

Kiawah Cares Made With Love: September 2017-June 2018 Season in Review

By Donna Porritt, KCMWL Coordinator, 7/16/2018



Overview

In our second full season, Kiawah Cares Made With Love (MWL) continued to focus on our underserved and under-recognized Johns and Wadmalaw Island neighbors, in keeping with the Kiawah Cares Foundation (KCF) mission. Since starting MWL as a simple way for Kiawah crafters to use those crafts to show care for our Sea Islands neighbors, we've witnessed rapid expansion, growth in products offered and participants engaged, as well as groups desiring our support. Here are the Season 2 highlights, and a look to our third season of caring for our neighbors with things Made With Love.

Season 2 Notable Firsts

- Our schedule expanded. By popular demand
 - We went weekly for our signature "Fleece Fridays" (FFs), where we gather to make a variety of products (not just fleece!) and enjoy the friendship of our fellow "MWLers" (Made With Love-ers), as we are called.
 - Fleece Fridays are running throughout the summer, this season being our first as an experiment. So far, so good!
- We established an ongoing relationship with the residents of Johns Island Rehab and Healthcare (JIRHC), delivering blankets to aging veterans on Veterans Day, supplying Bingo store prizes and cosmetic bags, holding blanket-tying sessions, and giving blankets, pillows and wreaths to cheer resident rooms.
- We hosted a Mother's Day "store" for kids at Angel Oak Elementary School (AOES), giving them the chance to "buy" six different MWL items. The cost? Each child made a card we delivered to JIRHC seniors. Kids made Father's Day cards we delivered, too
- We gave "Teacher Appreciation" homemade gifts to the staffs at Angel Oak and Frierson schools.
- We delivered blanket and pillows sets to one class at Mt. Zion.
- We met with Haut Gap to plan how to engage their older kids in service projects for younger kids and seniors.
- We delivered blankets to the seniors at the Johns Island facility of Charleston Respite Center, a relationship established as a result of the 2018 Kiawah Cares Volunteer Fair.
- We delivered products for animals -- made from fabric and fleece scraps -- to our Johns Island animal rescue liaison, Sharon Hite.

MWL Product Distributions

While numbers don't tell the whole story, they sure go a long way in showing the servant-hearts, love, and dedication of our volunteers...and the need and receptivity on the neighboring islands. Major recipient groups included: Angel Oak, Mt. Zion and Frierson elementary schools, Johns Island Rehab and Healthcare, Our Lady of Mercy, Charleston Respite Care, and local animal shelters.

- **We made 33 deliveries on 26 "delivery days" throughout the year – a 260% increase from Season 1.**
- Compared to last year on just three items: **we increased blanket distribution by 91%, pillow distribution by a whopping 2400%, and toiletry distribution by 77%.**

In addition to showing the growing range of products MWL, here's a look at some of the more than **2,260 items distributed, touching an estimated 1,600 families, with a fair-market value** (Internet sources, KCF, Communities in Schools) **exceeding \$52,000:**

Item	Number Delivered	Fair-market value
Fleece-tie blankets, various sizes	477	\$23,850
Fleece-tie pillows	258	\$7,740
Animal Pocket Pillows (fleece and fabric) & books	84	\$5,040=pillows, \$1,260 = books
Buddy loveys (fleece)	35	\$875
Totes (fabric, various sizes) and ID tags (metal)	95	\$5,950
Purses/Bags (fabric, various styles)	28	\$980
Tissue pack covers (fabric)	183	\$915
Scarves & shawls (fleece & knitted/crocheted)	123	\$1,230
Hats, hair bands/bows (fleece, knitted)	12	\$120

Sachets (fleece)	182	\$910
Heat/cold rice-filled packs (fleece and fabric)	4	\$60
Toiletry packs (ranging from 5-10 items per)	310	\$930
Toiletries, bulk (shampoo, detergents+)	74 pounds	\$500
Wreaths (fleece squares)	5	\$175
Doggie pull-toys (fleece and fabric)	133	\$1,330
Greeting cards, recycled	300	\$300
Backpacks (from blanket kit packaging)	34	\$204
Totals (excluding bulk toiletries)	2,263	\$52,369

Numbers don't tell one story that further demonstrates our volunteers caring hearts: When MWLers heard about the local family brutally affected by a home invasion earlier this year, we rallied and created a range of specially-made and selected Made With Love items – from blankets, pillows, and Buddys to totes, Animal Pocket pillows, books and more -- to give much-needed love and comfort to the mom, dad and five children.

About Our Volunteers

MWLers are prolific, dedicated, hard-working and humble! Every volunteer is valued and we are grateful for any time and effort that each gives. We logged 38 volunteers at Fleece Fridays (FFs) this year, some coming once (such as two friends from England visiting a MWLer!), some with almost perfect attendance! FFs averaged about 8 MWLers per week – a 33% increase over last year's average attendance. Of note:

- The team members who tracked and reported their hours logged **3,206.5 hours spent on MWL activities** in Season 2.
- At the nationally-recognized "value of a volunteer hour" of \$24.69, **MWLers gave nearly \$80,000 in labor value**. Volunteers continued to be comprised of part-time and full-time residents, as well as those who work from wherever they may be.
- Products are made by **adult and kid volunteers not just in SC but also in PA, FL, GA, ME, CT and MO**.
- Our **email list of participating/interested parties has grown by more than 50% to some 43** versus last year.
- This year, **a few good men joined our MWL volunteer corps, making blankets** as well as helping with logistics.

The six-member Made With Love Leadership group team-worked even more this past season and continued their dedication, commitment, comradery and Herculean efforts. I am not yet full-time at Kiawah so when I started Made With Love a couple of years ago I could not have imagined that it would become what it is today, and so quickly and organically. And it would not have done so were it not for the unique and complementary set of talents and skills brought by each who've assumed Leadership positions. I am proud and humbled to facilitate the efforts of such a special group.

Our full-time Leadership residents – Jane Payne, Ruth Flynn and Cathy Lavin – help keep Made With Love going year-round, hosting Fleece Fridays and handling a lot of day-to-day logistics. Each MWL Leadership Team member participates in strategy development, planning and distribution, coordinating with our recipient liaisons, making products, welcoming and teaching volunteers – and in pitching to "help in any way needed," as each is quick to say. In addition to always working to maximize the use and value of all of our processes and products, each takes on more responsibilities that are worthy of mention:

- Jane also heads our Inventory Management system for all non-toiletry products, managing intake and outflow of all fleece and fabric, finished products, and general organization in our two large storage units (that double as our MWL "offices" and workspace). She also selects and makes our blanket and pillow kits from fleece yardage, and makes sure our Fleece Fridays and other kits at the KICA Beachwalker donation station are well-stocked;
- Ruth also helps keep MWL "in the know" as our KICA/KCF liaison (in fact, she was named Kiawah Cares Volunteer of the Year this year!), and is our "ears and eyes" in the community as to needs and opportunities to effectively engage with our neighbors. And she takes on complicated but creative projects – like making a braided rug from fleece scraps! Also, as a retired lawyer, she continues to provide legal and related insights;

- Cathy Lavin also helps create effective communications about MWL and assists in marketing our program. In addition to her skills in working with the elderly and helping with KCF efforts, Cathy keeps MWL in touch with what's going on with other groups and activities in the surrounding communities;
- Jeanne Spray, who's part-time on Kiawah, heads the fabric products for KCMWL, keeping an eye out for new ideas, and attracting volunteers more inclined to work with fabric than fleece. For those folks, Jeanne compiles intricate kits of fabric and items needed to complete many of the products such as tote bags. She also holds workshops for those who want to learn how to make MWL sewn products;
- Sally Reed, also part-time on Kiawah, heads the Toiletries Program which is housed in its own storage unit (courtesy of Sally). She handles all aspects of providing this important service to our neighbors -- from creating and maintaining relationships with our recipient groups (which are different from our other MWL wares) to organizing all items, compiling kits based on specific needs, and personally handling distribution.

We gratefully acknowledge KICA's Carla Howard and team for their support and help with logistics, communications and outreach.

Supplies and Donations

Since our inception, MWL has been largely self-funded by a few of our members, and many still buy and donate fabric and supplies. MWL was surprised and delighted to have Kiawah Cares Foundation inform us that we'd received an anonymous \$10,000 donation late in 2017; as of today, we have \$3,530 remaining from that donation. While we still gladly accept monetary and materials donations from our members and others, the large monetary donation allowed us to increase both our quantities and our comfort-level in accepting and honoring requests, and committing to deliverables.

Some more Season 2 donation highlights, which combined had a value exceeding \$5,000:

- Fleece kits donations begun late in Season 1 by Kiawah-owner Kathy George and her employer, Springs Creative Products, continued. From early fall 2017 through the first quarter 2018, donated kits valued more than \$1,500.
- In Q2, we established a relationship with YourFleece.com, an online provider of fleece that has shown great support for our mission with steep discounts and extra TLC in customer service. Discounts on fleece alone thus far total over \$1,000.
- Lowcountry Dental on Maybank continued to donate much-needed teeth-care products exceeding \$200 in value for our Toiletries Program.
- We received 200 new children's books by Kiawah author William Guiffre -- valued at more than \$1,500 -- that allow us to add a new book to our blanket and pillow sets for kids.
- As a result of the 2018 Kiawah Cares Volunteer Fair, we established a relationship with Begin With Books and have already received over 275 books -- estimated value at \$1,500 -- for use with younger recipients of our MWL wares.
- Kiawah residents continued to donate their travel-size toiletries. The large donation to MWL allowed us to supplement those toiletry supplies with bulk orders for rarely donated but much-needed items like deodorant.

Our MWL inventory numbers always change but as of today we have nearly 300 blanket and pillow sets completed and ready to deliver for the new school year, about 60 kits ready to make, 360 gifts -- from totes and purses to sachets and key fobs -- ready for "stores" and appreciation events, 30 Buddy Loveys, 138 pillows ready to be covered...and much, much more. So we are already well underway to Season 3.

Looking ahead -- so far -- to 2018-2019 Season 3

As in the past two seasons, our Season 3 plans will grow and change with needs and opportunities. An immediate Season 3 challenge we face resulted from two of our best and most enthusiastic contacts leaving Angel Oak and Frierson for other assignments. While we know others at the schools and they know MWL, a key Leadership priority will be establishing quality relationships to ensure the students, especially, get support and love through our Made With Love items. We also hope to expand our reach within Mt. Zion.

Here are just some of the planned Season 3 highlights:

- AOES requested 100 blanket and pillow sets with books for their Child Development classes (all current classes will take their blankets with them to the next grade!)
- AOES requested 40 Buddy Loveys to start the school year
- Frierson has asked for 150 blanket and pillow sets with books for all of their kids

- Heat and cold packs will be gifts for 2019 AOES Teacher Appreciation, about 130
- Totes will be the Teacher Appreciation gifts at Frierson, about 30
- Pocket Pillows and books for “Star Reader” awards for high-achieving kids at AOES and Frierson, about 90
- Meals on Wheels (MOW) requested blankets and warm items like scarves for their clients, about 50
- Toiletry kits and bulk supplies are desired by OLM, AOES, MOW – at least 300 again
- OLM’s Prenatal moms will each have a gift pack of blankets and toiletries and other Made With Love items – about 12
- Fidget blankets – a new item for MWL that help Alzheimer’s and dementia patients -- for JIRHC and Charleston Respite Care will accept as many as we can make, quantities TBD
- Scarves, purses, sachets and other “gifts” are always in demand – quantities TBD
- Animal rescue braided toys and blankets – we’ve been told “as many as you can make, as often as you can deliver!” – quantities will be based on amount of scraps.

Conclusion

What a year! And what hearts-for-service that keep Made With Love going... and growing! As an all-volunteer and volunteer-led group, we constantly need to guard against overload and burn-out, especially of our core group...MWLers have big ideas and big hearts! So, once again this year, we’ve asked KICA/KCF to spread the word through their communications that we always need help in making any and all of our items, whether it’s with MWLers on FFs or in one’s own home (wherever home is!). We always need donations, like NEW: cotton fabric, anti-pill fleece, travel-size toiletries, yarn, and children’s books. We also accept used greeting cards to recycle, any new direct-mail provided or other new greeting cards, and unused envelopes for the greeting cards we make.

And, of course, we ALWAYS need more volunteers!

What a beautiful Season 2... THANK YOU and BLESS YOU!

On to Season 3!