Dear Don:

It was good to see you today in Washington DC.  I wanted to share the outcome of a wonderful gesture of human kindness from the AJAS members that brought and continues to bring a wonderful sense of peace and welcome to one of my colleagues last year after Superstorm Sandy.

Three members of the staff of Christian Health Care Center were tremendously impacted by the ravages of Superstorm Sandy.  Within just days of that storm, these three colleagues of mine were tremendously blessed by an outpouring of support to help them recover from their significant losses.  I want to share the story that unfolded since then for one of those three . . . I will call her “Mary”.

Mary was a young lady in her mid 20’s, living in a small apartment at the time that she shared with her cat.  The floodwaters from the storm came up quickly where she lived and, in the middle of the night, Mary needed to evacuate her apartment with nothing but the clothes in which she slept and her cat.  She was never able to return to live in that apartment after the storm as the building was condemned and shortly razed.  She was unable to recover almost anything from her apartment.  With the support of her colleagues and others, such as the members of AJAS, Mary began to rebuild her life in a new apartment.  However, in looking back on Mary’s journey since then, I’ve realized that the gifts she received provided much more than even the basic necessities of life – they provided hope and a new beginning.  The gift from the AJAS members was among the most cherished that Mary received – because it came from people that she did not even know and that did not know her . . . people who had a heartfelt desire to simply help another person in a time of tremendous need, knowing only that she also shared a life’s work with them to serve the elderly.

At the time of the storm, Mary was in a clerical position that wasn’t the most fulfilling for her.  She knew that she wanted something more and most likely didn’t see any opportunities coming along soon.  The effort to rebuild in the months after the storm . . . with the help and encouragement that she received . . . seemed to restore her hope that opportunities to move forward and grow might not be out of reach.  Mary soon found the opportunity to apply for a promotion within our organization and now finds herself the Executive Assistant to a senior leader.  She’s blossomed both personally and professionally.  There is a new spring in her step and she is on a new journey, one that started with an unexpected storm and the caring, loving actions of others.

If I understand the meaning of the Hebrew words correctly, a very heartfelt *mitzvah* by the members of AJAS brought *Shalom* to a young lady most unexpectedly and with great impact.  Thank you again, to the members of AJAS, for reaching out to LeadingAge to identify and share care and concern with those impacted by this difficult storm.  Even more than a year later, the gift from the AJAS membership continues to bring hope and opportunity.

May God bless each of them and you in a mighty way.

Douglas A. Struyk

*President and CEO*

Christian Health Care Center