



Delaware neighbors: Quilts are warming hearts

Volunteers give stitch of comfort to the disadvantaged

BY ROBIN BROWN • THE NEWS JOURNAL • JANUARY 16, 2010

Jackie Johnson pulled a quilt up to her face, snuggled into its patchwork and smiled serenely.

"It's like whoever made these quilts is wrapping around me and keeping me safe and warm," Johnson said, adding she feels the love put into every stitch.

Johnson, 51, was homeless for three years before moving recently into Georgetown transitional housing run by nonprofit **Connections Community Support Programs Inc.** She was among scores of Connections clients statewide given quilts made by volunteers at Quilter's Hive on Kirkwood Highway at Harmony Road.

"It's on my bed every night, every morning," said Johnson, who plans to give her quilt a place of honor when she attains her goal of a place of her own.

"I won't forget where I came from," she said. "I thank God for this quilt and Connections."

Johnson hugged and thanked the volunteer quilters at an appreciation lunch Connections hosted this week in Wilmington.

Quilters Hive owner Joan Hobbs said her shop's volunteers regularly support a variety of charities and usually adopt different nonprofit programs in Delaware to give their quilts each year.

She hadn't heard of Connections until a longtime employee, Bonnie Johnson -- no relation to client Jackie Johnson -- took a beginning quilting class. Hobbs said the group decided to adopt Connections after learning from her of "the important work it does with the homeless."

Johnson, whose work includes helping clients get federal benefits, made more than quilts. She created a poster for Quilters Hive with photos of clients with quilts.

"It started with one stitch, one square, two hands. It ended with many squares and many hands," her poster read. "It started with warm smiles and ended with warm bodies, so thank you one and all."

Quilters Beverly Lamenzo, Jeanie Rash and Susan Hintzen said they were happy to help warm the clients' lives and let them know someone cares.

"There but for the grace of God, I could be in the same position," Hintzen said.

After meeting clients and enjoying lunch, Hobbs said the volunteer effort will keep supporting Connections, rather than picking another group, "because there is such need."

Connections Chief Executive Officer Cathy McKay called that great news. "Their quilts are beautiful, and the clients really appreciate them," she said.

Connections has 40 programs statewide to provide housing, food and other services to the homeless and disadvantaged, including those with mental health and substance abuse issues, McKay said. The programs help many people turned away at programs with zero tolerance for relapse, she said.

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"It's like whoever made these quilts is ... keeping me safe and warm," said Jackie Johnson, who had been homeless for three years. (Special to The News Journal/EMILY VARISCO)