

Christmas Appeal

Appeal helps young man land new job

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In his new position as a teacher's aide, David Sharp stresses the importance of education to middle-school students.

"I try to instill in them to be the same as me getting up and going to work in the morning. I tell them 'Right now, it's your job to go to school. Education comes first, before everything,'" he said.

Sharp, 28, has had his own reawakening regarding education. After graduating from high school in 1992, Sharp had been a factory worker, restaurant employee and convenience-store clerk, but never stayed at any one position for very long. Then, two years ago, he decided to begin classes at Monroe Community College.

"I was sitting around, thinking about my brother who graduated from Buffalo State and how good he was doing. So I just took the initiative," Sharp recalled. "I'm more focused than I was when I was younger. If I don't do it, nobody's going to do it for me."

Due to mounting expenses from student loans, Sharp eventually found it necessary to stop attending school and get a steady job. An opportunity arose earlier this year for a six-month position with the Rochester City School District. However, at that point, he was so strapped for cash that he had trouble affording a fingerprinting test required by the district for all new employees.

Sharp was put in touch with a family friend, Jackie Turner, who serves as Catholic Family Center's program su-



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

David Sharp at his home in Rochester Nov. 19.

pervisor of community resource services. Turner then began the process that led to Sharp receiving \$74 from the Catholic Charities/Catholic Courier Christmas Appeal so he could take the fingerprinting test.

"I was real excited for the simple fact that I needed a job, and wanted to get back to the kids and help them out," Sharp said. "It felt real good to get a job where, a few weeks down the line, I wouldn't be looking for something else."

In September, Sharp began his

teacher's-aide job at Jefferson Middle School. He works one-on-one with students who have behavioral difficulties. Many of the young people at his school, he noted, come from single-parent households. Sharp said he now has a deeper appreciation that his parents, Clarence and Patricia, have been married for nearly 50 years.

"I used to think my father was just being hard on me, but once I got older, I had a lot of friends whose fathers weren't in their lives. Now I see, more and more, that a father figure is very important in children's lives," said Sharp, who is one of 12 children.

Sharp said he's had a strong desire to work with children since he was a teen, when he had a summer job that required him to help deliver meals to homes where parents couldn't afford to feed their children.

He had never actually witnessed severe poverty until that summer, he said. "It really touched me, that this went on in my own city," Sharp said.

Although he enjoys his current work, Sharp plans to return to college. He has his sights set on the Educational Opportunity Center in Rochester, where he would like to study to become a surgical technician.

"My main focus is getting back into school," Sharp said. He has earmarked his savings toward tuition and books, and he'd also like to buy a car because he doesn't own one. Sharp, who lives with his parents, says he's determined to be responsible for his expenses.

"I'm trying to get it done on my own," he stated.

What is the Christmas Appeal?

It is a cooperative effort of the Catholic Courier and diocesan Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester to raise funds for people in desperate financial crisis.

For the past 27 years, the appeal has enabled the Catholic community to help thousands of people in 12 counties to help meet life's basic needs. Christmas Appeal funds have been there for them when no other sources of aid were available.

Who benefits from it?

The Christmas Appeal helps individuals and families in short-term financial crises. These are people who have no financial resources and are either awaiting or are ineligible for assistance through other sources.

How does it work?

Appeal proceeds are allocated to the emergency funds of the following diocesan agencies: Catholic Family Center; Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes; Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier; Catholic Charities of Livingston County outreach; Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation; and diocesan Urban Services.

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Caseworkers from Catholic Charities agencies submitted examples, including the following, of how Christmas Appeal funds are used year-round:

★ A woman was provided \$200 by Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes to turn electricity back on in her home after it had been turned off. She had recently completed a parenting program and received custody of a daughter she feared was being physically abused in the child's previous home.

★ A father, John, was provided \$200 by Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes toward having his electricity and gas turned back on. The utility company had agreed to do this for \$253. The father

lives in a mobile home with a son, 6, who courts determined had been abused by his mother. The father and son participate in a single parenting program. Though the father has a good job, his wages have been garnisheed and he buys food first with the remainder. "John is very grateful for the assistance and is amazed that others would care enough about him to assist in this way," a caseworker stated. He had tried to make a camping game out of the lack of electricity, using a grill and a lantern.

★ A brother, 13, and sister, 14, whose parent was diagnosed with HIV, wanted a way to earn spending money. Catholic Charities Community Services used \$50 to pay for Red Cross babysitting classes for them. The children received certificates, which raised their self-esteem, and the lessons provided skills as well as confidence.

★ A Catholic Charities Community Services case manager used \$100 to shop with a 16-year-old girl for personal hygiene products, underwear, socks and some clothes for school, which helped motivate her to attend school with a positive attitude. The girl, described as very timid, had never had a new outfit and did not have the ability to properly care for her own hygiene.

★ A mother who is HIV-positive was reunited with her three school-age children after a nine-year voluntary surrender. She had been addicted to drugs and alcohol at a time when she also had poor parenting skills and no social supports. Her Catholic Charities Community Services case manager used \$100 to buy a YMCA membership to help the family become involved together in activities. The family participates in exercise and wellness programs.



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