



# Help Foster Children This Holiday Season

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BELLEVILLE – You can help hundreds of foster children have a joyful Christmas this year by taking part in Caritas Family Solutions’ Secret Santa program. As the largest provider of foster care services in Southern Illinois and the second largest in the state, Caritas Family Solutions’ CEO Gary Huelsmann said donations and gifts provide year-round support for more than 1,700 foster children in their care.

“The impacts on families due to the pandemic have been profound and as a result, we are seeing increases in children and families dealing with depression, anxiety and child care issues as well as isolation challenges that sometimes make abuse and neglect harder to recognize,” said Huelsmann. “We are also experiencing a workforce crisis just as the need for services is increasing. Our goal through the Secret Santa program is to raise awareness about these issues and do what we can to provide meaningful joy to children this holiday season.”

Caritas has created Secret Santa tags for every foster child in their care which includes information about the type of Christmas gift they’d like to receive. Beyond presents, Huelsmann said monetary donations play a critical role in supporting all of Caritas’s programs and foster children year-round.

To become a Secret Santa, go online, or in-person to one of the participating locations throughout the Metro East and Southern Illinois and select a Secret Santa tag. Caritas’s Secret Santa website also includes Amazon wishlists with gifts for a variety of other programs including Fontebella, a maternity home for women experiencing homelessness; Community Integrated Living Arrangements, group homes for people with developmental disabilities; and Fox River Assisted Living for moderate to low-income seniors.

People can drop off new, unwrapped gifts to the location listed on Caritas Family Solutions website at [www.caritasfamilysolutions.org/secretsanta](http://www.caritasfamilysolutions.org/secretsanta) or donate by phone, online or by mailing in a check. All donations will go to support the services provided by Caritas Family Solutions.

### ***About Caritas Family Solutions:***

*Founded in 1947, Caritas Family Solutions strengthens the social and emotional well-being of individuals and families in order to create healthy relationships, loving homes and strong communities. Caritas provides services across Southern Illinois from offices located in Belleville, Carterville, Mount Vernon, Olney, East Alton and Effingham. For additional information, visit [www.caritasfamilysolutions.org](http://www.caritasfamilysolutions.org).*