

*We often hear from supporters who sponsor families through Western Fairfax Christian Ministries Holiday Program who tell us that the experience of helping a family in need made them feel like they actually received even more than they gave. Jennie Bush, our Holiday Program manager, recently shared her experience with us:*

While overseeing WFCM's Holiday Food Program this year, I took a phone call from a counselor at a local high school who was concerned about one their student's families. The father had just lost his job at the end of November, and they were in need of food and gifts for their children, but had missed the county's deadline for registering for the holiday program. The counselor wanted to know if there was anything I could do at this late date.

WFCM does everything it can to provide for those who reach us with a need, especially food, so I told the counselor I would add the family and find a sponsor for them for Christmas food. When I reached out to the family to find out how many were in the household and to verify the address, I talked with the mom. I'll call her "Tracy."

What Tracy's shared with me that day cause me heartache, and I felt an immediate desire to do something. "My husband lost his job three weeks ago, and I'm not sure how to provide food for our family," she said. With the recent government shut-down, I realized this could be the plight of many of my own friends. And, this family had teenage children the same ages as my own kids. I knew this had to be a scary time for them with the Christmas holidays in less than two weeks, end of the month bills looming, and her husband interviewing for jobs and waiting to hear back from potential employers.

"I'm adopting you," I said. I had been planning to adopt a family, but hadn't done it yet. I admit I'd felt a little nervous about how my kids would react to helping someone their age...we'd always helped families with small children before and my teenagers loved to shop for the dolls and crafts for the little ones and hadn't really helped me put together a food basket before. But, I thought perhaps getting more involved this year might help them relate to other teenagers in a difficult situation.

We went as a family to shop for food for their Christmas food. My daughters enjoyed finding food not only for the Christmas meal, but for several other meals they particularly enjoyed...pasta, tacos, and pancakes! We filled boxes with general pantry items, and lots of teenager-friendly snacks. Then, we bought a grocery store gift card to help with meats and fresh foods. Everyone was so excited to deliver the food!

It's not easy to get teenagers in one place at one time, but we found a day to deliver the food to our "adopted family" and my daughters were there to help bring in the heavy boxes of food. As we carried in the boxes, Tracy worked hard to contain the family dog who was excited to see the new visitors. My girls didn't get to meet the teenagers they were helping, but they understood from the mom how much their thoughtfulness meant to them.

This experience changed our Christmas. Seeing the hardship of others and acting to alleviate it had a big impact on my whole family. I know on Christmas morning, as my kids opened their own gifts and enjoyed the wonderful meal they helped me prepare, they saw everything with new eyes.

"Thank you for everything," Tracy told me. "You've made our Christmas so much better."

It's no exaggeration to say that helping this family made our Christmas so much brighter.