

## Kindergartners offer holiday gifts to 'Adopt-a-Family'

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A generous group of kindergartners at Marymount School came to class Thursday with gifts in hand to bring cheer to a local family in need this holiday season.

"With kindergartners, we always try to do acts of kindness," said Melanie McQueen, the lead kindergarten teacher at Marymount School.

Ms. McQueen's class has participated in the Child Abuse Listening Mediation organization's Adopt-a-Family program each year since the program started six years ago.

"We feel so blessed here with all the things that we have, especially during the holiday season," Ms. McQueen said. "We just want to give back."

During the season of giving, the nonprofit CALM provides gifts, food and holiday decorations to families receiving their counseling services. The gifts are donated from the community.

The Adopt-a-Family program brings the holiday spirit to high-need families "that wouldn't otherwise be getting presents or really be having a gift exchange during the holidays," said Alana Walczak, CEO of CALM.

Ms. McQueen's class received a wish list from the family and then, with the help of their parents, the children made it their mission to bring the family holiday cheer.

"The kids and the families, they have these big hearts and they are just so generous," Ms. McQueen said.

CALM representatives visited the class of 18 kindergartners to pick up the variety of wrapped presents for their CALM family. With everything from basic needs to toys and holiday decorations, the children were excited to hand over their gifts.

Six-year-old Jasmine beamed a smile from ear to ear as she talked about her gift, which was a grocery store gift card for the family.

"It makes me feel like other people are going to be really happy because they are getting food," Jasmine said.

Isabella, 5, said her family wrapped some shoes, while Griffin, 5, said he was glad to give the children of the family some books.

The twist with CALM's Adopt-a-Family program, explained Ms. Walczak, is that it is completely anonymous.

"There's something really powerful about that two-way anonymous giving," she said. "They are being supported by CALM, but for them to know this whole other layer in the Santa Barbara community is thinking about them this time of year, I think that's really important."

Marymount School participates with the program each year to teach their kindergartners the "H.E.A.R.T." values of honesty, empathy, altruism, responsibility and teamwork, said Andrea Torchin, the Lower School division head.

"This collaboration and partnership with CALM allows us to focus on those five values that we have at Marymount," she said. "With empathy towards others (and) altruism, we're making sure we understand other people's perspectives."

The school also strives to embed a "global responsibility to help others," while "coming together and working towards a common goal," she said.

Head of School Andrew Wooden said the CALM program fits in with what Marymount School tries to teach the children, which is "to believe in something larger than themselves," he said.

Founded 45 years ago, CALM focuses on preventing, assessing and treating child abuse and family violence.

While the Adopt-a-Family program is finished for the year, the nonprofit is accepting donations throughout the month.

To learn more about the program or to donate, visit [calm4kids.org](http://calm4kids.org).