ATGWP Yokosuka celebrates Christmas at children's home

Story and photo by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

Afloat Training Group Western Pacific (ATGWP) Yokosuka onboard Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka sponsored the Shiroyama Children's Home on base to celebrate Christmas with ATGWP Sailors and family members in Yokosuka Middle School's gym Dec. 3.

"We have been working with the home for 50 years," said Senior Chief Machinist Mate James Bailey, one of the event coordinators. "We've done the Christmas party with them for at least the last 10 years. We bring down here and show them a good time like they were our own kids."

The party marks the end of a year that saw the Sailors traveling to the home to complete community relations projects that improved the home and provided it with a new barbeque cooking area.

"Shiroyama is not close by, it's a couple hours away. When we go there, when we paint a play ground or clean up their home, we are changing these kids lives," said Senior Chief Quarter Master Henry Nicol, event coordinator. "We go there quite often, so the teachers felt that it would be good to come here to see where we live and work. That's how we began setting up the Christmas party."

Lt. j.g. Geordie Kelly, 7th Fleet Band Master, conducts an ensemble made up of members from the 7th Fleet Band and from the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force Band during a Holiday Concert in Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Fleet Theater Dec. 3. The annual event fills the theater with guests from the U.S. and Japanese communities.

Children from Afloat Training Group Western Pacific Yokosuka's families and children from Shiroyama Children's Home pose with Santa on the stage of Yokosuka Middle School's gym Dec. 3. The event was part of the Christmas party that ATGWP has put on for the children's home for at least the last ten years.

Volunteers from ATGWP set up games, a potluck lunch and group activities for the children to do together. They also got to decorate cookies, win prizes and play some games that even the adults joined in playing.

"I think that the children really enjoyed everything," said Yu Ohashi, Shiroyama care taker. "They are happy to get out and play with the other children. I really appreciate that they invited us to spend the day together."

After food and games Nicol brought all the children together and read "The Night Before Christmas" while a translator provided the Japanese version to the children from Shiroyama. After the reading, Santa appeared from behind the curtains on stage to pass out presents to all the children.

"Before the event we get a list of all the kids that are coming from the home and from the command," said Nicol. "We get their names and Santa calls each up to the stage to receive a gift."

With their presents in hand and opened quickly, the kids from both groups played together with their new toys.

"I think that this was a great opportunity for us to show our kids that the greatest gift is giving back," said Chief Ship's Serviceman Maurice Thomas. "We taught them the real meaning of Christmas."

Don't let depression ruin your winter, holiday season festivities

Story and photo by Jeffrey C. Doepp, CFAY Public Affairs

The holiday season is supposed to be a time of joy, cheer, parties and family gatherings. But for many people suffering from winter or holiday blues, it can be a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on failures of the past and anxiety about an uncertain future.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness website www.nami.org, the U.S. National Library of Medicine website www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov and the Mental Health America website www.mentalhealthamerica.net, many factors can cause winter or holiday blues: stress, fatigue, unrealistic expectations, over-commercialization, financial constraints and the inability to be with one's family and friends. The demands of shopping, parties, family reunions and house guests also contribute to feelings of tension.

People may also develop other stress responses such as headaches, excessive drinking, over-eating and difficulty sleeping. Even more people experience post-holiday let down after Jan. 1. This can result from disappointments during the preceding months compounded by the excess fatigue and stress. The following tips can help you cope with stress and depression during the holiday season:

• Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable. Try to set realistic goals for yourself. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make a list and prioritize the important activities.

• Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Don't put the entire focus on just one day such as Thanksgiving Day, Christmas or New Years Day. Try and remember that it's a season of holiday sentiment, and activities can be spread out to lessen stress and increase enjoyment.

• The holiday season does not block or stop reasons for feeling sad or lonely as there is room for these feelings to be present, even if the person chooses not to express them.

• Leave the past in the past and look toward the future. Life brings changes. Every season is different and can be enjoyed in different and unique ways. Don't set yourself up in comparing today with the good old days.

• Do something for someone else. Try volunteering some of your time to help others.

• Enjoy activities that are free, such as taking a drive to look at holiday decorations, going window shopping or playing with children.

• Be aware that excessive drinking will only increase your feelings of depression.

• Try something new by celebrate the holidays in a new way.

• Spend time with supportive and caring people. Reach out and make new friends or contact someone you haven't heard from in a while.

• Save time for yourself and make sure you get plenty of rest. Let others share in the responsibility of planning activities.

Studies show that some people suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), which results from being exposed to fewer hours of sunlight as the days grow shorter during the winter months.

According to statistics by the American Academy of Family Physicians, SAD may be experienced by six of every 100 people. Another 10 to 20 percent may experience some mild form of SAD.

It seems to be more common in women than men and although some children and teenagers get SAD, it usually doesn't start in people younger than 20 years of age. For adults, the risk of SAD decreases as they get older. Symptoms of SAD, which are usually the same as with depression and tend to build up slowly in late autumn and winter months, are:

• Increased appetite with weight gain (weight loss is more common with other forms of depression)

• Increased sleep and daytime sleepiness (too little sleep is more common with other forms of depression)

• Less energy and ability to concentrate in the afternoon

• Loss of interest in work or other activities

• Slow, sluggish, lethargic movement

• Social withdrawal

• Unhappiness and irritability

Phototherapy, a treatment involving a few hours of exposure to intense light, is shown to be effective in relieving depressive symptoms in patients with SAD. Other studies on the benefits of phototherapy found that exposure to early morning sunlight can be effective in relieving seasonal depression.

The holiday season is supposed to be a time full of joy, cheer, parties and family gatherings. But, for many people suffering from winter or holiday blues, it can be a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on failures of the past and anxiety about an uncertain future.

Recent findings, however, suggest that patients respond equally well to phototherapy when it is scheduled in the early afternoon. This has practical applications for antidepressant treatment because it allows the use of phototherapy in the workplace as well as the home.

Call for an appointment with your health care provider if you have symptoms of SAD. People who have had repeated seasonal depression should talk to a mental health care professional about prevention methods. Starting treatment during the fall or early winter, before the symptoms of SAD begin, may be helpful.

For service members and their families, additional help and information is available by visiting the following websites:

• Navy Operational Stress Control online at www.navynavstress.com

• Navy Marine Corps Public Health at www.nmcphc.med.navy.mil/healthy_living

• Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control at www.nccosc.navy.mil

• Navy Knowlege Online at www.nko.navy.mil

• Yokosuka Fleet and Family Support Center at http://www.cnic.navy.mil/Yokosuka/FleetAndFamilyReadiness/SupportServices/index.htm

• Yokosuka Chapel of Hope at http://www.cnic.navy.mil/Yokosuka/InstallationGuide/FacilitiesAndResources/ReligiousPrograms/index.htm or www.chaplaincare.navy.mil

• TRICARE at www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth

•Military One Source at www.militaryonesource.com