

CMHA'S HOLIDAY SPIRIT

On Monday, December 20 and Tuesday, December 21, 2010, residents of CMHA's Outhwaite Estates participated in two events that helped lift spirits just in time for the New Year.

The first event was held in the newly renovated community center, and centered on giving toys to the children of the Outhwaite community. With festive decorations and music the community center turned into a winter wonderland, complete with a waiting area and free coffee for parents. This event takes place each year and draws more than 100 parents and children. The Holiday Toy Giveaway focuses on children who are twelve years old or younger. All sorts of toys were available, from drawing sets and board games for older children to developmental toys for toddlers.

Smiles were all around as children lined up to receive their toys, and many of the parents thanked the event volunteers multiple times. After receiving their gifts, children were given bags of candy along with caramel popcorn for their parents. One of the coordinators of the events, CMHA Property Manager Jackie Mills explained, "These are low income families, struggling for various reasons. For some of these children, this is an addition to their Christmas, but for many, this is their Christmas."

The following day, Outhwaite hosted another giveaway event that was held in the Louis Stokes Museum. Although Outhwaite holds various giveaway events throughout the year, the winter event is sponsored by a Pepper Pike donor who wishes to remain anonymous. The sponsor and others collect items throughout the year and donate all of the items to the Outhwaite community for the holidays. The donations vary each year, but they always center on clothing and household items. This year, the leftover toys from the event on Monday were included in the giveaway, and parents were encouraged to take multiple children's books.

The process was highly structured, as only five people were allowed into the room at once, with a strict time limit of five minutes so that every family in attendance was given an equal opportunity. The event workers made sure that each person found the special piece of clothing or toy that would make their holiday season a little brighter. Ms. Mills said, "These items are all new or gently used and we are so thankful to be able to do this for our residents." Just as the day before, every resident at the giveaway expressed immense gratitude, exchanging hugs, thanking the workers multiple times, and saying, "happy holidays" to everyone they met.

Even though over fifty households attended the event, there were many pieces of clothing and trinkets remaining after the two hour giveaway ended. All of the extra items were immediately donated to the City Mission located on E.55th St. and Carnegie, so that CMHA could help even more Clevelanders in need this holiday season.