

Christmas Appeal

Woman needed refrigerator replaced

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Christina Stevens, 22, a single mother of two children, came home from work to her apartment about a month ago to find her refrigerator was not working.

"I was going to fix dinner and looked and nothing in here was frozen," she said, pointing to the old refrigerator in her apartment. "My refrigerator just died, and the motor wasn't working. The freezer was defrosting."

Fortunately, her sister lives nearby, and Stevens was able to transport all of the food in her refrigerator to her sister's refrigerator.

However, Stevens, who said she lives paycheck to paycheck "right down to the last 50 cents," was concerned that she would be unable to get her refrigerator repaired soon. Most of the service representatives she called estimated she would have to spend between \$300 and \$400 to get the refrigerator repaired.

Stevens does not receive public assistance, although she said she is helped out by the fathers of both her children, Mysia, 5, and Jahreem, 2. Mysia is in kindergarten in a local public school, and Jahreem is in a home day-care when his mother works.

Stevens has to make rent, automobile and auto insurance payments, as well as pay for day care for her children. She works 35 hours a week as a bank teller, and noted that repairing the refrigerator seemed out of the question because she is unable to budget enough money for such emergencies. One repair representative told her that she would be better off simply buying a used refrigerator, but even that seemed out of the question.

Fortunately, through a contact with the Catholic Family Center, Stevens was in touch with a case manager, who was able to obtain an \$89 voucher that Stevens used to purchase a used refrigerator from the Volunteers of America Store on Main Street. The voucher was paid for from funds raised through the annual *Catholic Courier*/Catholic Charities Christmas Ap-



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

★ St. Michael Parish, Rochester, used \$70 toward medicine and food for a family consisting of middle-aged parents, a 22-year-old daughter who is physically and mentally handicapped and a 27-year-old son who never finished high school and has been in counseling for years. Neither parent has been able to maintain a job. The mother has physical problems, is not able to read and has difficulty understanding things. The father's brother helps a little financially, and the family's only help from social services is the daughter's benefits.

★ St. Martin's Place, Rochester, used \$450 to buy a rebuilt stove and refrigerator for a 42-year-old woman. She was known in the neighborhood for mental



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Christina Stevens plays with her children, Mysia, 5, and Jahreem, 2, in their Rochester home Nov. 28.

peal. Stevens' sister and her sister's boyfriend were able to secure a truck and picked up the refrigerator. And it all happened within one day of her refrigerator breaking.

Stevens said she is grateful for the voucher she received, and noted it helped her get through an unexpected crisis that threatened destroying the food she works to provide for herself and her children.

"I think it's a very good program, and not a lot of people know about it," she said of the Christmas Appeal. "I did not know what I was going to do at all without it."

Stevens is taking out loans, and receiving financial aid and scholarships to attend the State University of New York College at Brockport this January. She received an associate's degree in criminal justice from Monroe Community College in Henrietta this past spring, and wants to be a social worker who works with children.

health issues and addiction problems. But thanks to treatment and having her medications regulated, she lives independently, continues her recovery program, has become a productive member of society and has reconnected with her family, according to Sister of St. Joseph Frances Sweeney, co-director of the ministry.

★ A single father with a limited income needed help obtaining medication for his son's severe acne. Health insurance for his children was pending through the Department of Social Services, but his son's acne was worsening. The family were refugees from Yemen. Catholic Family Center provided \$100.

★ A 77-year-old woman was assisted by Catholic Family Center with a \$40 food voucher and food pantry assistance after someone gained access to her bank account and withdrew all her funds.

★ Summer day-camp registration fees amounting to \$40 were paid for a brother and sister, ages 9 and 7, both with developmental disabilities, through Christ-

"I was a teen mother and I know how hard that was," she said, noting that when she was a young mother, she felt like dropping out of high school and abandoning any aspirations for a better life. At the same time, she said, she was torn emotionally because her friends were hanging out at parties or at the mall, while she had more real responsibilities.

"I couldn't go out because I had this little person."

Despite the temptations to give up on herself, she graduated high school, has a college degree and wants to keep moving up the ladder of career success. She hopes to become the kind of social worker who can steer other single mothers into successful lives, and encourage them in the early days of their children's lives.

"Even though things always seem rough at the time, you're going to get through," she said she wants to tell young mothers. "It gets easier."

mas Appeal money administered by Catholic Charities Community Services.

★ Catholic Charities Community Services used \$64 to buy car seats for staff who transport children under the age of 4 to recreational activities and doctors appointments.

★ Samaritan Center, Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier, provided \$49.80 to an uncle and nephew, ages 52 and 20, who were stranded in Elmira, to take the bus back to Syracuse. Money and personal items had been stolen from them, and they were staying at Mt. Saviour Monastery until transportation could be found. The older man was a veteran who received Supplemental Security Income and had medical problems.

★ Rochester's Immaculate Conception Parish used \$75-100 to provide a grandmother raising five grandchildren with a Christmas food basket, a grocery food certificate and a toy store certificate, as well as new clothing it obtained. Parents of the children, boys ages 7-15 and a girl, 12, were on drugs and the father was in

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 32 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; Catholic Charities Community Services; Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation; and diocesan Urban Services.

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jail. "The children are doing well in school and the grandmother wants to make the holidays special. She is struggling financially," remarked Father Michael Upson, parish administrator.

★ Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes used \$60 for a new crib and mattress for a 3-month-old whose crib was old and unsafe. The sides wouldn't stay up, and the mattress supports were missing parts. The child's mother, 21, had little family support and received public assistance and food stamps. She was attending nurse's aide training full-time.

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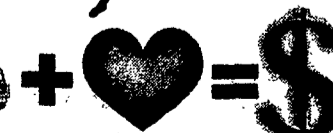
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