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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 23, 2009
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DOC Staff assist with recreational equipment drive

Pierre, S.D. - The old adage that it's better to give than receive is especially true this time of year, especially for Department of Corrections staff involved in an effort to help battle obesity and inactivity on South Dakota Indian reservations.

While attending an Indian Education conference in Rapid City last year, Lori Drotzmann, an instructor at the Yankton Minimum Unit, and Jim Halsey, Cultural Activities Coordinator at the Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield, learned of a drive to supply reservations with much needed recreational activities and equipment. As they discussed the idea on the way home from the conference, they decided to take on the project and see what they could do to help.

At first, they emailed family and friends about the idea. That led to their emails being forwarded on to others. Drotzmann also got the newspaper and radio stations in Yankton to run a public service announcement (PSA) about the project.

Dr. Wil Hurley of Sioux Falls works in Yankton part-time and heard the PSA. Dr. Hurley mentioned it to his son, a student at Sioux Falls O'Gorman High School. The son in turn began a school project to help out with the effort, with items being collected during the school's Homecoming week. The drive resulted in an entire trailer full of games, balls, uniforms, weights and other equipment.

In September, Drotzmann and Tom Heilman drove to Sioux Falls to pick up the items.

Yankton area businesses and churches also got involved in the effort. Bicycles from the Pedal Power at the Pen program were donated by Mike Durfee State Prison. Once the donations were collected, the focus turned to distributing the items to those in need.

Child Fund International, a world-wide charity, works with Native American children on the nearby reservations. That organization helped connect Drotzmann and Halsey to people on the reservations that could get the equipment to where it was needed.

On November 17th, with a trailer full of sporting goods equipment, uniforms and games, Drotzmann and Halsey got to see the results of their work first-hand.

Their first stop was the SAFE House on the Rosebud Indian Reservation. There were smiles all around as the trailer was unloaded.

“This trip was a very rewarding project for Jim and I to take part in,” said Drotzmann. “With traveling to Rosebud, seeing the SAFE house and meeting all the staff, we both felt it was a truly meaningful and successful experience! We know that small things like new games or even baseball bats can make a huge difference.”

Child Fund International will sort through the donations and distribute some of the items and equipment to the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River Indian Reservations as well.