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JAMAICA PLAIN, ROXBURY

Donated gifts for needy teens lacking, some agencies say

Posted by Matt Rocheleau December 22, 2011 02:49 PM

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Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage and Bernie & Phy's Furniture delivered truckloads of gifts to The Home for Little Wanderers' Toy Room in Jamaica Plain on Dec. 15 as part of the annual Big Wishes for Little Wanderers' Gift Drive. Donations, which included much-needed gifts for teens, were collected from employees and neighbors in each corporation's offices and stores to benefit children and families in The Home's programs. Pictured: Joan Wallace-Benjamin (right), president and CEO of The Home with Michelle Pepe and "Lumpy" from Bernie & Phy's Furniture.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Holiday donations are often directed to getting toys to needy young children and providing assistance to struggling families, but local agencies say disadvantaged teenagers can be overlooked.

Tonight is the deadline for gift donations to home for Jamaica Plain-based Home for Little Wanderers, which provides shelter and at-home services for thousands of families across the state.

Donations of gift cards and toys earmarked for teenagers are down 33 percent there from last year's totals, the nonprofit's spokeswoman, Heather MacFarlane, told the Globe.

"A lot of programs actually have a cutoff age of 12, and once you turn 13, they

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don't collect gifts for you anymore," she said, according to [today's Globe](#). "But how do you say to a teenager, 'You don't get any gifts this year?'"

The spokeswoman said yesterday that the group believes the numbers are down because it is easier to buy general toys and gifts for babies and young children, while teenagers often ask for specific items that other children their age have, such as MP3 players, brand-name hoodies, and video games.

"It provides them with a sense of normalcy," MacFarlane [told the Globe](#).

To donate, visit the Home for Little Wanderers toy room at 161 South Huntington Ave. or go to www.TheHome.org.

At Children's Services of Roxbury, 52 teens in line to receive donated gifts were nearly left without after the organization said it recently learned with little time before the holidays that "a thoughtful donor could no longer meet their pledge."

"Many of the younger children will receive gifts this holiday thanks to 'Toys for Tots,'" said a spokesman from United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, which partners with CSR. "Year after year, many donors step forward to provide for children and heads of households, however, the teens are often the 'forgotten' group. It has been found that teens are often especially impacted by homelessness."

So, over the course of several hours between yesterday and today, the United Way held an impromptu book sale at its headquarters in Boston that raised more than \$1,100 for its partner along with an additional \$200-plus in direct staff donations.

A check will be presented to CSR this afternoon that will allow the agency to provide the gift cards it had intended to give to the 52 teens all along, according to a United Way spokesman. Plus, the money raised will allow CSR to give each teen more money per gift card -- \$25 instead of \$15.

The agency also received support from Family to Family Project of Boston in order to provide holiday gifts to teens, officials said.

Children's Services of Roxbury operates a number of family-oriented programs and provides a broad spectrum of services to economically disadvantaged infants, children, teens and their families, as well as homeless adults. The

infants, children, teens and their families, as well as homeless adults. The agency's scattered sites homeless shelter program assists about 310 youth from 105 families.

Gift or monetary donations to the nonprofit can be made by contacting Evelyn Norman at CSR at 617-989-9433 or by e-mail atenorman@csrox.org. Donors can drop off gifts but are asked to call first. The CSR office is at 520 Dudley St. and is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

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