A Gift for Brooklyn

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by Pat Curtin

On a cold December morning just before Christmas I made my way through Brooklyn to attend a very special event. The Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation (SCF), together with Food Bank For New York City and two of its member agencies, The River Fund and Bed-Stuy Campaign Against Hunger, joined forces to deliver 500 meals to residents there affected by Hurricane Sandy. Families from New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) public and rent-subsidized housing in Red Hook and Gravesend--many of whom had been without heat or power due to flooding from the storm--received vouchers for emergency relief packages filled with frozen chicken, stuffing, potatoes, milk and other essentials to make the holiday season a little easier. "I've spent the last month at my cousin's house in New Jersey," one grateful resident told me. "Now that I'm back home, I just want to try to relax." Among those affected by Hurricane Sandy was Gloria Carter, CEO of the Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation. I had a chance to talk to her before the food drive kicked off and she told me that her own house was damaged in the storm. In fact, it was the severity of Sandy--and its widespread impact on her community--that spurred her to get involved. "There are so many people who are still devastated, who don't have water or food," Ms. Carter told me. "I lost my house, but I'm here. I have food and water. The people who don't have those things...someone needs to provide it for them." The Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation's partnership with Food Bank For New York City marks a departure in SCF's usual holiday efforts. "I usually do a toy drive" Ms. Carter said, "but because of the devastation, I decided I'd like to feed people. That's why I did this." However, Ms. Carter and her volunteers couldn't stray too far from their toy drive roots, especially so close to the holiday season. They brought along two large bags of stuffed animals and sports hats--early Christmas presents that were a big hit with the kids. As the event wound down, I asked Ms. Carter how she thought the day went. "[People] were able to get what they needed today, and were really appreciative," she told me. "It ended up really nice." I think the families of Red Hook and Gravesend who were there that day would agree.

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