

During the month that boasts the "Random Acts of Kindness Day", for today's e-newsletter, I wanted you to read first-hand from one of my hospital colleagues whose patients have recently been on the receiving end of our donors' generosity.

This time it wasn't because of a piece of high-tech equipment, but rather thanks to the "high-touch" activities that we know can be as important to a patient's health.

Katherine is a Recreation Therapist for our Mental Health Program.

The holidays can be difficult for many, especially those who are staying with us in the hospital. The hospital can feel isolating and sterile so celebrating Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Christmas are just small gestures we can do to make someone feel a sense of comfort while seeking extra support. Furthermore, those living with mental illness are among the most marginalized, oppressed, devalued and stigmatized populations in our community, so we want to celebrate and empower our patients to uproot any preconceived notions that may weigh on their spirit.

In 2022, we came up with the idea of backpacks in order to provide tangible resources that benefit our mental health population.

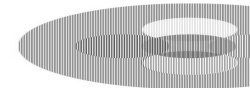
The backpacks were filled with cozy holiday clothing, goodies, gift cards to grocery stores and restaurants, practical items like hygiene kits, as well as healthy leisure activities such as art supplies, novels and puzzles. Plus, the backpacks themselves are important because for many who may be living in homelessness or not in a permanent living situation the bags serve as a tool to carry items that are most important to them in a safe & secure manner. And we used the backpacks as not only a helpful tool for day-to-day items but to help the patients feel thought of both during the festive season as well as throughout the year.

Wonderfully, the Ajax Pickering Hospital Foundation extended its support to its hospital's sister units, and was able to gather **over 100 backpacks** for two inpatient adult mental health units, and one child and adolescent mental health unit.

As we got closer to December 25th, the Foundation office became crowded with full backpacks, extra bags and loads of items for the packs, all donated by members of the community, corporations, Foundation Board members & volunteers, sports teams and hospital staff. Each time I would visit, I would become more and more overwhelmed by how generous our supporters were being because everywhere I looked, more bags & more items had arrived.

Any backpacks that needed to be filled were thoughtfully and meticulously done so by the mental health staff.

But none of this happened over night. It all began months before when together we figured out the best contents for the bags and then the Ajax Pickering Hospital Foundation started to reach out to those who are looking to explore ways in which they can support community members along their mental health journey. Many donors may have themselves also experienced moments where they needed support, and sought to fill their donated backpacks with items that have been successful for them to develop coping strategies. Sometimes sharing with each other,



especially what has worked for them personally, can be therapeutic for all those involved.

And when the day arrived when the patients on our child and adolescent unit opened their backpacks, we allowed each child to pick whichever backpack reflected them the most as an individual. The patients were *beyond excited*, and one child even elaborated **"I somehow managed to pick a backpack that is an exact representation of who I am."**



Here's a photo of me (kneeling & in the antlers) with some of my colleagues of the Mental Health program at Ajax Pickering Hospital with some of the backpacks. You can't see them, but all our masks are hiding huge smiles!

"Thank you" cannot express how exceedingly grateful all my mental health colleagues and I are to everyone who was a part of this backpack project.

~ Katherine

These backpacks were an extension of our [Compassion Fund](#) activities that take place throughout the year at the Ajax Pickering Hospital. Many patients arrive at our hospital in an emergency and have absolutely nothing with them. This is often true of the loved ones who accompany them. You might even have been in this situation yourself.

And others are here for an extended period, often months, while they wait to find a long-term home. And if they don't have close family or friends, they probably don't have the comforts of home or even simple personal care items. At the Ajax Pickering Hospital Foundation, we love seeing the smiles on the faces of hospital staff members when they can provide their patients with these basic necessities.

It's this human touch that makes our hospital so special and makes a hospital stay, especially a long one, so much easier on patients and family members.

If you want to get in touch with me, just give the Foundation office a call at 905.683.2320 x11501 or drop us an email at aphfoundation@lh.ca.

Or "like" us on [Facebook](#) to check out even more about what we are up to!

Yours in Philanthropy,

Tracy L. Paterson

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