

Making your Christmas

Here it is again. The Christmas season is supposed to be filled with feelings of joy, peace and profound love. For many of us though...this season is a reminder of those we have lost and a time of loneliness and isolation. For people struggling with feelings of depression and anxiety, Christmas can be a time of agitation and strain.

How did such a happy and pleasant time become, for so many, uncomfortable and demanding? People can find it very hard to live up to the expectations of this time of year. When that happens, it can make them feel even worse about themselves, contributing to more isolation, a sense of low self worth and overwhelming sadness. At the Open Mind Group, we believe that more people than we can even imagine experience such feelings, which has a significant impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

At a recent meeting, we discussed how sometimes, through involvement in our community and helping to support others, people find connections and opportunities that help themselves feel better, particularly during the Christmas season. It is kind of the hopeful experience during the holiday season, that giving is a two way street, and through giving of yourself you often end up helping yourself at the same time. I am an Occupational Therapist and our motto has been, "through mind and hands to health". I think that this is particularly true at this time of year. If you can think of some creative ways to help out or participate within your comfort level, you may be surprised at the positive rewards that come your way.

Some creative suggestions include:

- Making craft project (knit, crochet, wood work or sculpt) items to contribute to craft sales raising money for a good cause. You might also contribute these to a local seniors centre for sale or to a community project for gifts.
- Volunteer at a food bank or with an organization that supplies gifts for children in need.
- Take some food to a neighbour or share some purchased or homemade cookies/treats with someone you haven't connected with in a while.
- Go Christmas Caroling with some friends.
- If you have the resources, you could "adopt a family" where you buy gifts and Christmas food for a family in need in the community. You can contact www.childrenfoundation.org to learn more about helping out. You might even inquire for next year since this season is already well underway.
- If animals are more your thing, you can help out at the humane society as a volunteer or offer to walk someone's dog, giving and getting lots of love.
- You can even volunteer at schools as they often have Christmas events and special seasonal projects for the children.
- Retirement and Long Term Care residences have many people who would love a visit.

That is just a few, and I am sure you could come up with more ways to participate in seasonal events in your community. Who knows, the connections you make and the feelings you create might just last into the new year as well.

To find out about the many volunteer and giving opportunities in our area, contact the volunteer centre of Guelph Wellington at www.volunteerguelphwellington.on.ca or phone 519-822-0912 or Toll free at 1-866-693-3318. There is a special holiday volunteering and giving feature on the site.

We all have inherent worth. Helping others and participating in our community can allow us to see what we have to offer and that can help us to feel better.

This article was written by Paula Frappier, Occupational Therapist with Homewood Health Centre and Trellis Mental Health and Developmental Services.

The Open Mind Group wishes you good mental health during this holiday season and in the year to come. Best Wishes from Paula Frappier, Elizabeth Pease, Janet Fowler and Sandra Parkinson.

For access to all Open Mind columns & local mental health resources/ info. visit www.cmhagrb.on.ca