



2023 Christmas Program

Making spirits bright
Your donation shines a light



How a Season of Giving Healed Hearts: A Grandmother's Story

Here's my story about how my daughter Mabel and I began caring for seven children under one roof. During that time, my daughter Mabel and her three children had already lived with me for over ten years. Due to very exceptional circumstances, my son Marc and his wife asked if Mabel and I could care for the four kiddies.

The first few days felt like a giant sleepover at Grandma's. The home was filled with laughter and wonder, but not long after, reality set in. Khloe was yearning to go home. Blake only wanted to play on the computer. Peter started screaming when anyone came near him, and the youngest, Nathan, couldn't understand what was happening. He often woke up crying for cuddles. In those days, Mabel's three kids, Sarah, Evan, and Maddie, helped by sharing their toys and tumbling with them on the trampoline. Mabel and I did everything possible to get everything we needed to care for the kiddies, including clothes, food, and beds. I even picked up baskets for each of us to store our shoes, slippers, and hats. At least our entrance wasn't a total disaster.

But Christmas was approaching, and I began feeling anxious and worried. What was I going to do? Who could I turn to? Fortunately, I saw an ad about the Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre Christmas Program in the community. With the help of a volunteer, I registered my family. I was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. It was one less thing I had to worry about. I held back my tears until I was alone. I had always told the kiddies that Santa brings the little things, and those who love you bring you bigger things.

I didn't know what to expect when it came time to pick up the gifts. Walking through the Centre, I saw rows of boxes filled with toys lining the hallways. I had difficulty breathing because I was overwhelmed by how supportive everybody at the Centre was. When I left the Centre, my car was packed with food and gifts for everyone.

When it came time for the kiddies to open their gifts at Christmas, they were all overjoyed. There were balls of every kind, books on soccer, a soccer net, soccer socks, and giant body pillows and pillowcases. They loved them - and still do! There were cute hair things, elastics, brushes for long, thick, curly hair, detanglers and bath balms for the girls. There were Paw Patrol toys, Lego, Play-Doh, games, and batteries for the boys. For Christmas supper, some kiddies took turns helping with making dinner and setting up the table. The food was terrific! Each child had a favourite dish. Thanks to the OCCRC's Christmas Program and the support of their donors, everyone had a magical Christmas filled with love and gratitude.

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The importance of community programs like those at the OCCRC helped me cope during a challenging time. Nathan was just a toddler when he came into my care. He's now six and goes on about how much of a big boy he is today. I call him Lucky Seven, as he's my seventh grandchild. Khloe is now seven, and I call her my Lambie Pie. She tells me she's a picky eater but loves ham, pepperonis, cheese, strawberries, green grapes, corn on the cob, bowtie pasta, and Cap'n Crunch. She hardly ate anything when she first arrived.

Maddie loves making banana bread with me. It is a great lunchtime snack. I call her my Cutie Pie. She's eleven and in cheerleading as a flyer. Peter loves collecting rocks and knows the names of many crystals. He loves to bake and eat chocolate chip and peanut butter cookies. I haven't given him a nickname. He asked not to be called anything but Peter. Blake is a computer whiz. I call him Blake Boots. I always sing the song These Boots Are Made for Walkin'. He also loves playing and watching soccer but has grown an interest in basketball now that he is in grade 8. Last year, he received the "Courteous Award for Kindness" because he was nice to the newer kids in his class.

Evan is Electric. I always get static shocks from him. Contrary to Khloe, Evan loves all types of food. If I let him, he would take cold mashed potatoes and cold spaghetti to school for lunch every day. Evan is also in cheerleading as a base. He holds the flyer up and can do so with one hand. Sarah is now in grade 12 and has a love for owls. She always says she'll "owls" (always) love me. She is a top cheerleading flyer, and her team has competed in the Cheerleading Worlds for two years. In her first competition, her team reached the podium with bronze. Sarah helps out a lot.

When I was younger, my father and I delivered food to those in our Northern Ontario community who were in need. He always told me to never make them feel poor - not once have I. Thanks to the OCCRC Christmas Program, I can provide for my family during the holiday season. The generosity of donors in our community is truly incredible. Everyone needs to know how grateful we are for your support. The staff and volunteers are always cheerful, kind-hearted people who treat us with dignity and respect. At the OCCRC, we've never felt judged or looked down upon. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts! You are always in our thoughts and prayers. Merry Christmas!

Heartfelt blessings,

Meridith

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