

MEDIA RELEASE

1 December 2021

Santa Appeals to Canberra's Christmas Spirit

It was sleigh time in Gungahlin (well, close enough!) as Santa made his annual pilgrimage to Gungahlin Village shopping centre on the light rail, laden with donations for families in need.

Assisted by helpers from Canberra Metro Operations, Santa delivered his goodies to the Gungahlin Village giving tree, adding to the gifts generously donated by the shopping centre's customers for the Communities at Work Christmas Appeal. Communities at Work is Canberra's largest non-profit community organisation, providing much-needed food, gifts and crisis support services to the many individuals, families and children experiencing domestic or family violence, homelessness or financial or emotional challenges.

Christmas is traditionally a time to celebrate joyously with family and friends over shared meals and gift-giving joyously. But this year, due to COVID-19, many Canberrans are experiencing hardship for the first time. It's more important than ever for the community to unite to support those less fortunate.

Gungahlin Village is one of the numerous organisations around Canberra uniting the community by hosting a Giving Tree for Communities at Work to collect non-perishable food and gifts and by donating a percentage of customers' shopping through its 'Share the Merry' campaign.

"Gungahlin Village and its customers support Communities at Work and its community pantries not just at Christmas, but year-round," said Gungahlin Village Centre Manager Bri Nix. "It's not only an expression of compassion for those in our community who need support but also a symbol of community solidarity. We have seen time and time again, particularly during the last two years through bushfires and COVID-19, the uncertainty and the strain these events have and continue to have on our community.

"The services of the Communities at Work team have been invaluable to many during these times - not only the service they provide but the care they take to provide support without judgement to those who need it, when they need it," Bri said.

Canberra Metro Operations has also hopped on board the Communities at Work Christmas Appeal, presenting the organisation with a cheque to assist in purchasing food for Christmas hampers. General Manager Bruno Lancelot said that his organisation was proud to support the Appeal. "Canberra Metro Operations has been assisting Santa with his travel arrangements to Gungahlin for the past four years. We are delighted to support the Communities at Work Christmas Appeal once again. This year has been unlike any other, and we are proud to be able to support vulnerable and disadvantaged Canberra families with our donation."

Communities at Work has a strong and proud history of partnering with local businesses and community groups to provide essential support for the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Community partners donate food, clothing and money, or provide free or discounted services. And at Christmas many host giving trees - or even 'giving buses', in the case of Canberra FM Mix 106.3 and Transport Canberra. They've lent their support to the Christmas Appeal and will be

driving their “Pack the Bus” around Canberra from 6 December to collect donations from registered supporters.

“The support of our community is vital as it allows us to stock our community food pantries, arrange clothing for people in need, and provide essential items and services in times of crisis”, explains Lee Maiden, Communities at Work Chief Executive Officer. “And at Christmas, it allows us to bring smiles and relief to Canberrans whose Christmas may not be such a happy time.

“Last year we helped more than 1,100 people with Christmas gifts for their families and gave out over 1,000 food hampers. That was thanks to the more than 70 businesses, community groups, government departments and schools who hosted giving trees for our Christmas Appeal – and the countless individuals who generously donated over \$8,800 online.

“This year there are lots of different ways people can help, including hosting virtual giving trees to remain COVID safe. And our website has a handy toolkit of resources to help people organise and promote their giving tree drives. So please visit our website and consider registering for our Christmas Appeal. Together, we can do so much more!”

For more information on the Christmas Appeal

visit commsatwork.org/christmas

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Background to Communities at Work and its Christmas Appeal

Communities at Work is Canberra's largest not-for-profit community organisation, with over 44 years' experience providing a wide range of education and care and community services in the ACT and Capital region.

Communities at Work has a core mission to assist in alleviating hardship and improve the quality of life for Canberrans. It invests all surplus funds back into the Canberra community through food and clothing programs, the Galilee School (an independent high school for disengaged and vulnerable students), as well as support coordination and transport services for seniors and people with disabilities to ensure they remain independent and socially connected.

Communities at Work Donation Drop-off Points

(for food and new and unwrapped gifts):

- Gungahlin Village (near Coles)
- South.Point Tuggeranong (downstairs near centre court, opposite Dusk)
- Cooleman Court (centre court, big red box)
- Gungahlin Community Centre
- Tuggeranong Community Centre

Collection bins for non-perishable food (all year):

- Cooleman Court (near the ground floor lift)
- Calwell Shopping Centre
- Gungahlin Village (outside Coles)