

Caregiver's Corner Column (December 2015)

The Season of Giving and Learning

By Linda Hayes, Director

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December is a time for giving, and for celebration of family, friends and loved ones. There is such joy in giving. When I think of giving, I am reminded of the hundreds of volunteers who have been hard at work knitting, crocheting and loom-crafting thousands of hats, mittens, scarves, and gloves needed every year for the Santa Claus girls to give to children of our community in need of warm winter wear. I recently spoke to one such volunteer who said, "Knitting and crocheting is hard work for my old, arthritic hands; but, I get such a good feeling knowing that some boy or girl will be warm on these cold days because of the work I'm doing. And then these old fingers don't seem to ache quite as much. I get tired sometimes of doing the same old thing, but what keeps me going is thinking about that child on Christmas morning when they run to the Christmas tree, eagerly searching for a package with their name on it. I envision them tearing off the paper, filled with curiosity."

I commented back to her, "I hope kids appreciate all the hard work that went into a pair of homemade mittens or a hat. They sure keep you warmer than some of the store-bought ones. And they are made with love, which has to make a difference."

She smiled, and said, "Whether they are excited to receive them or disappointed because they would have rather gotten some electronic gadget is of no matter to me because I know either way, they will have something that is good for keeping them warm. That's my intent and the purpose".

I was struck by her positive outlook regardless of how her gift was received. For me, two meaningful golden nuggets of truth popped out of that short exchange that perhaps can be applied to caregiving as well as many other areas of life:

1. Keep your focus on the reward and the purpose, not on the negative aspects.
2. Remember your value is in who you are –the giver of a gift-- not in how others receive or perceive who you are or what you have done or given.

At times, being a caregiver is not easy. Sometimes those who are caregivers can feel the hard work and the toll of providing care for others, and can become weary of doing the same things over and over. Those receiving care can either be grateful and appreciative, allowing themselves to be touched by the efforts of their caregivers; or, they can be difficult and indifferent, lacking acceptance for the gift given.

The flip side of the coin is that, for some, being cared for is sometimes the hardest thing to accept and express appreciation for.

Perhaps it is good as caregivers to be reminded that the care you give is indeed a gift, regardless of how it may be received. The value, goodness, and rightness of that gift is not diminished when not understood or accepted in the same vein in which it was given.

May a little gift of wisdom extracted from a simple conversation with a sage volunteer, and the peace and the joy of the season of giving be yours this December and beyond.

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title IIIE, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.