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## Camden children get the gift of giving

By Nancy Phillips

Inquirer Staff Writer

Earnest, determined, and brimming with delight, scores of children trolled the aisles of a store in Camden on Sunday, gathering holiday gifts.

Shopping baskets in hand, they picked out dozens of toys and trinkets, carefully weighing each choice.

"This is for my brother," said Ciyani Tokey, 6, as she held up a Disney Pixar cars paint set. She also got him gingerbread cookies and a Santa Claus lollipop.

For her mother, she chose chocolate-covered cherries and a tin of hard candy.

"And this," she said, pointing to a Disney Princess paint book, "is for me."

Ciyani was among 100 children who took part in a holiday shopping spree sponsored by UrbanPromise Ministries, a Christian organization that works with inner-city children. The group paid for the gifts the children selected for family and friends.

"There's just something rewarding about it," said Joshua Brady, who helped organize the event at the Dollar Tree on Mount Ephraim Avenue.

"You feel God's presence when you're watching over kids."

The shopping trip, for children ages 6 to 13, was meant to be a lesson in sharing. "The point is to try to get them to give," Brady said.

With an allotment of 10 gifts each, there was room enough for self reward. But most shoppers seemed to be focusing on others.

Toni Bronson, 10, filled her basket with gifts for her family.

"It's really nice to give to other people," she said.

For her mother, Toni chose a Christmas mug filled with candy. "I just have to figure out how to put it under the tree when she's not looking," she said.

For her 19-year-old sister, she picked up the paperback book, *Retail Therapy: Life Lessons Learned While Shopping*. For the family dog, Storm, she chose a stuffed pillow that said "#1 Pet."

And for her grandmother in Georgia, she bought a "dreamcatcher," a hanging mobile of feathers and string that when hung at someone's bedside promises to guard against bad dreams.

Her friend Monee Norman, 11, said she was grateful for the chance to buy gifts for her mother. Monee said she had asked her mother for money to buy her a Christmas gift.

"I asked if maybe I could get an allowance so maybe I could buy her something, and she said, 'Don't worry about it,' " Monee said. "But now, I'm going to get her a surprise."

In the end, she settled on a picture frame, a holiday mug filled with candy, violet-scented hand lotion, and a glass flower vase. And she was still able to buy presents for others, including an "FBI kit," complete with toy gun and plastic badge, for her brother.

On hand to help shoppers choose was Will Gass, 21, a volunteer with UrbanPromise who lived in Camden for four years as a child.

"I got out. I moved up," said Gass, who lives in Lindenwold. "But I know what it's like for these kids.


"It brings a lot of joy to my heart to see the smiles on their faces. It's all about the kids."

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