



Christmas Wishes Come True

By: Kellianne Vallee, NCI

The cadets sit quietly in the bleachers, a crisp white tent protecting them from the tropical sun. As they watch the scene unfolding before them, many wipe tears from their eyes while others beam with pride. It's a week before Christmas and an Oahu family, five small children and their parents, are opening gifts. Presents given by these young men and women to a family they have never met, until today.

Each year the Hawaiian Salvation Army sponsors the Lokahi Adopt-a-Family Program. The organization raises money to help a struggling family enjoy a bit of holiday spirit. Today, the Hawaii National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Academy cadets are experiencing the happy results of their generous hearts. In late November, the entire company voted to donate a portion of their \$5 weekly stipends to purchase gifts for a local family. Each cadet contributed to the effort, some giving every last dollar they had saved during nearly six months in residence. In total, the cadets of Class 23 contributed over \$1200. Their only request was to adopt a family with young children. Children like the brothers and sisters they had left behind at home.

Dad has been out of work since 2003 with a physical disability reads the family's Lokahi application. The family of seven lives on less than \$1200 monthly, using only a hot plate and a microwave for cooking. Mom often feels overwhelmed, but is determined to keep the family's spirits up. The application lists the children's Christmas desires; a coloring book, a Bratz doll, a Hulk action figure. Dad would like a hammer and mom is hoping to replace her tattered wallet with a new one. The application ends simply...these practical gifts will impact this family tremendously.

As soon as they were given an adoptive family, a small group of cadets went shopping. With wish list in hand, they selected and purchased three gifts for each child. ChalleNGe staff purchased gifts for both parents. "The cadets have wrapped all the gifts," says Charlene Takesue, mentor coordinator. "They are so excited and want everything to be perfect."

When the special day finally arrives, everything *is* perfect. "We are very proud to present these gifts," says Cadet Matthew Faasua, acting as spokesperson for the company. "You are part of the ChalleNGe family now. We wish you a very Merry Christmas." As the children open their gifts, Cadet Faasua notices four-year-old Abraham struggling with the bow on his package. Instinctively, he leans over to help the little boy. It's a sight that brings more tears to Charlene Takesue's eyes. "Our cadets have learned through ChalleNGe how to give of themselves," she explains proudly. "Hopefully, it's a life lesson they will never forget."