

# Program gives poor families reason to give thanks

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Two HOPE program participants present Shontoya Watt (center) with a surprise turkey delivery just before Thanksgiving. Sarah Eubank, HOPE program supervisor, looks on in the background.

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By **Miranda Bradley**

*Children at Heart Ministries*

ROUND ROCK—Shontoya Watt works hard to provide for her family, but living in a low-income housing complex, she hasn't always found it easy to give thanks.

This Thanksgiving was different, due largely to [Texas Baptist Children's Home's](#) HOPE program.

"Sometimes you know you are going to make it, but you still need that little bit of encouragement," Watt said, adding the children's home ministry "has given me that over and over again."

Watt—who has three children, ages 3, 11 and 16—works as a substitute teacher in the Pflugerville Independent School District.

After she leaves school each day, she reports to her second job as director of the activity center for the housing complex where she lives.

To assist Watt and her neighbors, middle-school students involved in HOPE's youth leadership groups delivered turkeys with all the trimmings to their homes just in time for Thanksgiving.

"I think I'm going to cry," she said as she was presented with the basket, which included a turkey, stuffing, side dishes and a six-pack of soft drinks.

HOPE, a community outreach program that assists families in at-risk environments during difficult times, also sponsors after-school programs for children in low-income housing throughout the Round Rock area. The

turkey delivery project was the first outreach experience for the youth leadership group, who often are on the receiving end of such generosity.

“It was cool to give someone something so special,” one of the students said. “My friends think it’s a good thing, too.”

Watt, who has spent a lot of time interacting with the HOPE program staff, said she sees tremendous improvement in the children involved with the children’s groups.

“You just see everything about them change,” she said. “HOPE takes them on outings to go swimming in the summer and on special trips in the winter. These are kids who don’t get to do that sort of thing. It’s amazing what a difference it makes in their lives.”

Watt began work at the activity center just one month before HOPE launched its children’s group in her community. Since then, the children have grown in more ways than she can count. Sarah Eubank, HOPE program supervisor, credits some of that with Watt’s involvement.

“She has a real heart for kids,” she said. “The sacrifices she makes to help these children means a lot to us. That’s why we wanted to surprise her with this Thanksgiving dinner today, so she would know we are thankful for her.”

Watt, a fourth-generation product of low-income housing projects in Mississippi, said her main goal is to give the children something better to shoot for. Just as she left her home state because she set higher goals for herself and her family, she hopes these children will do the same.

“I wanted to break that cycle of bondage,” she said.

“I know these kids want that, too. The most important thing I teach them is love. Today, they can see that someone cares about them and that God is

smiling on us.”

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