



The Power of An Emerald Green Shawl: Why You Should Care

By Susan Saldibar

There are some of the really terrific programs out there, sponsored by various organizations, that collect gifts for disadvantaged kids around the holidays. And, in more recent years, we've seen similar programs spring up that are geared towards seniors. One you may be familiar with is the "Be Santa to a Senior" program.

Jacquie Brenan, Vice President of [Vigil Health Solutions](#), a Senior Housing Forum Partner, is well aware of programs such as this. Vigil sponsors several of them. But last week, during our call, she shared a very personal experience around the Be Santa to a Senior program. It made both of us stop to think. So we decided, as we approach the Christmas holiday, to share it.

A blue brooch, a scarf and an emerald green shawl.

Jacquie lost her mom last year; something that we all know cuts very deeply, especially when the holidays roll around. Feeling the void of not needing to shop for her mother this year, Jacquie randomly picked up a tag for the Be Santa to a Senior program at a local store. The tag was for a woman named Rita. Rita's request was simple; she wanted a flower brooch, a scarf, and a shawl. The shawl, she added, should be emerald green.

It raised Jacquie's spirits to be shopping for an older woman again as she set about the challenge of hunting down an emerald green scarf. And, she found it. As she murmured out loud, "Is this emerald green?" a woman nearby confirmed "Yes, that looks like emerald. Is she a redhead? It would look great on a redhead." Jacquie replied that she didn't know; it was for a senior through the Be Santa to a Senior program.

Well, as it turns out, the woman works for the Be Santa to a Senior program. They spoke about the value of the program and its unique way of connecting the giver to the receiver. After a warm hug and exchange of "Merry Christmas", Jacquie went on her way, feeling like a million, after spending about ten dollars.

Here's the point. These programs are about more than broaches and emerald shawls.

It's hard to miss the reciprocity of good will that comes with these programs. Jacquie noted that, not only would Rita get her emerald green shawl, that small act of caring was helping her get through a difficult holiday season.

Senior living communities would be well served by finding more creative ways to connect the greater community to their own communities. It's true that many already have programs, such as visits from school children and seminars that bring people in to their community. But the power of that one-to-one connection can't be overestimated.

What does your community do year round to foster more points of connection between your residents and others out in the community at large? The holidays have so much power to bring out the giving spirit in all of us. Wouldn't it be great to find a way to bottle some of that and keep it alive from January through November?



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