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No Act Too Small When a Family is in Need

'There With Care' celebrates its first year in the Bay Area.

February 22, 2013

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[Editor's note: The following was submitted by Jennifer Rudy of "There With Care." If you have an event or an announcement you'd like to post on Patch, email the editor at joan.dentler@patch.com.]

By Jennifer Rudy

It's a Tuesday morning and volunteer Dianne Blake is at There With Care's office in Menlo Park. Past the towering aisles of generously donated baby items --- toys, books, diapers, clothes and more --- Blake makes her way to the refrigerator where she gathers groceries for a very important errand across town.

Blake's delivery of two weeks worth of breakfasts, lunches and dinners is a sigh of relief for a special family of six whose son is recovering from a heart transplant at just over 1-year-old. Uprooted from the life they know at home outside the Bay Area, they are staying in a one-room temporary housing arrangement while thrust into a rigorous and emotionally challenging new schedule: copious medical appointments, administering medications, busing kids to their new schools, and managing a household, all while the family's father continues to work back home to maintain critical medical benefits.

Even basic tasks can become daunting amid such intense family changes. With meals taken care of for two weeks they are able to more aptly focus on the acute medical needs of their son and the day-to-day obligations of the rest of their family. Being this link in a family's continuum of care is central to There With Care's mission.

"At There With Care, we believe families are best able to care for a loved-one through a medical crisis when their daily needs are met," said Executive Director Michelle Chang. "Everyday, we provide tailored non-judgmental support such as food delivery, childcare and transportation for families, because the physical and emotional stress of caring for a critically-ill child or family member can be overwhelming."

Clients and volunteers alike each receive something valuable from their experience with There With Care.

Blake appreciates what There With Care is teaching her grandchildren, who sometimes accompany her during volunteer days.

She states, "I love that they get a feeling of community out of helping. What a unique perspective they've had that this is part of life and that this is what we do in our day. They are learning that care giving is part of life, an enriching life anyway. It's a way for them to build their self-esteem, learn about the world and their role in it," she said.

Whether someone can donate an hour of office work or commit to a weekly food delivery, every contribution is vital to the overall success of There With Care, according to Blake.

"The most important thing I would want people to know is that no act is too small. I wouldn't want people to think they cannot volunteer because they can't give enough," said Blake. "This is an organization of people. Without people, it doesn't work."

Volunteers from around the Peninsula have readily responded to There With Care's compassionate mission and call-to-action.

This month, the organization celebrates its first anniversary since opening in the Bay Area. And, it has a lot to be proud of. In 12 months, There With Care has trained 188 volunteers and has delivered 21,743 pounds of groceries, among other crucial necessities, to 100 families facing critical illness.

As There With Care receives more referrals to new families from hospital social workers, they are continually preparing to meet increasing needs.

"Every hour of volunteer work and every dollar and item donated is making a deep impact for the families we are able to reach," said Chang. "We anticipate working with an additional 100 families in 2013 and look forward to partnering with new volunteers and community supporters to make a difference for families in need of our services in the coming year."

To learn more about There With Care and how you, your family and/or civic group can get involved, please visit: bayarea.therewithcare.org. There With Care's offices are located at 3475 Edison Way, Ste. H, Menlo Park, CA, 94025.

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