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Area nonprofits report heavy holiday turnout

by [Caroline Young](#)

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Staff / Nathan Self
Helen Cunningham, Buckhead Christian Ministry's executive director, stands among the shelves of food at the ministry's food pantry, which serves the working poor of Atlanta.

Local nonprofits were busy throughout 2012 and into the holiday season, a time when some residents are in the most need of help.

"In November and December, we have the highest number of people coming in. It's always at a certain energy level to make sure we see everyone, ... and make sure we keep that Christmas spirit," said Helen Cunningham, executive director of the Buckhead Christian Ministry. "I think partly it's because people have their dollar stretch as long as they possibly can, so toward the end of the year it may be a little harder."

She said several clients are also seasonally or hourly employed, making income less stable over the

holidays. Plus, children are out of school.

"Many of our families are working-class, low-income workers who depend on school lunches and the support schools provide," she said. "They really need that support of community-based programs." She said the ministry has two holiday programs, Joyous Toys and Adopt-A-Family, and they provided toys to almost 1,000 children and adopted about 25 families this past season.

The Community Assistance Center in Sandy Springs, which serves the poor in that city and in Dunwoody, conducted holiday food drives and an online adopt-a-family program.

"We give families we're serving a food basket for Thanksgiving and Christmas," said Executive Director Tamara Carrera. And every child whose profile is put online gets adopted, she said, and

more than 1,000 were adopted this past season.

"We couldn't put them up fast enough," Carrera said. "The families that adopted kids brought in presents."

The center usually closes Christmas week but stayed open to keep serving clients food.

"It was packed," Carrera said. "We see a lot of families that have just lost jobs and are really just trying to make it."

She said the center is always in need of new volunteers throughout the entire year.

The Atlanta Day Shelter in Midtown provided new Christmas gifts for more than 1,000 homeless women and children, said Executive Director Ginny Nickles."

These gifts were individually packaged for each person with critical-needs necessities as well as something special," Nickles said.

She said the shelter also gave women gift cards ranging from \$10 to \$25.

"Women with children received gift cards for them as well," Nickles said. "We also gave out holiday food kits for guests who have recently secured a new permanent residency which included items like canned foods, peanut butter, pastas, vegetables, oranges, apples and a turkey."

On the Web:

www.atlantadayshelter.org

buckheadchristianministry.org

www.ourcac.org

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