

More than 136,000 baby items donated for HomeAid Orange County's 2009 Essentials For Young Lives drive

More than 70 companies, community organizations, elected officials, and nearly 3,000 YMCA of Orange County children participated in HomeAid Orange County's 2009 Essentials for Young Lives program in partnership with the Children and Families Commission of Orange County. Their combined efforts conducting Essential for Young Lives drives amongst their employees, families, and friends resulted in the collection of more than 136,000 essential baby items distributed to 16 non-profit organizations that serve homeless mothers and their children.

"HomeAid Orange County's Essentials for Young Lives is such a blessing for us," said Judi Bambas, Fullerton Interfaith Emergency Service, Inc. executive director. "This year they delivered even more items than last year. We sat with our jaws dropping when we saw the truck pull into our driveway with stacks and stacks of baby items. I can't thank everyone enough for their generosity and caring spirits. The supplies of diapers, baby wipes and all things essential for the little ones in our programs are vital items for the families we serve."

The increase in donations over last year is particularly encouraging during these difficult economic times.

"In just two years' time, this donation drive has inspired an incredible response that will help ensure that our county's most vulnerable residents, homeless mothers and their young children, have the basic necessities," said Maria Minon, M.D. and chair of the Children and Families Commission of Orange

County. "The Children and Families Commission is proud to participate in this campaign that supports our mission that all children are healthy and ready to succeed when they enter kindergarten."

The collaboration with the YMCA of Orange County was a big boost to the 2009 efforts. YMCA staff turned Essentials for Young Lives into a service learning project for the children in their 56 YMCA after school programs. After researching the issues of homelessness in Orange County, the children planned and implemented donation drives at each of their after school program sites.

"One of our core values at the YMCA is caring," said Jeff McBride, YMCA of Orange County president and CEO. "I can think of no better way for our kids to practice this value than to be part of a project that provides essentials for homeless mothers and their children. Our children are learning about a segment of our population that often goes unnoticed. Through the Essentials for Young Lives service project, at an early age, they are becoming extremely aware of the needs in our community and taking action. Our hope as they grow and become adults is that they will continue to give back to the community."

Companies and organizations ranging from Anaheim Family Justice Center, Irvine Spectrum Center, Balboa Insurance Group, Bank of America, Cal Pac Sheet Metal, St. John Middle School, DaVita, Hampton Products International Corp., First American Title Insurance Company, and the Tustin Police Department championed the cause to bring aid to homeless families across Orange County. In

addition, seven California legislators representing Orange County communities supported the drive by hosting donation drop-off sites at their district offices. They include Senators Correa and Harman, and Assembly Members DeVore, Duvall, Harkey, Miller, and Silva.

"This is only our second year of conducting Essentials for Young Lives in Orange County," said Essentials for Young Lives committee chair, Sonia Lister of Jackson, DeMarco, Tidus and Peckenpaugh. "I'm amazed at the community involvement even in a challenging economy. It is wonderful how so many people have cared enough to join together to help the fastest growing segment of the homeless population – families. I think it is because people really care and want to help."

Donated items for the Essentials for Young Lives drive were distributed to the following HomeAid service provider partners that assist families and children: Anaheim Interfaith Shelter; Casa Teresa; Families Forward; Fullerton Interfaith Emergency Service; H.I.S. House; Human Options; Interval House; Catholic Worker – Isaiah House; Laura's House; Mary's Shelter; Mercy House; Orange County Rescue Mission; Precious Life Shelter; Shelter for the Homeless; Thomas House and Women's Transitional Living Center.

Plans are in motion now for the 2010 Essentials for Young Lives drive. Official drive dates will be April 26 - 29, 2010. For more information, or to get involved in the 2010 program e-mail info@homeaidoc.org or call 949.553.9510.