

HEARTBEAT

Volunteers are the Heart of Hospice

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Hospice & Palliative Care

KNOTS OF LOVE

Anne Schneider, Volunteer Coordinator
West Chester, Ohio

The Knots of Love program began as an idea of Suzanne Lewis, the Executive Director of Evercare Hospice & Palliative Care in Cincinnati, Ohio. She wanted volunteers to make fleece blankets for patients in order to keep them warm. Armed with directions, fleece and a dream, the first Knots of Love program was off and running. On their lunch break, UnitedHealth Group employees and volunteers cut and tied blankets for patients. This initial lunchroom group made sixty-five blankets! We were so successful that we set a second date for UnitedHealth Group employees and volunteers to meet and we have been cutting, tying and ironing on labels every few months since.

Each member of our hospice team delivers blankets to patients. We try to bring multiple blankets and the patients can choose their fleece color and pattern. Attached to each blanket is a label that includes our name, Evercare Hospice & Palliative Care, our 888 number and the words, "Made Especially for: _____." The patient's name is written on the label once the blanket is chosen. It is our hope that these labels will keep the blankets from being lost in the laundry at patients' facilities.

One particular blanket did not get to a patient before he passed. This blanket was passed on to our Bereavement Chaplain, Patrick Owens, who delivered it to the parents of the deceased. They were elated and touched by the gesture and I am sure it has become a treasured memento of their son.

The program has been so successful that this year we have expanded our Knots of Love program to our marketing team. Blankets are cut to size with a label and then taken to a facility as an activity for patients. Patients then choose their favorite fleece. We have plenty of staff



and volunteers to help assist cutting and tying. The patients truly don't believe they get to keep their blanket until their names are written on the labels. We talk, cut, laugh, knot, dance sometimes and learn about the patients. One participant told the story of jumping the broom with her husband who had long since passed. Another patient said that she needed another blanket to match other outfits for when she went out. A male patient chose a pink floral piece of fleece and when he completed the blanket, he said he wanted to give it to his daughter who had recently been diagnosed with brain cancer. A group of veterans inspired by friendly competition worked diligently to see who could get their blanket finished first.

At the end of every program the patients are left with warm heartfelt gifts they made themselves.

Whether a gift or a project, all blankets are —
Knots of Love.

For more information or to learn more about Evercare™ Hospice and Palliative Care, please visit us online at:

EvercareHospice.com

Nurturing Hope for the Holidays

Jeannine Pope-Carter,
Bereavement Coordinator, Birmingham, AL

For the bereaved, memories of past holidays and the prospect of facing new holidays without a loved one can be daunting. I want to offer you encouragement to plan for new traditions and experiences that will be meaningful to you and plant a seed of hope for the future.

If you are going through your first year of bereavement, then I do not expect you to have a blooming sense of hope right now. Even if your loved one was ill for a long time and they are now relieved of their suffering, the initial year after loss is a year of redefinition of who you are and readjustment of your life without them. To encourage hope requires cultivation of your spirit using the steps any good gardener would.

Preparing the Soil — Fall is a perfect opportunity to reflect on what matters most for the holidays. Find the organization in your town that hosts the “Preparing for the Holidays” workshop. I would encourage you to introduce yourself to the organizers of this event before the day of the event, which will be quite busy for them. They want to meet you and help you! Schedule a time to meet them when they can hear your story. Also, if you find that you think better after doing something important like: prayer, thinking of your beloved, walking, journaling, tinkering, taking a long bath, or having a good cry — then do that. Give yourself some time to list what

you want to keep about past holidays and what new things you may try. Write them down; keep them nearby so you can talk about them when the calendars come out for holiday plans.

Planting Well — No one buys dried out plants to put in their garden. They have to be cared for before they are planted. The same goes for you. Choose those activities that speak to you and give you meaning. These will be the events that fill you up and help you to feel connected. The same goes for people. Match your friends to your events. There is nothing worse than spending time with someone who is unable to hear you talk about deeper things. Match light-hearted people to events such as holiday shopping and match deeper people to events such as seeing Handel’s Messiah or church services.

Tending to New Growth — Once you start the holiday season, you will get a sense of what is blooming within you. However, you may receive pressure to do a family tradition, “because we’ve always done it this way.” If it isn’t working for you, then honor your feelings. Explain that this year you are going “where the spirit leads you.” Taking time to sort this out is healing. You will discern those “old chestnuts” that you cannot imagine the holidays without. You will also learn what is uniquely yours now. In doing so you give yourself and your family a great gift — memories of the past with hope for the future.

Sharing our Greatest Resources...Volunteers

Karen M. Zelle, Volunteer Coordinator,
St. Louis, MO

Sharing your favorite pail and shovel in the sandbox...
sharing half of your sandwich...

Sharing is a skill that we learn at a tender age and one that wears many faces. It is an important part of our maturation and emotional growth as human beings.

As Volunteer Coordinators in the field of hospice, we embrace the idea of sharing. While we have always freely shared creative ideas for organization,

compliance, volunteer recruitment and retention, we have begun to share our most valuable resource... our volunteers. The sharing of volunteers can occur in various ways, as is evidenced by the following examples.

John began the important work of hospice volunteering years ago in Delaware. When he moved to St. Louis, he continued with another local hospice. The hospice found that they rarely brought patients



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on service in the area where John resides. John's Volunteer Coordinator felt that John was far too great of an asset to let languish. After getting John's permission, she contacted me with the idea of sharing John's valuable talents. Several weeks later, John joined the St. Louis Evercare Hospice team and began seeing a patient who lives down the street from his condominium!

When asked to share his thoughts about volunteering in the field of hospice, John said, "It is a way to spend your time effectively. Being the person that a patient can open up to and talk with who is not immediate family gives you the feeling of actually doing something important."

Andrew is the son of Anne Chida, Chaplain for Evercare Hospice in St. Louis, Missouri. Along with his studies at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, Andrew volunteers for a hospice organization. When he returned home for summer vacation he made the decision to volunteer for Evercare Hospice and Palliative Care. Andrew had a great reputation with the hospice in Omaha and he quickly became a favorite in St. Louis as well. He was placed with a patient and they spent the summer organizing her large home, talking about politics, religion and becoming close friends. Andrew plans to continue his dual hospice volunteering roles in Omaha and St. Louis. "Hospice volunteering," Andrew states, "is one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. It's not for everybody, but if you can handle it, it is a truly wonderful experience."



Karen was an active Evercare Hospice volunteer in Arizona when she and her husband bought a home in Colorado in which to spend their summers. Hospice volunteering was an extremely important part of Karen's life and she wanted to continue in her new state. The Evercare Hospice Volunteer Coordinator in Phoenix contacted Lynette Reiling (Volunteer Coordinator in Denver, Colorado) and the connection was made. Now, Karen is able to share her time and talents all year long!

Karen has this to say about being an active hospice volunteer. "Being a hospice volunteer is a gift I give myself. I love spending time with all the people that I visit, listening to what they have to say and seeing them smile with appreciation."

Florence (pictured above with Karen) was a patient with whom Karen visited that became a best friend over one and one half years. This photograph of the two best friends was among cherished family photographs at Florence's funeral in 2007. "I loved Florence and she has a special place in my heart forever," says Karen.

Hospice volunteers are committed and caring individuals who share their time and talents with patients and families when they need it most. Volunteers who share this commitment with other hospice organizations are able to reach across miles to touch lives.

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Fringe Benefits

Hugh Henderson
Regional Executive Director

As a part of my position with our company, I interview a lot of candidates interested in positions with Evercare Hospice & Palliative Care. One of the topics that invariably come up is “benefits.” People want to know what “extras” in addition to salary they will get at Evercare Hospice. After explaining 401K options, health and dental insurance, paid holidays, and the employee stock purchase plan, I finally get around to what I consider to be the greatest fringe benefits of all — the people you get to work alongside and the inner satisfaction of being able to go home at night not wondering if you made a difference, but *knowing* you made a difference!

As I reflect on my 18+ years in hospice care, I'm convinced that it's the people that keep me in the field. Both of my parents were teachers and, until I got into hospice work, I was convinced that the best people in the world worked or volunteered in the field of education. With no offense to higher learning (no one would argue there is a shortage of quality individuals in the field of education!), I'm afraid the hospice field may have a slight edge on education as far as where the best caliber people are found.

The volunteers and employed staff in hospice never cease to amaze me. What a benefit to be surrounded by people who not only want to “make a difference,” but do so every day. The tireless and selfless acts of our employees and volunteers keep me going. It's the nursing assistant who took it upon himself to mop a patient's kitchen floor before leaving his visit, or the hospice care team that pitched in and bought a window-unit air conditioner for an elderly patient living in 100 degree plus temperatures. It's the team of three volunteers who sat in constant vigil with a patient for *over 4 days* until he eventually died. The stories are too many to print, but, suffice it to say, people like this renew my faith in humanity and things larger than me.

National Hospice Month provides me with the opportunity to personally say “thank you” to all those who give me a “fringe benefit” every day — one that won't show up on my paycheck or in the form of a quarterly statement, but one that will show up in the attitude and motivation I put on each new morning.

Engaging Faith Communities in Volunteer Services

Jen Jackson, Manager of Volunteer Services

We are all surrounded by faith communities; some smaller and some larger; within small cities, suburbs, large cities and rural communities. Engaging faith communities in hospice volunteer partnership can serve and provide mutually beneficial outcomes if done with deliberation and strategy. We ask: “how can we help each other bring our similar needs into focus and achieve our goals together”? Allow me to discuss.

Why partner with faith communities? Partnering with our faith communities align us with other groups of people who tend to be like-minded. We meet fellow community members who too are caregivers, are already providing outreach to their congregation and are often looking to find meaning

and purpose in what they do, as well as have a desire to really make a difference; a mark, so to speak. It can also be a powerful tool in maximizing service in our communities who have hospice patients, as many faith communities aren't aware of all the benefits hospice care can provide patients and families. With that, we also need to know that many organizations continue to plea for help with their faith communities to achieve the presented needs of their own respective mission. We need to be able to speak to the right person and help them realize that partnering with us will be worth some energy, yet enticing and economical. More or less, a win-win for all involved.

As our population ages it is essential to build partnerships with faith communities and with those increased needs, we can anticipate more volunteers who will want to be engaged. Faith communities can often times provide us with a space (at reduced or no cost fees) for volunteer training for their caregivers; whether it's general volunteer training or whether it's

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specific to hospice volunteer training. It also helps us to brand our name in the community while that faith community observes our philosophy in action.

What tools and benefits can Evercare Hospice & Palliative Care provide faith communities? To name just a few, often times faith communities have the volunteers in place to support the needs, but generally those recruiting volunteers aren't as equipped in the areas of volunteer/volunteer coordinator training and retention. We can work alongside these faith communities to provide education on teamwork and retention, as they may be working with those in the congregation recently discharged from the hospital, those declining in health — perhaps ready for hospice or working through their bereavement. We can also discuss how a hospice Interdisciplinary Group and volunteer “touch point” support approach can help their faith community ensure that the scope, needs

and gaps are identified and action planning can occur based on the member's desired needs.

If you are connected to a faith community who would welcome someone from the Evercare Hospice & Palliative Care team to come and share how we might be able to partner, please let your Volunteer Coordinator know. Bringing community needs into focus while partnering with our local faith communities will help us strategically engage our efforts toward living out and demonstrating more fully our hospice mission.

Captain Irene Meddeb: The Heart of Our Evercare Hospice Veterans Program “Honoring Our Veterans”

Dee Zeitounian, Volunteer Coordinator,
Atlanta, GA

Captain Irene Meddeb, US Army Reserve, is an Evercare Hospice volunteer and the heart of the Atlanta Evercare Hospice “Honoring our Veterans” Program. Irene inaugurated our Veterans Program on Memorial Day 2009.

Irene is an Evercare Hospice direct patient services volunteer, an administrative volunteer and she recently joined the vigil team. Our Evercare Hospice Veterans Program was started when we realized the deep significance of our being there so our patients could share their military experiences, especially with a member of the military.

Irene was born in the Philippines and received her BS in International Trade from Georgia Southern University. Irene served on active duty for four years and was then stationed in Iraq for one year where she was in transportation. She was stationed in Ft. Campbell, KY, from 2004 to 2008 and served in an aviation support battalion as a Transportation Platoon Leader. She was then assigned to the intelligence staff for one year starting in 2008.



In Irene's words, “Visiting with veterans is an honor and it makes me feel humble to be part of the Evercare Hospice Veterans Program. I particularly enjoy meeting the amazing veterans and their family members and learning about their background in the military. I like to hear from both the veteran's perspective as well as from the perspective of the family members”.

The program consists of visits to veterans to thank them for their service to our country. Irene listens to their stories, gives them an Evercare Hospice Certificate of Appreciation and a small American flag. We give the family a framed photo of patient with Irene. Furthermore, we make a DVD, a CD or a scrapbook for the family.

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Finally, we give them a journal prepared with questions and titled, "My Military History". Many veterans are tearful to see a uniformed military officer visit with them.

Irene says, "It would be wonderful if more people could support this program. We really need more people in order to make this program successful. Unfortunately, a lot of the veterans are not being recognized and this is our opportunity to recognize them. We have a lot of veterans in hospice and many don't have families to visit them and listen to their incredible stories".

I Want a Song



Reva Dolobowsky,
Volunteer, Boston, MA

"I want a song."

I was startled when the 100-year-old woman I visit as a hospice volunteer suddenly said this. When I first began visiting her a year ago, she

told me stories of teaching herself to play the piano at age four, and how she graduated from high school early and almost went to music school. So I know that music has been a big part of her life.

During those first few months, she could still converse pretty well. Lately though, her words have escaped her more and more. The spark is sometimes still in her eyes and her smile, and I can still see the spirit of the woman who, some months ago, referred to a young man who works at her nursing home as, "What a hunk!" But her words are disappearing.

So I try to connect with her through music. She seems to enjoy my singing, but I never really knew for sure, until she suddenly announced one day, "I want a song!"

There's a beautiful waltz we've learned in our JourneySongs choir, a group that sings to people in hospice: www.jouneysongs.org.

*"I've been waiting all the day long,
to see the stars in your eyes,
My love, come dance with me now,
see how the evening flies.
And as you sleep, my dear,
know that I'll be near,
To hold you when you arise.*

Her eyes light up, and she smiles and laughs when I sing this. I'm sure she played many waltzes on her beloved piano, and I hope this brings back happy memories.

I sing her a sweet lullaby I learned at summer camp:

*Baby's bed's a silver moon,
Sailing o'er the sky,
Sailing o'er a sea of sleep,
While the stars float by.*

*Sail baby sail
Far across the sea.
Only don't forget to come
Back again to me.*

*Baby's fishing for a dream
Fishing near and far.
Her line is a silver moonbeam is
Her bait a silver star.*

*Sail baby sail
Far across the sea.
Only don't forget to come
Back again to me.*

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Once, she cries after I sing this. Is she thinking of the lullabies she sang to her son, now 67, but still her baby?

Another time, as the song ends, she says over and over "I wish, I wish, I wish, I wish." What is she wishing? I hug her and her face gets wet with my tears. I tell her that I wish too. Later, when I mentioned this to her son, he says she doesn't want to be here any longer. That's what I think she may be wishing. But I don't know.

When my father was dying, his words stolen by brain cancer, my sisters and I sang Christmas carols to him, the songs of our childhood. It seemed a miracle when he began tapping the rhythm of Jingle Bells

with his finger, in time with our singing. We knew then, that he was still there.

My sister tells me that if I'm with her when she's dying, she wants to hear her favorite Moody Blues songs. I haven't decided yet what **my** songs will be. But what I do know is that like my 100 year old friend, I **too** will want a song.