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Christmas for three little girls delivered by firefighters

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It was Christmas Eve when firefighter Ron Marks met the gaze of a 5-year-old girl and felt a tug at his heartstrings.

Her two sisters were jumping up and down with excitement, spouting off names of toys, after Marks asked them what they wanted for Christmas.

But it was little Sally who kept her calm.

"Oh, anything," she said. "Just bring us anything."

Earlier, firefighters from Station 6 had answered a domestic disturbance call at Waterdance Apartments. When they arrived, firefighters couldn't help but notice that the family had no furniture except for a mattress.

"When we got back to the station house the guys sat around the dinner table and talked about it," Marks said. "We agreed to do something for those kids."

The family's plight kindled the Christmas spirit from more than just firefighters on Christmas Eve. Help poured in from drugstore customers and employees working late that night and, unexpectedly, from another family that had little to give. Help continued yesterday when an Arlington charity donated a truck full of used furniture.

The firefighters had already raised money and donated food, clothes and Christmas presents to a family they had "adopted" from Mission Metroplex in Arlington.

But when they saw Wendy, 10, Yvonne, 7, and Sally living in an empty living room, the men decided they also had to do something for them. So they chipped in some money, went back to the apartment and asked the children what they wanted, then went to a Walgreen Drug Store because it was the only store they could find open at 9:30 p.m. on Christmas Eve.

When other store customers and a cashier saw eight firefighters filling up a basket from the toy aisle, they chipped in some money as well.

Then, the family the firefighters had already helped heard about the three little girls, and they offered the family half of their food and donated \$20.

"It made our shift to come across something like this, to do something about it and make those kids' Christmas," Marks said. "The mother is just as nice as ever, she had tears in her eyes the whole time."

The girls' mother, Esmeralda Ojeda, said that even though she has a steady job, she has had financial struggles lately that have been difficult to overcome. Ojeda's boyfriend, Henry Sumlin Jr., has been unable to contribute to the family income because he broke his ankle.

In addition to car trouble, Ojeda lost all her furniture when she was evicted from an apartment

and the apartment managers placed her furniture outside while she was at work. Most of it was stolen, including the children's toys and clothes, she said.

Ojeda thought she would be able to make ends meet more easily when, after waiting three years, she finally got called for a government-subsidized apartment. But because she had an eviction on her record, she was rejected.

The firefighters from Station 6 notified Mission Metroplex in Arlington about the family's situation, and the mission donated a trailer loaded with furniture yesterday, including beds, chests of drawers, tables, chairs and a love seat. The firefighters moved it into the apartment.

Ojeda came home from work yesterday, stunned to find an apartment full of furniture.

"We are going to be OK," she said. "This is a start."

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