

My name is Cindy Engebretsen and I work as a Family Advocate with Pajaro Valley Unified School District in Watsonville. I work with homeless and at-risk families. I began volunteering with the Rice Project Plus in 2007. Every month I receive at least five bags each of rice and beans, canned goods, toilet paper, and used clothing from the project. I take these to my high school and distribute them to needy families. These can be farm workers, single parents, or anyone who needs assistance. I have repeat families that come in every month. This food truly makes a difference to these families.

For Christmas, I was lucky enough to be able to submit names of my neediest families to the project and have them adopted. One family consisted of a mom living in her car and her two children living in two separate homes with friends and relatives. Another family had just lost their father, the primary wage earner, to a long bout with cancer. Yet another family had lost a young daughter to a house fire. An electrical heater caught a mattress on fire in an unheated garage where they lived.

I want to share these pictures of the grateful families with you. I wish you could have been there to see the tearful eyes, grateful smiles, and blessings that were given to me, which in turn are sent to the Rice Plus Project volunteers. The families were awed and overwhelmed by the generosity shown to them.

The Rice Plus Project is such an important organization here on the central coast. The cost of housing is exorbitant. Families sometimes live with up to twenty people in one house out of economic necessity. Families often must decide between paying the rent, utilities, or buying food. I have witnessed adults forgoing meals in order for the children to eat.

Thank you to all the volunteers and those who donate to this worthy organization! You make a difference.

Sincerely,

Cindy Engebretsen