



Secret Santa for the kiddos and families, service support, volunteering, and a career with heart

You can find your way to give back with Caritas Family Solutions

Caritas Family Solutions is a nonprofit committed to providing services to help families, children, adults and seniors receive the support and refuge they need to live fulfilled lives, here in Southern Illinois. The organization serves more than 6,300 people, including 1,700 foster children, and has touched thousands of people's lives since it was founded 77 years ago in 1947. During this time of year, the agency is encouraging people to help support its Secret Santa program, which allows their youth in care to have a magical Christmas.

"During the holiday season, our Secret Santa program aims to provide gifts for nearly 1,400 children this year," said Chief Program Officer Hope Carbonaro. "For some families, getting gifts under a Christmas tree is not always a given. Through this program, we rely on the help and generosity of our communities to buy gifts and donate for kids in need. It is incredible to see people come together to provide these kids a piece of happiness and normalcy during the holidays."

The Secret Santa program provides tags for every foster child in their care along with families from intact family services. Each tag includes information about the type of Christmas gift they'd like to receive. Businesses interested in helping can either sponsor an entire list of kids, provide a monetary donation, host a toy drive or provide their employees with an Angel Tree, where people can pick the Secret Santa tags. People can also then drop off new, unwrapped gifts to the location listed on the Caritas Family

Solutions website or donate by phone, online or by mailing in a check.

For those looking for other ways to support those in need over the holidays, the nonprofit also has service lines which include pregnancy care and adoption, counseling, community family stabilization for families experiencing homelessness, assisted living, and independent living for adults with disabilities. Headquartered in Belleville, the agency has office locations in Alton, Belleville, Carterville, East Alton, Effingham, Glen Carbon, Highland, Mount Vernon, Olney, and Sparta.

"A motto we live by year-round as an agency is 'every life deserves love' and that speaks to the heart of our mission work every day," said CEO Gary Huelsmann. "We really could not have the footprint we have without the support of our donors and we're very thankful for that. Our goal is to be agents of positive change, to build healthy relationships, loving homes, and strong communities. The way we do that is through our programs. Whether it be providing a foster child with a safe environment, giving a senior adult a place to call home or connecting a pregnant mother with the resources she needs, we are here."

Along with needing volunteers and donations, the organization is looking to add to its growing team. The agency offers competitive benefits like tuition reimbursement, flexible work environment, a potential for growth in salary, opportunity for paid time off, employee assisted programs and



A representational family, served by Caritas Family Solutions. (Courtesy Caritas Family Solutions)

retirement programs.

"If you have a servant's heart and want to be a part of a human services agency, look into a career with us," said Huelsmann. "Our team has over 500 employees and we are always looking for new team members to contribute to our mission. The work we do is not always easy, but it's important work and we can see firsthand how we are making a difference in the lives of those we touch. Regardless of what role you have in social work, you will experience

a team atmosphere of support and will create lifelong connections by being a part of a larger support network. Our case managers help children thrive and succeed, bring families together and assist families with successful adoptions when that is in the best interest of a child."

The organization is always looking for volunteers, staff and donations to help support its mission. For additional information or how you can help with end-of-year giving, visit www.caritasfamilysolutions.org.

Holly's House of Hope helps uniquely-abled young adults thrive and shine

Holly's House of Hope Inc. believes that everyone has unique abilities and gifts and can serve the community as they lead purpose-filled lives.

The nonprofit organization provides vocational assessment and training and skill development for young adults with intellectual disabilities in Madison County and its surrounding Illinois counties. This is done in part through the Holly's House of Hope Community Store, which accepts donations of gently used clothing and household items from the Highland community.

Holly's House of Hope clients clean, sort, and then merchandise or store the received donations, ultimately providing them at little or no cost to those in the community with unmet needs. While only open three days a week plus one Saturday morning per month, they have successfully sold or gifted literally thousands of items to the community.

"We are glad to give back and have a voucher program to do just that. Area social service providers, churches, police and fire departments, and foster care facilities all have vouchers they may distribute to those they deem in need

with voucher holders able to get those unmet needs met. Our store is run by a small paid staff and several volunteers, but largely by our clients, who perform all aspects of the work necessary to run a busy and successful store while learning pre-employment skills," notes the organization's Tammy Wrobbel.

Holly's House of Hope (HHH) has also developed a one-of-a-kind program to help uniquely-abled younger adults secure inclusive and customizable employment. It starts by conducting an intake interview, where staff identify a potential client's strengths and interests.

"We then work with our area business and professional partners to identify job opportunities that align as closely as possible with the client's skills and aspirations. Once we have identified a potential position, we work with county, state, and federal government agencies to create a formal apprenticeship," adds Wrobbel.

The developed apprenticeships are typically for 12 to 20 hours per week. Those supported by Madison County benefit employers in a number of ways, including those employers paying half the wages with the county paying the other half.

This one-year apprenticeship also includes 144 hours of classroom training provided by Holly's House of Hope and their partners at their Highland facility. HHH uses an approved Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act curriculum to provide the classroom training. HHH clients who qualify can also work with a job coach provided by the State of Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services at no cost to the client.

While it is not guaranteed, the intention



HHH clients are seen working through donations and preparing them for the organization's Community Store. (Courtesy Holly's House of Hope)

of the program is that clients learn and grow and succeed over the 2,000 hours and are offered a permanent position at the end of the apprenticeship.

"Because no one likes all work and no play, Holly's House of Hope also provides educational, social and recreational opportunities to our clients," Wrobbel says further. "We provide specific vocational training, Friday afternoon art classes, monthly birthday celebrations, and care for a garden every spring, summer and fall."

Because HHH does not receive ongoing funding, clients must pay a small monthly fee for the duration of their time with the organization. This fee covers all aspects of participation in HHH, including classroom training, support in obtaining both the apprenticeship and the job coach, and participation in all other events and

activities. For an additional fee, HHH also provides transportation for clients unable to take advantage of other local transport options. The organization relies on fundraisers, private donations, and occasional grants to help cover expenses.

"A nonprofit is as strong as the community that supports it," Wrobbel further notes.

If you are interested in supporting Holly's House of Hope through your holiday and year-end giving, reach out to the organization by calling 888-544-6559 or via email at hhh@hollyshouseofhope.org.

HHH is headquartered at 1000 Zschokke St., Highland, IL 62249. You can also connect with them online at <https://hollyshouseofhope.org/contact-us> or follow them on Facebook, @hollyshouseofhope.

