

Dear Friends of Second Mile,

Every year as Christmas approaches, we come to our friends with a request: help us stock the Secret Santa Shop at the Neighborhood Thrift Store with new toys! If this is the first letter you've received from us, the idea of donating a new toy that we will then sell might seem puzzling. But, if you stop and think about it for a moment, I believe it will make perfect sense.

Many of us love the art of gift-giving (me included). It's even named as one of the five love languages. For me, picking out the perfect item or finding a special treat is kind of thrilling. Saving for something I know my kids, husband or friends will cherish, something that reflects who they are feels special. The best part might be knowing they'll love it, but right behind that excitement of knowing they will love it is the feeling of being the one who gave it. It feels good to give right? Not every gift comes wrapped, of course. The gift of grace when someone has made a mistake. The gift of unconditional love, just because. The gift of our time and our talent. These all feel good too and matter every bit as much, maybe more. Still, there is undeniable joy in choosing a gift for someone you love.

For many families, even an affordable gift is out of reach though. Thousands of good organizations step in every year to provide an entire Christmas: adopting a child, filling a wish list, wrapping presents, delivering them to the door. There is a need and a place for that work no doubt, and we are grateful for our partners in ministry who do it! But it is not what we are called to do at Second Mile.

In his book *Toxic Charity*, Robert Lupton puts it plainly: *Giving to those in need what they could be gaining from their own initiative may well be the kindest way to destroy people.* That kind of giving, however well-meant, centers on the rewards WE receive as the giver rather than the benefits to those we serve. Lupton tells a Christmas story in that same book that has stayed with me for years. You may have heard it before; Well-meaning strangers arrive at a family's home with gifts for the children. The kids are thrilled. But their father stands in his own living room watching someone else provide what he could not.

That moment is exactly what we work to prevent at Second Mile! We are called to walk alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ, helping them find pathways forward while guarding their dignity. Our mission is to strengthen families and neighborhoods. The Secret Santa Shop is one of the ways we do that.

When you donate a new toy, or funds for us to buy one, you give a parent on a fixed budget the chance to shop for their own child. They choose the gift that fits their child's personality, the one that will bring joy on Christmas morning. They buy it at a price they can afford, in a space that honors their worth and offers the same customer service you expect when you shop for your own family. And they get to know the pride of providing. That is no small gift.

It is also a sacrificial gift. You won't be the one wrapping it in your favorite paper or watching the child open it. You are giving so that someone else gets that moment. And your gift keeps giving. Every toy purchased at the shop supports someone's paycheck at our Neighborhood Thrift Store. It helps buy the next toy for the next parent who walks through the door. It lets families take part in their community as contributors, not only recipients. It is a cycle of giving that brings joy and protects the dignity of everyone involved.

A parent, grandparent or caregiver experiences the joy of giving and the pride of providing for their family. A thrift store employee earns a paycheck and creates a warm, beautiful place for neighbors to shop. You know your gift is doing real and lasting good. It's a win, win, win.

Thank you for going the second mile with us, and with our neighbors.

Peace be with you,

Vicky Hinton

Executive Director

Sharon Olshefski

Neighborhood Thrift Store Director