



OPERATION SANTA IOWA



Christmas is a truly magical time for kids. It's an opportunity for them to create lasting memories with their families. Unfortunately, for foster children, these experiences are not always guaranteed.

Traci Schermerhorn, president and co-founder of the Foster SQUAD was determined to ensure that her foster son could experience Christmas with his biological mother. Recognizing the challenges faced by foster children and parents, Schermerhorn saw the crucial need for a dedicated space where foster, biological and kinship families could unite and celebrate the holiday season together.

In 2022, the inaugural **Operation Santa** Christmas Celebration, hosted by **Foster SQUAD** in collaboration with the **Youth Law Center** and the **Des Moines Public Library**, brought together 55 children for a heartwarming celebration. The event provided a precious opportunity for children in separate foster homes to reconnect and exchange gifts with their biological grandparents.

The first Operation Santa Christmas Celebration exceeded all expectations, prompting us to broaden our outreach to include foster, kinship and adoptive families. **In 2023, we were able to brighten the holidays for 465 children through Operation Santa.** The Foster SQUAD was pivotal in making this happen, extending support to 240 foster, kinship, and adoptive families and providing 55 teens in supervised apartment living with gift cards. **Our collaboration with seven nonprofits ensured that every foster child received Christmas gifts and experienced joyful celebrations.** This success was only possible because of the support and participation from the community. Our efforts were even recognized at the Capitol tree lighting, marking a significant achievement for our cause.

This holiday season, Foster SQUAD and Four Oaks are on a mission to bring joy to over 4,000 children in foster care in Iowa through Operation Santa. Teaming up with more than 20 nonprofits, we are organizing festive Christmas parties across the state. Your support can make a meaningful impact in their lives by providing these children with a sense of normalcy and inclusion during a challenging time.

This is a great opportunity for Iowans to come together to show these children that we care about them and support them. You can help by purchasing gifts directly from a child's wish list or by making a financial donation. **We urge you to consider supporting Operation Santa and help us bring holiday cheer to these deserving kids.**

www.fostersquad.org/santa

"Every child should feel the joy and wonder of the holidays. The amazing team at Foster SQUAD and Four Oaks Family and Children Services partner to make that possible with Operation Santa Iowa. Last year, state employees supported Operation Santa Iowa with gifts and donations for children in our foster care system. It was such a success that we plan to make it a part of our holiday celebration again this year, and I strongly encourage others to consider supporting this worthwhile cause."

-Governor Kim Reynolds

