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'Children with stresses' dip into holiday well of cheer

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LAKE VILLA -- On the walls of Richardson House, black-and-white photos serve as testaments to the generations of disadvantaged children who were helped by Central Baptist Family Services.

On Sunday, the house -- built on the shore of Deep Lake by the Lehmann family just south of the mansion that still bears their name -- was alive with the colors of the holiday season, as volunteers with Kids Hope United continued the mission of giving a helping hand to children.

"They have not (been) abused or neglected," said Kids Hope senior vice president Bruce Rasey, describing the guests at a holiday party as "children who have stresses in their lives" and have received services through the Parenting Group support network.

Some 60 children and their parents were treated to food and presents handed out by Santa Claus, sitting before a marble-framed fireplace in the Richardson House's main dining room. Joyce Heneberry, Kids Hope director of development, said the guests have all participated in the self-referred Parenting Group at some point in the recent past.

"It's a support system where they meet once a week with a facilitator to talk about issues that might be affecting them -- discipline, parenting strategies, using resources that are available in the area," Heneberry said. "It's support they might not have otherwise, using prevention strategies so they don't have trouble later."

Rasey said more than 1,000 Lake County residents are served each year through the free program, which among other things offers free child care for parents during sessions so "they can talk with their peers about issues that are affecting them."