

Astor's kids aided by Holiday Helping Hand

DONNA YEE • NOVEMBER 29, 2009

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Xbox 360, iPods and laptops — these are not items children at Astor Services for Children & Families have placed on their list of needs.

While other children may be generating long lists for Santa Claus, children at Astor are asking for the basics that people take for granted, such as hats, shoes, coats and pajamas.

This year, Astor will once again be able to provide the necessities with the aid of Holiday Helping Hand, an annual fundraising campaign now in its 27th year, run by United Way of Dutchess County and supported by the Poughkeepsie Journal.

"It makes a difference to them," said Sonia Barnes-Moorhead, executive vice president for Astor Home for Children Foundation. "These are things they wouldn't get particularly if it wasn't for this program. These are luxury items. It's an amazing program and we're thankful to be a part of it."

Astor's community-based health and prevention services offer a wide range of programs for children in the mid-Hudson Valley and the Bronx who have emotional and behavioral challenges. Many of the children come from low-income families.

Most of the children who will benefit from Holiday Helping Hand participate in Astor's Head Start programs, which recently received 100 percent compliance from a federal review.

Barnes-Moorhead credits her dedicated staff.

"It's a huge achievement that we're proud of," Barnes-Moorhead said.

Staff members at Astor also help compose the list of needs, as well as a wish list.

"What's really wonderful is that at each of our centers, they know the children and the families very well," Barnes-Moorhead said.

Directors seek out sales and make efforts to ensure that the money goes a long way.

"They're not only teaching," Barnes-Moorhead said. "They're going beyond the call because they know what the needs are."

As of Nov. 25, Holiday Helping Hand has raised \$6,934.

"For those who have given to Holiday Helping Hand, on behalf of Astor's children, thank you for making the holidays brighter for these children," said Anne Beaulieu, president and CEO of United Way of Dutchess County. "All of these gifts will be truly appreciated by their children."

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