



I am writing in reference to the wonderful program, Knit for Life™, as created by Tanya Parieaux. Tanya and two or three Knit for Life™ volunteers come to Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center once each week on Monday, from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. They come to the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA) unit at Children's Hospital bringing with them bins of yarn, needles, other knitting supplies, and their gracious spirits of kindness and compassion.

Once on the SCCA unit, Knit for Life™ is set up in a lounge/play area out of the way of the medical staff but clearly visible to patients and their family members. As the bins of yarn are opened, some folks will wander by and ask about the program. Often, Tanya will so engagingly speak with them about Knit for Life™ that the people are drawn in immediately and sit down to knit - or to learn to knit - on the spot!

I became happily acquainted with Knit for Life™ during the fall of 2004. I am a full-time chaplain at Children's Hospital and one of my assigned units is the SCCA unit. Each day, I "round" on the unit by visiting with as many patients and/or family members as possible in order to see how they are coping both spiritually and emotionally. Sometimes, people are hesitant to speak with me because they think that chaplains have a particular agenda. Other times, people are simply too tired to talk to one more person or they are not sure if they can trust me with some of their deepest feelings and emotions. It is not my intention to force myself on people so I simply come back at another time. Sometimes, however, I have wished for a more relaxed and casual way to meet the patients and their family members.

Last fall as I heard and learned about Knit for Life™, I began to stop by the group on Mondays and chat with some of the patients and family members there. Eventually, Tanya told me (with her wonderful sense of humor) that if I was going to stop by so often, than I needed to knit. One of the volunteers slid needles into my hands and before I knew it, I was knitting!

So on Mondays, after I see many of the patients on the SCCA unit, I am very fortunate and delighted to be able to sit with the Knit for Life™ group as they visit and work with those who have come to knit and relax. By participating with the Knit for Life™ group, I often have found a connection with a mother of a patient who had been hesitant previously to share with me. There is something about talking with people while working with one's hands that alleviates the "pressure" that a one-to-one conversation can have. Not only am I able to meet some family members I haven't been able to meet before, but they are able to get to know me a bit in a casual way as we talk and laugh with everyone in the group.

I think Knit for Life™ not only provides support for patients and family members but nurtures and sustains them as well. Part of this support and nurturing comes from the act of knitting and creating something with one's hands. However, another very large part comes from the compassion and kindness demonstrated by Tanya and the Knit for Life™ volunteers. As they welcome people to the group and invite them to choose some yarn and a pair of needles, the respect and deep concern for the patient or the mother or the sibling is clearly evident in all who participate in the program. Knit for Life™ is truly a gentle, healing ministry, and the space that Tanya and the volunteers create is safe, loving, and quite sacred.

A good example of the kind and generous caring exhibited by the Knit for Life™ group occurred just a few weeks ago. Many families become connected on the SCCA unit, as their experiences of having a child diagnosed with cancer can be very similar. One Monday morning a long-time patient died in her room on the unit. The entire unit was grieving and subdued throughout the day. The mother of another patient who had been particularly close to the patient who had died was very upset, grieving and tearful. This mother is an avid knitter and had attended the Knit for Life™ group on many previous Mondays so as she walked by the group this Monday afternoon, Tanya and the others gathered her into "the fold." We gave her a chair as we continued knitting and listened as she tearfully spoke of the sweet child who had died. Quietly, one of the volunteers slipped a pair of knitting needles into this mother's hands. Tanya chose some yarn out of the yarn bin and laid it gently on her lap. Still talking and crying, the mother picked up the needles and cast on several stitches. As she began to knit, her tears slowly stopped and she began to smile and talk of the funny things the patient who had died had said and done with this mother's own daughter. Every once in a while, her tears would return and we would simply continue knitting as she knitted through her grief. It was one of the most loving and gracious examples of ministry I have ever witnessed.

Knit for Life™ is, without a doubt, one of the most beneficial activities offered at Children's Hospital to those on the SCCA unit. Many of the SCCA patients are there for weeks or months at a time and often are not allowed to leave the unit due to their immuno-suppressed condition. Knit for Life™ gives them

and their family members a time to relax, unwind, share, and create. On a personal note, knitting has become a fabulous stress-reliever for me. I count it now as part of my "self-care" routine and I have encouraged other staff members to give it a try.

Tanya and the volunteers with the Knit for Life™ program are deeply gifted as creative knitters and compassionate listeners. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. It has been a pleasure working with Tanya - and it is my heartfelt joy to recommend Knit for Life™ for funding and to other area hospitals!

Many blessings,

Rev. Karen B. Taliesin
Chaplain, Pastoral and Spiritual Care