

# CHARGER CHRISTMAS KIDS KICKS OFF HOLIDAY DRIVE

By Chloe Anderson

associate editor

After 11 years of the program, Charger Christmas Kids is still hard at work to ensure each OSD student has presents to open on Christmas morning. The program began with 11 OSD students to be provided for and now has around 500.

“We started when my oldest son, Brody, was in the first grade at OE,” Charger Christmas Kids founder and president Tara Denevan said. “The school counselor came to me and asked if I could help collect gifts for 11 students. This year is really special to us because we started out with only 11 kids and now this is our 11th year.”

During the first year, the project was done out of Denevan’s house. Today the program has a set team of 17 people, and the collecting and organizing is done in a building that is around 50,000 square feet.

“Charger Christmas Kids usually starts Nov. 1,” Denevan said. “That is the day that we begin collecting donors and solidify our location for the year. Shortly after that, there is a meeting with our team and all OSD school counselors to discuss plans and spreadsheets. All student names that we receive come directly from the school counselors and admins, so having that meeting with them early on is very important.”

The Charger Christmas Kids staff and the OSD counselor stay in close communication during this time to ensure everything goes smoothly. The counselors meet with Denevan to double check everything and make sure nothing has been overlooked.

“The hardest and most stressful part is making sure you don’t miss anyone,” OHS counselor Elizabeth Cassidy said. “Tara and her group are phenomenal at working with us and give us a lot of patience. We work with a spreadsheet of information, work to make sure that siblings are included and work to make sure we do not duplicate families.”

The group of people who dedicate their time to Charger Christmas Kids every year do everything from collecting the donated gifts, organizing them, labeling them, making sure items from wishlists were purchased and, finally, helping distribute the gifts to families.

“My role in Charger Christmas is to work behind the scenes,” donor Meghan Anderson said. “I am a part of a small group who spends about two

weeks making Charger Christmas happen. It begins with the school counselors collecting wishlists, and the Charger Christmas team typically receives a message from Tara in November that it is time to start preparing. From that day forward, we are working until gifts have been distributed in December.”

The team of people who work to make this happen spend a lot of time together during the holiday season. Being together with the goal of bringing joy to others makes them close.

“I look forward to our team and getting to spend two straight weeks with them,” Denevan said. “We have had the same team for many years now, and they are a group of wonderful women who come together to make it all happen. We all lead very busy lives, and we don’t always see each other throughout the year. During these special two weeks, we spend countless hours together laughing, crying and working tirelessly to make this project successful.”

While the team may not spend much time together throughout the year, the time they spend together preparing for Charger Christmas Kids makes up for it.

“I love being a part of a team that has a shared goal and purpose of kids receiving things that they both need and want for the holiday season,” Anderson said. “I love that it is a way for our community to come together and truly take care of one another.”

The sense of helping the community is something that makes Charger Christmas special. While Oxford is already a close-knit community, this brings everyone closer together.

“The most rewarding part is easily the families who receive the gifts,” Denevan said. “Watching their faces light up is something that I’ll never get tired of seeing. We have so many parents who work so hard for their families and it is simply not enough. Being able to help them out and take a little pressure off of them during the holidays is what we are here for.”

Making sure that every kid has gifts to open on Christmas is so heartwarming for the Charger Christmas Kids staff. The comfort of knowing that each kid has been provided for leaves them feeling fulfilled.

“Not that anyone else knows, but when the students come back and have on the shoes or the jacket that they really wanted,” Cassidy said. “Just

the confidence that it gives them. It is an awesome thing and we are very fortunate to have everyone that donates, provides and contributes to such an awesome thing.”

The rewarding part of Charger Christmas for the team is not only bringing a little extra happiness to other’s holidays, but also having the satisfaction of knowing they helped to do that.

“My favorite part of our project is that it is completely anonymous,” Denevan said. “These children receive the gifts on Christmas morning and they never know where it all came from. We like to think of ourselves as the magic makers during Christmas, bringing a little touch of Christmas magic to hundreds of families in our community.”



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**Top:** Various sports balls donated by the Oxford community to be given as presents. Sophomore **Walsh Driskell** held a drive where these balls were collected.

**Bottom:** Charger Christmas Kids staff poses for a picture. This is the group’s 11th year working together.



Courtesy of Meghan Anderson

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