Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Gallup keeps its community warm this holiday season with hats, scraves, and mittens

Nothing warms the heart more during the holiday season than giving to those less fortunate.

That's where the Mitten Tree Project, sponsored by the Octavia Fellin Public Library, comes in to help.

A bare tree is set up at the library, where do-gooders then decorate it with donated hats, scarves, and mittens. The donated goods keep coming until the tree is completely crammed. A similiar tree is also set up at the Children's Branch. All of the practical decorations are gifts from the community, and some pieces are even handmade.

This marks the seventh year for the project. Marko Chavez, technology trainer for the public library, said the community response has been overwhelming.

"We do this annually around this time and it has been such a wonderful project and the community has jumped in once again and that's what it's all about," he said.

The project came about when former director Mary Ellen Pellington thought it would be nice to keep people warm who otherwise couldn't afford it.

Once the tree is full of donations, it is given to a charity where its cozy décor is offered to people in need. Pellington chose Battered Families Services, Inc. as the charity recipiant because the families that seek help there have faced many difficulities.

Willard Eastman, director of Battered Families Services, Inc., said this project has been one that everyone looks forward to and it keeps getting better.

"It's a great project throughout the winter, we have kids that come in and don't have those items," he said. "It really helps those kids and it's a great contribution."

Eastman said the organization sees more than 75 kids who come in due to family problems at home, and Battered Families Services, Inc. offers any help it can.

“We try to help out those familes in any capactity, in fact we keep a lot of stuff here for our children, we provide assistance and we try to help out as much as possible. All of our services are free,” Eastman said.

The Mitten Tree is just one of those resources available to struggling families in Gallup.

As the donations pour in, everyone involved shares in the joy, like Gayle Simplicio, a library clerk. Watching the donations arrive makes her feel proud of the generosity of others.

“I think it’s a good thing for the community because there are a lot of people that come and show they care and are willing to donate for those who can’t afford to get simple things like scarves and mittens,” she said.

The Children’s Branch also gets it share of donations, Anne Price, Octavia Fellin youth services manager said.

“The response has been pretty good and we still have room for more donations, and actually we are a litte head of ourselves, which is good.” Price said.

Library clerk Ashily Mann, who has been working with the library for the past three years, says it’s always exciting to see the donations come in. Especially when families come in to pass on moral lessons to their children. “I think it’s a great resource for the community for those fortunate to get these items (to) who otherwise couldn’t afford to get them,” Mann said.

Aaron Mingus, a library assistant, said sometimes it’s hard to describe in words what these donations mean to those who get them.

“It’s a fun project for everyone, and the feeling you get when you see what they are doing for

those less fortunate melts your heart and there is no word to describe it," he said.

At the end of the month everything is counted out, packaged, and taken to Battered Families, Inc. for those waiting to keep warm this holiday season.

For more information call the Octavia Fellin Public Library at (505) 863-1291 or Battered Families, Inc. at (505) 722-6389.

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