

## Children's Support League's helping hands

By P K Forsyth

During the holidays, a gift drive was held by members of the Children's Support League of the East Bay to bring the joys of toys and gifts to at-risk children as young as toddlers and as hip as pre-teenagers. Each Christmas, the nonprofit CSL adopts a different charity and asks members to donate the toys on the children's wish lists.

This year the charity selected the Bay Area Crisis Nursery, an agency whose core purpose is to interrupt the cycle of child abuse and neglect by providing supportive services to families in crisis. The Concord-based agency operates around the clock and seven days a week.

Piedmont resident Lisa Riddiough organized the drive, including delivery of all donations to the agency.

"They were delighted by our carload of toys, books, clothes, and treasures for the kids just in time for Christmas; and they invited us back to wrap presents, which is a lot of fun," said Riddiough.

Aside from the toy drive, CSL's prime fundraiser is the annual springtime Heart of the Home Tour that spotlights notable properties in Piedmont and Oakland. CSL members' purpose is three-fold: for the privilege of working with beautiful homes; to sell hundreds of tickets to enthusiastic tour-goers; and to raise as much money as possible to donate to worthy charities dedicated to improving the lives of children.

Now in its 28th year of the tour, CSL has raised a total of \$3,300,000, while keeping overhead expenses at an exceedingly low 3% amount to maximize the awards.



**Children's Support League members Brooke Hauch (left) and Lisa Riddiough helped collect toys and gifts at a holiday party in Piedmont to benefit the Bay Area Crisis Center.**

Proceeds from the 2015 CSL tour provided grants to 16 nonprofit agencies serving children in both Alameda and Contra Costa counties. The agencies that landed the grants won from among 43 contenders, a ratio where nearly two out of three requests sadly go unfulfilled. CSL members vote as a body to balance the funds to help children in key areas: crisis intervention and child advocacy; educational support; therapy, counseling, and supportive services; shelters and varied programs; and special needs.

According to CSL tour co-chair and former grants chair Brooke Hauch, "Our heroes first and foremost are the wonderful human beings who lend their homes for the benefit. Our most difficult decisions are where and how to grant the funds from the competing applicants that are all financially vetted and worthy entities. There's just so much need out there. We struggle to stretch

the dollars."

Many tour insiders regard the CSL tour as "the best in the East Bay," said Stacy Mattson, co-chair for a third year. "I love it, and so do our loyal fans. Don't worry about coming down with a bad case of house envy, you'll get ideas to fluff up your own nest, and do it cleverly."

Next year's tour, scheduled Friday and Saturday, April 29 and 30, is currently in the planning phases, selecting the prized homes and assigning member jobs. Typically the tour features five homes, with possibly a sixth home for special VIP events.

Children's Support League is an all-volunteer 501c(3) nonprofit that welcomes direct donations and encourages end-of-year contributions. A donation is welcome at the website ([www.Childrens-SupportLeague.org](http://www.Childrens-SupportLeague.org)), which offers full details.

For membership inquiries, call 338-4521.