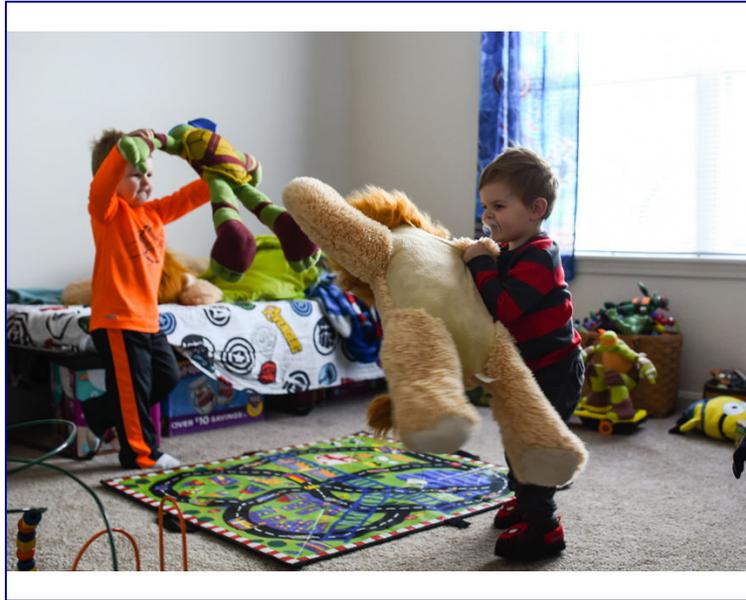


## WISH BOOK: Wish Book family receives a full Christmas



Brothers Kai, 2, and Liam, 3, swing their stuffed Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle and Lion around their room while showing off the new gifts they received through the Wishbook Program for Christmas.

SOUTHERN INDIANA — Around 8 a.m. on Christmas Day, Liam and Kai Auld toddled out of their shared bedroom and walked into a living room filled with presents.

Their grandmother Leanne McNamee filmed them with her cell phone as they grabbed one package then another, overwhelmed by options.

If it wasn't for Wish Book and the help of others, this wouldn't have been the case — at McNamee's place or the houses of the five other families who participated.

Wish Book, a partnership between New Hope Services and the News and Tribune since 2006, gives the community a chance to donate items and money to selected New Hope families for Christmas. Their stories are published in the paper.

“We know that our families truly try so hard to be the best parents they can be and overcome struggles,” said Elizabeth Boyd, the director of family services at New Hope. “Wish Book is an opportunity for us to take those stories and share it with the community. To engage them so that they know these families in a small way, to know what some of their struggles are and to give back.”

This year, community members and businesses donated over \$5,000, as well as \$7,000 in items.

McNamee can hardly name all that she and her grandchildren received from Wish Book. New toys litter her apartment floor and Liam, 3, and Kai, 2, run around pointing out their favorite gifts: a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle bicycle, a stuffed lion, a tower for toy cars.

Then there are the things most people wouldn't think to ask for for Christmas, such as socks and a bed. McNamee had been sleeping on piles of towels and blankets.

The bed actually came with a receipt revealing the giver: a Miss Bacon. It's the only person McNamee can thank by name — even though she still doesn't know who she is.

"I want to say thank you because they made this a Christmas to remember for these boys, which is what we wanted right?" McNamee said.

All the families who participates in Wish Book this year were overwhelmed, Boyd said.

"It's just hard to imagine that there were that many people who don't know them personally, but are willing to make a donation, a contribution to help them out," she said.

McNamee had to take her glasses off and wipe her eyes when she thought about that. "That's why I say people are good," she said. "Inherently, all people are good."

McNamee had to move herself, Liam and Kai hundreds of miles from their support system this year because she feared others would harm her at their previous home.

McNamee has been sponsored by other organizations for Christmas before, but this year, she got to share it with her grandsons in a secure place.

"It was very peaceful, very serene, and it was beautiful just to be able to enjoy it," she said. All thanks to the generosity of others.

McNamee told Liam and Kai that their presents came from Santa this year, but she also threw in another contributor: angels.

"Because that's how I view everybody that has helped us from the beginning of this to present time," she said.

By DANIELLE GRADY Dec 26, 2016

