

Breakfast Club Christmas Store 2021

18.12.21

This years Christmas store almost didn't go ahead due to Covid-19 restrictions. Whilst trying to work out how a family event for over 220 families from areas with some of the lowest vaccine rates in the city could go ahead during the newly proposed Traffic light system Steve had almost given up and cancelled the Christmas Store for 2021.

That was until major sponsor of the Christmas Store - DTR approached Steve and told him that if the Christmas Store didn't run that they would deliver the \$11,000.00 worth of Christmas Hams that they were sponsoring to each family on their own. At this point Steve and the planning committee was given a pick me up and they pushed through to work out how they could ensure that the families relying on some extra help at Christmas time would still be able to get the things that they needed.

The usual plan for the day is that families are given an invitation to show up during an allotted time and encouraged to bring their whole whanau to enjoy the day as a family. Upon arrival they would be given assigned a trolley boy who would push a trolley (on loan from New World Eastridge) and accompany them around the Christmas shop. They would start by going through the school hall to each table and gathering several food and personal items. They would then be brought to a classroom where they would collect a present with each of their children names on it. The trolley boy would then load up their car while the family enjoyed several free food and drink stalls such as sausages sizzles, candy floss, popcorn, donuts, ice-cream trucks, coffee carts and entertainment such as music and a bouncy castle.

We knew that some good was going to happen this year because as always, the day before and morning of the event usually turns to chaos. With the Christmas Hams that had been ordered being delayed, New World stepped in and let us borrow some of their stock until we could replace it with our own. Many different lay outs for the event were trialled and about half the volunteers we usually have were unable to come.

Because of the restrictions this year the family event part of the day had to be removed and families were asked to only send one adult. Steve being the wise man that he is decided to keep only one of the usual outside attractions - the coffee truck, as he didn't want his volunteers striking. With only one person from each family attending and no entertainment or food/drink being served, the usual happy hum of people enjoying the day was missing and replaced with a loop of classic Christmas songs being played through the school sound system.

Each adult arrived and was given a ticket then they walked through a coned off path until they were given a trolley boy who already had a trolley full of food waiting for them. They then moved to the meat selection where they were given a 4.5kg Christmas ham and some packs of mince. If the family had a young child they then continued to the Mums and Bubs classroom where they were handed a bag full of nappies, wipes, food, and toys for the baby before lastly visiting the presents room to receive a present for each of their children also through a classroom window. After filling up their car or the breakfast club van they were then invited to stay for a coffee or two before returning home.

11 different organisations identified the 220 families in need including schools from around East and South Auckland, Tamaki Family Health Centre and the Glen Innes police. The Police spent all day showing up to pick up food and presents and putting them in the Police car and delivering them by hand to the families that they had identified. Whilst we missed the family fun part of the event there was some good to the way things had to be changed. The new process brought a different element of dignity to the families that were receiving the food. We usually find the Mothers are very emotional while walking through the hall being handed items and the Fathers often stay outside to avoid the cultural shame of not being able to provide for their family. Although this was a very different Christmas Store to the usual event it was fantastic to be able to rethink how we do things and to prove that despite a global pandemic God is still capable of planning and providing for his will. I am so glad that our church was able to financial support this amazing event and the rest of the great work that the Breakfast Club is doing in our community.

Sami Smart

