

## When your Debt and Benefit Case Manger decided to “ Elf out” the children at Christmas by adding some extra sparkle !



As we approached Christmas 2020 I was conscious that as an organisation we had been lucky to be working from home, not been furloughed or suffered loss of income. However, there are many people in our local community who have not been as fortunate as us at SWT.

Since April 2020 I had supported over 450 families with their financial struggles but with the influx of Christmas adverts on TV, buying children's presents can be another pressure for these struggling families to face. So I decided to put out an appeal to staff, colleagues, friends and families to donate a brand new toy, book or gift for these children – my Christmas Wish was to “add a little extra sparkle” The response was overwhelming and the generosity of donations far exceeded my initial expectations and in just under 4 weeks I received over 350 wrapped presents ready to distribute.

Special Thanks to Tenants Action Group Chairman Wayne Hobson who also very kindly donated £200 to add to the “sparkle” and was used on a shopping list for a range of different gifts.



The Mayor of Taunton, Cllr Fran Smith, also gifted £1,000 in £10 Asda gift vouchers to Taunton families identified in need of support when she learned of my appeal. The gift vouchers were purchased using funds donated from the Alderman Spears Charitable Trust which was setup in 1973 by former Councillor, Alderman and Freeman, Mr Frederick Cory-Spear OBE, specifically for the benefit of those in need at Christmas. This endowment is specifically tied to the Mayoralty and the former Borough of Taunton.

A number of families were identified as facing extreme financial hardship through the repeat number of requests for support, particularly during the lockdowns, and

through the close working relationships fostered with tenants from deprived areas by the council's 'One Teams' and multi-agency staff.

The Mayor of Taunton, Cllr Fran Smith, said: "I'm very proud of the voluntary work undertaken by our staff and partners, and these gestures will provide some relief to families and individuals who are vulnerable or are suffering financially in the run up to Christmas. This fund was bequeathed to us specifically for the poor and needy during Christmas and given the impact the Coronavirus pandemic has had on our communities this year, we felt now was the right time to make use of this fund."



I am so pleased to have been able to do this for these families and also received some lovely comments of thanks back from the families we supported, one tenant in particular wrote directly to The Mayor Cllr Fran Smith.....

*Dear Mayor F. Smith,*

*I would like to thank you for your kind donations to the presents for families like myself who have fallen on hard times. It meant the world to all 5 of my children, partner and myself, it made presents under the tree look even better.*

*I was over the moon that, Pippa Hughs and Dee Bradley who work for Somerset West and Taunton Council for putting us forward for receiving the extra presents and gift vouchers.*

*My family and I will be forever grateful for too you all !*

