

A Christmas Story

In late summer, I was contacted by one of my Mom's caretakers who also serves as the Director of the Senior Center in our town. Sharon told me that a middle-aged man had started coming to the Senior Center for lunch on a daily basis. It seems that this fellow John was living in the heavily wooded area behind Dean Park. She was concerned about him and wondered what to do. We talked and I suggested that she approach John and ask him if he'd like to talk with somebody about housing. A couple of days later, Sharon let me know that John, whom she described as quite shy, said he was OK.

On Thursday night, December 10th, Sharon called me at home. She was really worried about John. He was still hanging around the Senior Center every day, trying to be helpful, especially at mealtime, but some of the seniors were growing tired of his presence. He looked frail and disheveled and his body odor was becoming an issue. One day when the Chief of Police visited at lunchtime, a couple of the seniors asked if the Police could arrest John for being homeless. "Jim, I'm really worried. He doesn't look good, but he finally asked me yesterday if I still knew the man he could talk to about housing. So I told John that I would make the call."

The next day, I contacted Matt Castleman at our Open Pantry Community Services program in Springfield. I got back the following response.

*Hi Jim,
I have set up a meeting with the gentleman this monday. Ill keep you posted.
Have a great weekend.
Talk to you soon,
Matt*

Tuesday the 15th I heard from both Sharon and Matt. Neither had been able to find John. He wasn't at the Senior Center, so Matt went looking for his camp, which he found, but John wasn't there. Sharon said to me, "Matt told me he'd be back. He found John's camp. I'm sure I can help him connect. I'll make sure that John's here when Matt comes back."

Yesterday afternoon, I was home sick, feeling quite sorry for myself, when I received the following update.

*Hi Jim,
I just want to give you an update on the individual you identified that was living in the woods in Warren. He moved into the Kings Inn today. We provided him with one of our Y-Bed subsidies. All of his belongs were soaking wet from having been out in the rain the last few days. We got him some laundry tokens and helped him get cleaned up. He was so thankful to finally have a safe and secure place to stay and roof over his head for Christmas.
We had our division holiday party last night. I spoke to the team and reminded them that this time of year many in this country and around the world try and do what we have the privilege of doing each and every day, and that is care and show compassion for those in need.
Thank you to you and SMOC for proving the opportunity to embody the spirit of this season throughout the year.
Merry Christmas,
Matt*

Christmas is obviously a Christian holiday, but its underlying themes – compassion, tolerance, hospitality, respect and alms for the poor, are universal. They are shared by all of the world's religions and belief systems. They are certainly shared by our staff. SMOC is blessed to be comprised of staff whose work is the reflection of the tenets of Buddhism, Christianity, Ethical Secularism, Hinduism, Humanism, Islam and Judaism. On this day before the holiday, I'd like to thank our staff, who come together from all various places and life experiences to work as a team, to effect positive change in the lives of others. I'd also like to give a special shout-out to Matt and his team for bringing someone in from the cold.

Best,

Jim