

Buckner in East Texas rings in Christmas for vulnerable children

December 21, 2016

LONGVIEW—Christmas came early this year for vulnerable families and children served through Buckner in East Texas.

In a day filled with parties, smiles, laughter and joy, families served through Buckner foster care as well as those served through the Buckner Family Hope Center in Longview received presents, participated in games and celebrated the season.

About 200 families—210 adults and more than 400 children—served through Buckner Family Hope Centers, Buckner Family Pathways and Project Hopes gathered for a Christmas party Dec. 13 at Grace Creek Church in Longview.

The event included dinner, crafts, cookie decorating, a devotion and family photos. Families won new bikes for their children, grocery gift cards, Chick-fil-A gift cards, a Best Buy gift card and an Xbox.

“God has done so much through Buckner and through the hard work of the families we serve this year,” said David Ummel, executive director of Buckner Children and Family Services of East Texas. “Christmas is the perfect time to come together as a Buckner family and celebrate their accomplishments and thank God for his guidance in our lives.”

Later that night at First Baptist Church, more than 130 foster children and their families who receive ministry through Buckner participated in a Christmas party sponsored by the Longview branch of Morgan Stanley that

included pizza, drinks, cookies, a photo booth, face painting, games and a visit from Santa Claus.

“Christmas is a time when families come together,” Ummel said. “It’s a time to create memories. The Morgan Stanley-Buckner Foster Care Christmas party is an excellent opportunity for the children and families we serve to do both.”

The Longview branch of the financial services company has provided gifts for hundreds of children served through Buckner foster care since 2004.

“We started this several years ago in the place of an office Christmas party,” Financial Adviser Rick James said. “We thought it would be better to do something for others at Christmas, especially for children who might need some extra Christmas cheer.”

Children most often come into foster care after being removed by the state following neglect or abuse. Through foster care, children begin to heal from what they have experienced as they enjoy healthy family relationships. The Christmas party is another way to help the healing process.

For some of the children, this is the first time they will get to enjoy the simple pleasures of Christmas such as a tree, decorations and presents.

“The Christmas party helps shine hope into the lives of children,” Ummel said. “During this time, it doesn’t matter where you came from or what you’ve experienced, you can simply be a child. You can soak up the Christmas season and enjoy it like never before.”