

Compassion Story of the Month

With Brattleboro voting overwhelmingly to become part of the international Charter for Compassion, the Reformer and The Commons have agreed to publish a “compassion story of the month.” This is the eleventh. Information on submissions from Brattleboro area residents is offered below.

Compassionate Cooks

Jane Southworth

My response to the call to write about compassion is a bit mixed. It makes me imagine a group of “Compassion Searchers,” rather like the plane spotters of World War II England. The acts of compassion, like the planes don’t come regularly. But when they come, we notice. The planes we defend against. The compassionate acts we welcome. Would that they arrived more often. It makes me think of those “days” we have scattered about the calendar for Mothers and Fathers, Grandparents and Secretaries. Why one day a year? Why can we not just praise and thank these wonderful people every day?

And why is it that we need to search for compassionate acts? The point, of course, is that our world on the whole, as it is now, is far from compassionate, and woefully needs to become more so.

Yet - even so - often below the surface, and sometimes even organized and on an ongoing basis, some things are happening. Compassionate people *do* exist everywhere, and *are* performing compassionate acts. We just don’t see enough of them.

Take, for a good example, the “Loaves and Fishes” meal program, sponsored and housed by the Centre Congregational Church. Loaves and Fishes serves lunch from 11:30-12:30 every Tuesday and Friday in the Church basement. Together with similarly compassionate groups in town, persons in need can now get a free meal every day of the week.

Of course these things don’t just happen. As it take a “village” to raise children, it takes a legion of volunteers to provide these meals for hungry people.

At about 7 a.m. on Fridays (the day I know best), the kitchen in Centre Church’s basement is warm with heat from stoves and hard work. Phil, Josie and Ruth (our organizer and captain) are cooking. William is doing dishes. Diane is setting the eight tables.

Food has come from the Food Bank and been donated by super-markets, the Co-op, and other generous food suppliers. Vince, Toni, Barbara, and Nancy chop veggies, make salads, peel potatoes and squash. Lloyd chops carrots or onions or grates cheese. Later he will wash floors. Bob and Hollis oversee organizing the donations, and place items in 3 refrigerators, 4 freezers, the newly refurbished “coolbot” for produce, and 4 pantry storage rooms. Meanwhile, Jane and Claudia prepare week-end groceries for the families who use or work at the Centre Church Day-Care program and prepare food for the day-care children. And, of course, not to be forgotten, Centre Church supports the volunteers with facilities and, this year, new appliances.

At 11:30 a bell rings, and 80 or 90 people line up to choose among the meat and vegetarian entrees, salads and desserts. Some of those attending are regulars, some are occasional drop-ins, some are transients passing through. Most take “to-go” containers to help tide them over through the weekend.

If you count the meals provided to those who dine-in, and/or take out, the day care family groceries, and the day care meals, we may well provide 350 meals on a typical Friday. Not bad.

So here’s some “new math” we might consider. Perhaps we can say that
Community = communion + compassion.

Submissions, from Brattleboro area residents, for future publication, not to exceed 650 words, should be emailed to: compassionstory@gmail.com or mailed to: Compassion Story of the Month, c/o Robert Oeser, PO Box 6001, Brattleboro, VT 05302. Please include your name, address, phone number and email address. Earlier submitted stories will automatically be considered in subsequent months.