



## Day of Caring: A hand up: Outpouring is great

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9/8/2007

**Thousands of volunteers turn out for what local United Way leaders call the largest Day of Caring in the country.**

Gary Gray knew poverty existed in Tulsa, but he said he did not know what it looked like until he arrived at his Tulsa Area United Way Day of Caring project on Friday.

The north Tulsa house looked like it had been through a hurricane. Roxann Moeller, who works with the homeowner through Family and Children's Services, wryly said that is what drugs and mental illness do.

Any improvements to the house would help the homeowner, who has been drug-free and working for three months, get on with her life, Moeller said.

Glass, wires, pieces of plastic and contraptions littered the yard. An orange extension cord stretched from a neighbor's house into the living room, where it powered a small light that exposed furniture and belongings in disarray and a fine sifting of dirt and leaves over a dark green rug. A hole remained high on one wall where an air-conditioning unit or window should have been.

The one-day volunteers were tasked with replacing deteriorating wallboard and painting the walls. They were among approximately 4,000 people volunteering with 65 United Way agencies in the Tulsa area on Friday for what local United Way leaders called the largest Day of Caring in the country.

At the north Tulsa house, volunteer Stephanie Sutter cleared off furniture, tidied books, tried to make minor repairs and still faced an endless line of tasks.

"Something tells me I'm not going to be done at noon and shopping today," she said cheerfully. "And that's OK. There's definitely a need."

Volunteers said the project made them realize how well they live.

In west Tulsa, Debbie Blair could not figure out how her son was so lucky to have been chosen to have his house painted. He is a client of Family and Children's Services, a United Way agency.

Until volunteers started dipping their paintbrushes in soft grass-green paint, Blair could not believe it was happening. She could not help but gawk at workers slathering the eaves in green and touching up window frames with cream-colored paint.

"It looks like a whole new house," Blair said.

Even the gentle rain on Friday did not stop the project. The volunteers were soaked, but they were still amiable and smiling by mid-afternoon.

At Life Senior Services, 5950 E. 31st St., where adults spend the day, four volunteers and three women fought playfully over who said "Uno" first. The game kept Eloise Frayser constantly laughing, while Louwanda Powdrill shrewdly kept track of her cards.

Volunteer Nikhol Robinson said she likes helping her community.

"We had such a good time last year," she said. "I came in last year and whupped everyone in dominoes."

At Marshall Elementary School, 1142 E. 56th St., students gasped in delight when a teacher told them they would be able to play outside with their one-day Big Brothers and Big Sisters.

Three boys quickly dragged their "Bigs" outside to play soccer and football. Seven-year-old **Desmond Jackson** laughed as volunteer Mike Vegher lifted him into the air after a touchdown.

Volunteer Susan Crutchfield and 8-year-old **Cameron Walls** perfected a game of catch, and Cameron grinned and shook his head "no" when Crutchfield asked if he was getting tired.

When the rain accelerated, the bunch headed indoors for games.

"It kind of breaks my heart" knowing "that some of them come from tough backgrounds," volunteer Brad Mann said. "To be able to give some attention to them touches me."

Mann showed 8-year-old **Tray Williams** how to block red discs with black ones in the game Connect Four, but Mann did not hesitate to win a round or two. No matter the outcome, the partners gave each other high-fives, and Tray smiled every time.

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