

# Community generosity abounds in annual charity campaign

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A local family in need is back on the road thanks in part to The Day's annual charity series.

**Stephanie, Jim and their 18-month-old son**, who were selected by Always Home as their featured family in the **Make a Difference** series, were trying to navigate her work shifts and his cardiac health appointments when the transmission on their car died.

Social worker Marlene Benker said she wasn't sure what the response would be like this year because the listing ran in the newspaper on Thanksgiving, but as of last week, Always Home received enough donations from the series to cover about half of the \$6,000 repair.

"It was fantastic, and we still have donations coming in," she said. Holmgren Subaru, the dealership tasked with the repair, offered a discount and other area organizations, including Ledyard Social Services, donated to the cause.

Benker had been texting with Stephanie the morning that the car was coming out of the shop, and she said she was excited to get back on the road. She said that while Jim is still in line for a transplant, he was scheduled for a different surgery in January for his congestive heart failure and faces a six-month recovery.

Benker said she couldn't stress enough the generosity of the people who donated to this year's campaign and said they couldn't have made it happen without community support.

**Riverfront Children's Center** in Groton also sponsored a young family of three who asked for help with rent and utilities as both parents started new jobs after one was in a car crash in October.

Kersten Elenteny, development coordinator at the center, said this year's response was "overwhelming": the agency received more than \$1,400 in monetary and gift card donations, a 50 percent increase from last year, and 25 percent of the people who donated this year were first-time donors to the center.

She said the campaign was an outstanding experience for the center and the family.

Marjorie Vrabel, service coordinator at [Reliance Health](#) in Norwich, said the response for their family was "just terrific," and many of her co-workers helped with wrapping the gifts for the family. She said they received a Christmas tree in addition to the clothing, art supplies and other items they requested, and one family donated a homemade tabletop game for them to play together.

She said holiday shopping can sometimes be difficult for families with older kids, especially for teens with cognitive delays, and she was happy to see the son receive gifts that he would like and be able to use.

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## **Organizations featured in Make a Difference in 2019**

Alliance for Living; Always Home; Care and Share; Catholic Charities; Covenant Shelter; Drop-In Learning Center; Jewish Federation of Eastern Connecticut; Jonnycake Center; Madonna Place; Martin House; Montville Social Services; Mother's Retreat; New London Community Meal Center; New London Homeless Hospitality Center; Norwich Human Services; OIC of New London County; Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center; Reliance Health; Riverfront Children's Center; Safe Futures; Salvation Army; St. Vincent de Paul Place; Stonington Human Services; Thames River Family Program; The Arc Eastern Connecticut; Visiting Nurse Association of Southeastern Connecticut, and WARM Center.