

Mobile help center aids San Diego's "forgotten"

Sierra del Mar Division assists back country residents.

by Suzi Woodruff Lacey –

Coffee mug in hand, Bonnie Stone clammers into The Salvation Army's new back country motor home, stirring up dust as she heads out on dirt roads to help some of the neediest and most neglected folks in San Diego; Descanso, Guatay, Pine Valley, Mt. Laguna, and Campo are a few of her destinations.

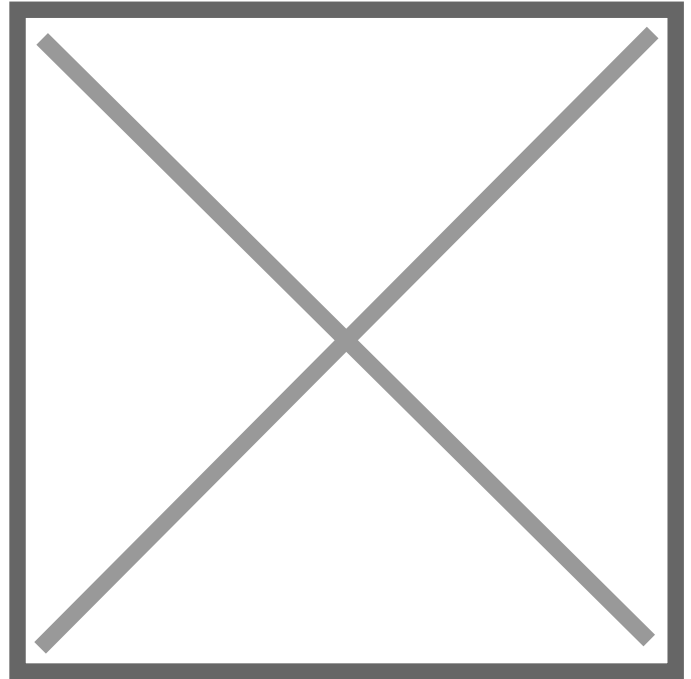
Four days a week she pulls up beside shacks, trailers, modest homes, and schools to hand out diapers, baby wipes, school supplies, blankets, clothing, personal hygiene products, food, and hope.

She brings a warm smile, a listening heart, and abundant resources. During the holidays, she will deliver toys and a Christmas meal in a box.

"These are the forgotten, basically," says Stone. "I am amazed how many individuals and families are living in the back country, needy, neglected, isolated. They are living in places I didn't know people could live! There are a thousand children out here. We're trying to gather information on how many seniors there are in the back country, alone and hungry for a good meal."

Helping the folks in the back country isn't new to The Salvation Army; it's something the Army has done for 20 years, most recently from an office in Pine Valley. It became clear that some of the neediest seniors, families, and individuals couldn't get to Pine Valley. Many don't have a car; those who do can't afford gas for a 50 or 60 mile drive. So The Salvation Army raised money for a 31-foot Fun Mover van with a 96" by 113" cargo area, perfect for storing goods and meeting with clients to provide counseling and case management. There's even a refrigerator, so The Salvation Army can transport and distribute fresh produce. Supervisor Diane Jacobs provided significant support, giving \$32,000 of the \$65,787 total raised.

The back country is an area of 2,500 square miles composed of the rural communities of Descanso, Guatay, Pine Valley, Mt. Laguna, Campo, Jacumba, Boulevard, Potrero, and Tecate.



Last year, The Salvation Army distributed 2,028 emergency food boxes to needy families and 90 Christmas boxes. Vouchers to help with gas, furniture and clothing were given to 125 families. The Army also provided 1,584 new books to children, new coats to 57 children, and Christmas toys to 276 children.

With the new van, The Salvation Army can reach out to more of the neediest and most neglected children, families, and seniors of San Diego County, offering physical, emotional, and spiritual support efficiently and effectively.