Roots of kids’ Christmas party go back decades

Mona Davies grew up in poverty in Chicago, an upbringing that led her to give back to her new community.

Mona Davies grew up poor on the south side of Chicago in the 1950s. Crime was a constant. It was normal to see police officers in her neighborhood, there to haul off yet another criminal suspect.

At least one good thing came of her turbulent childhood. It inspired Davies to help kids who have incarcerated family members.

First in Seattle, then Los Angeles and now in southwest Riverside County, Davies and her husband Bob have been doing their part for 51 years for these kids. This December will be the 19th time their Community Outreach Ministry has hosted an Angel Tree Christmas party locally. The event includes the delivery of presents, catered food, presentations from law enforcement officials and entertainment — all in a festive setting.

Lake Elsinore resident Marilyn Brown is doing her part, too. She’s a grandmother raising four kids — Jesia, 12; Jocori, 16; Jaelin, 13; and Anthony, 10 — hoping to give them a good foundation.

"I tell my grandchildren that although your dad ended up in jail, your parents don’t have to dictate your future," she said.

As part of a fundraiser for this year’s holiday party, about 20 kids churned out artwork during a June workshop. Adults are also asked to donate their art to the project, be it paintings, pottery, jewelry and other works. Retired Murrieta Fire Department chief Scott Ferguson donated his painting, “The Joker,” of Batman fame.

The art from adults and kids will be sold at the fundraiser from 2 to 5 p.m. Oct. 6 at The Corporate Room banquet hall, 94846 Monte Vista Drive, Wildomar.

Proceeds will help pay for Christmas party gifts.

At the June workshop, soothing classical music played in the background as the kids used art supplies to create collages, flags, drawings and portraits.

Patti Halbig, a retired art teacher in Murrieta who volunteered at the workshop, called it "a very creative and needed experience for the children to express their feelings and emotions as an outlet through art."

Jesia, Brown’s grandchild, said she made a tree and a character from the video game Fortnite.

"It was fun because most of the time we were drawing," she said.

Brown said that, besides making beautiful art, her grandkids sing and play instruments.

"God has blessed them with all these talents."

The couple that started the party tradition, Bob and Mona Davies, worked in the aerospace industry when they began their work with needy children in Seattle. They visited the city’s rough parts, seeing some kids without even basic utilities in their residences, surrounded by crime.

They continued their work when they moved to Whittier in 1994, then locally when they relocated to Murrieta in 1996. They started with apartments in the Via Princesa area in the southeastern area of town, putting out tarps on the ground and inviting families to play games and eat ice cream.

In 2000, they started their nonprofit group that does the holiday parties, beginning with modest peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, cookies and juice boxes. The dramatically more elaborate parties of today show how far the couple has come in the quest to help those who need it the most.

Mona said her own childhood drives her so passionately.

"Growing up was painful. As a child I was trapped. I want to prevent other children from having bad experiences and making mistakes... We are advocates and a voice for the voiceless children left behind by their incarcerated parents."

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