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Christmas Shoebox Drive provides gifts for those in need

By Marie LeBlanc on December 25, 2013

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Once again, this year's Christmas Shoebox Drive put smiles on many children's faces, while providing some relief for mothers at this time of year in the midst of financial hardship.

This year's 3rd annual Christmas Shoebox Drive, held at Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. 455 McDermot Avenue, on Saturday December 21, 2013, was a huge success. This was thanks to the generosity of Winnipeggers who opened up their hearts to provide gifts for a number of less fortunate children living in Winnipeg's inner city.

Shoebox Drive organizers Jackie Traverse, Heather Traverse, and Chelsea Cardinal received more gifts this year than expected.

Jackie and a couple of her friends came up with the idea a few years ago after seeing how poverty is a reality for many children. They introduced the unique and creative idea of a "shoebox filled with little gifts" which is now a holiday tradition.

Donating \$800 in gifts this year, Winnipeg city councillor Ross Eadie has been on board since its inception,

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PHOTO OF THE DAY



On the bandwagon: a sign of the times at a local donut shop. No word yet on official bagels or perogies. PHOTO by Greg Petzold

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RIVER CITY 360



Jackie Traverse is interviewed by CKUW radio.

making sure that every child receives a gift.

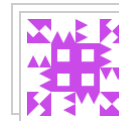
Other donations included: \$1200 in cash; gifts and shoeboxes valued at \$30 – \$40 each; \$500 from a fundraiser organized by Chelsea Cardinal; goodie bags and canned drinks; as well as five boxes of winter hats and mitts from the Giant Tiger in downtown Winnipeg.

In total, 150 shoeboxes were filled with toys and goodies for girls and boys, and their families.



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L-R: Isca Spillet, Heather Traverse, Santa, Chelsea Cardinal, Jackie Traverse, Linda English.

Upon entering the room at Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc., many parents and children lined up full of excitement but with mixed emotions, knowing this was their last hope to provide their child with a gift this year. It also provided a place to kick off their boots, come in and take part in the festivities of the day, where there were many opportunities for fun and excitement that everyone could enjoy.

Children and mothers were greeted with friendly faces of volunteers and organizers who were wearing reindeer antlers on their heads. Meanwhile, children lined up to have their faces painted with a snowman, angel or anything representing the fun of Christmas. Face painter, Charlene Dueck, donated her time to "make it an extra special day" for the children. A shy little Cynthia Cook smiled upon looking in the mirror to see the Santa Claus painted on her face.



Cynthia Cook shows off her face-painted Santa.

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Santa Claus made a special trip from the North Pole, leaving Rudolph and the other reindeer up on the rooftop while the children sat on his knee whispering in his ear what they wanted for Christmas. Santa handed out a candy cane and a gifted shoebox to every child, accompanied by his famous, "HO HO HO."

Santa said the kids are asking for iPads and tablets, not crayons, cars and trucks like in the old days. "I have low tech elves in a high tech world," Santa said jokingly.

16-year-old Jason asked Santa for a Lamborghini saying he would go all over the place and was looking forward to the wonderful ride.

Along with the shoebox of goodies and candy canes handed out by Santa Claus, each child received a goodie bag, a canned drink, and an opportunity to select a pair of winter mitts or a hat.

This time of year many children are left behind without a gift; a large number of single mothers are also left stranded without any help from social assistance or child tax credit, sometimes leaving them unable to provide a gift for their child.

According to Laney Cardinal, a local woman who came to volunteer along with her two children, "It is nice to come and see we are not just a number," where you go in and are immediately shoved out the door.



Laney Cardinal sees how the donated gifts put a smile on her son Cody's face.

Welcomed with open arms, visitors could stay and celebrate the day with people facing similar financial circumstances. Every aspect was covered to make this a fun filled day for the children, mothers and volunteers alike, including a *Mothers Draw* for two lucky mothers.

Due to the success of the Shoebox Drive in the face of an overwhelming growing number of single mothers with children living in poverty, Jackie hopes this will become a registered charity event next year.



Jackie Traverse with Mothers Draw prizes.

Through the generosity of Winnipeggers there was a large amount of goodies, so Jackie dropped the excess treats off at the Native Women’s Transition Centre and at a block on Young Street where she knocked on doors handing out gifts to unsuspecting children, putting a smile on their faces and a twinkle in their eyes.

In the end, the Shoebox Drive organizers thanked the families, volunteers and kind hearted donators who found out about this through an event Facebook page, word of mouth, and through other avenues. Advance registration saw 150 shoeboxes being filled with toys and goodies for all the girls and boys.

“People donate from their hearts,” said Heather Traverse.

Added Jackie, “I believe we are so blessed and have so much to share,” and it is everyone’s responsibility to help the children in the community. It really does take a village to raise a child, she said.

All photos by M. LeBlanc

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About Marie LeBlanc

Marie is an artist, poet, photographer, with a background in alternative health and Bachelor of Arts in Human Geography and Sociology (Advanced Major). She advocates and has been active in many committees to create awareness for people with various disabilities. She was awarded the Mental Health Volunteer Hero of the year in 2012 and has helped coordinate mental health walks. Marie believes creative expression through art and entertainment is healing for your body,mind and soul. She is extremely inventive, creative and resourceful.Other Interests include the environment, culture and just about anything due to her curious nature. She enjoys and has learned a lot through her experience writing and taking pictures for the community news commons.

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