

Christmas – A time for giving... and paying back

✘ For the past ten years East Dunbartonshire Council's unpaid work team have been involved in a project where more than 700 of the community's most disadvantaged families receive donations of presents in the run up to Christmas.

The scheme was set up to help families who often struggle to buy gifts for Christmas.

The inclusion of the unpaid work team – where individuals carry out a certain number of hours of unpaid work as part of their Community Payback Order (CPO) – means that those involved get to make a positive contribution to the community and help make amends for offending.

✘ Individuals who have served part of their CPO on this project are involved in collecting the donated presents from various locations across East Dunbartonshire, including local businesses, supermarkets, charities, churches, community centres and council buildings.

They then help to sort and wrap the presents before making supervised deliveries to a range of people across the community including single parents, families, kinship carers, people in supported accommodation and vulnerable young people.

The gifts range in value and include clothes, magazines and books, selection boxes, vouchers, gift sets, toiletries and age-appropriate toys.

The feedback from those on the workteams is that they have found it rewarding and satisfying, knowing that they are helping those in need during the festive period.

The team deliver approximately 36 parcels per day for the 20 days leading up to Christmas, with an average of around ten items per parcel. That means around 720 people or families benefit from this scheme in East Dunbartonshire each year, with more than 7,000 donations being received and distributed.

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grateful to all the kind people who made this happen for my family”

Of course, none of this would be possible without the generous donations made by the people of East Dunbartonshire to ensure that those who are less fortunate in their community have something to open on Christmas morning.

✘ Cabinet Secretary for Justice Humza Yousaf, said of the scheme: “This is a fantastic example of how people serving community sentences can help give back to their local communities.

It is incredibly important that we have community sentences that not only offer the chance to pay back, but help individuals in their rehabilitation into valued members of the community.

“Our focus in Scotland on effective community sentences has helped achieve a 19-year low in reconviction rates and in 2019 we will extend the presumption against short custodial sentences once safeguards for victims of domestic abuse are in place.”

✘ In one home in East Dunbartonshire, an unemployed couple who are benefiting from the scheme said: “We think that this is an amazing service, it makes a massive difference to our kids, especially the youngest ones. We would really have struggled this Christmas without this support”

A mother who was also a recipient, said: “I burst into tears when I saw the wonderful gifts that people had donated for my kids that I could never have afforded. I am so grateful to all the kind people who made this happen for my family”.