

Kiawah Care Made With Love: September 2016-June 2017 Season in Review

By Donna Porritt, KCMWL Coordinator, 6/30/2017

Overview

What began with several of us meeting impromptu to do crafting in early 2016 grew into KCMWL being formally launched when Fleece Fridays began in April 2016. Our initial plans were to make fleece-tie blankets, toiletry kits and recycled greeting cards, all made with donated materials. Since that humble inception, KCMWL has grown thanks to the love, caring and servant-hearts of so many on Kiawah and beyond. All beneficiaries are on Johns and Wadmalaw Islands, in keeping with the Kiawah Cares mission. Our first full season – September 2016 through June 2017 – is just completed so it's only fitting to recap the season's highlights.

Distributions

Not counting the items Kiawah Cares distributed directly to storm victims, mission workers, and the like through the season, KCMWL distributed a *total of nearly 250 blankets, 14 pillows, and more than 175 toiletry kits*:

- In November, 2016: 154 blankets and more than 150 toiletry kits were donated to Angel Oak and Frierson elementary schools, 2 area senior centers, and Our Lady of Mercy (OLM) for their use in their various outreach programs.
- In December, 2016, more than 40 knitted/crocheted scarves, hats and mittens were delivered for the KC Coats drive.
- In May, 2017: 83 blankets, 14 pillows, 14 children's books and 28 toiletry kits went to Angel Oak, Frierson and OLM.

A recipient group required a dollar value on a recent donation so, using endorsed national values for volunteers (\$24.14/hour/per) and established donated fabric values, the blankets and pillows alone bring this season's donated value to more than \$17,000.

Supplies and Inventory

Early-on, the individual KCMWL ladies donated fleece used in our most popular product – fleece-tie blankets – and many still do. Cotton fabric was donated by our dedicated quilter. Last spring, Kiawah's Kathy George and her employer, Springs Creative Products, began donating hundreds of fleece kits and dozens of bolts of fleece and fleece pieces, as well as cotton fabrics. Lowcountry Dental on Maybank also recently donated much-needed boxes of teeth-care products. Amazing generosity by all that we hope will continue and expand in the upcoming season. This past season we also grew enough to require a KCMWL-dedicated off-site storage unit.

Kiawah residents donated thousands of travel-size toiletries and related items that were made into kits in a variety of sizes. To aid in future reporting, we will begin to track and report these items by weight rather than numbers.

Our detailed season-ending inventory of items completed and kits ready-to-make is attached, but overall in major items we have:

Completed	Unfinished	Gift supplies available
109 blankets	136 blankets kits	18 fabric totes
66 pillows	31 pillow kits	14 fabric make-up cases, coin purses
95 scarves, hats+	4 scarf kits	
97 toiletry kits	53 skeins of finger-crochet yarn	

About Our Volunteers

Many volunteers are part-timers on Kiawah but what faithful and prolific volunteers we have, whether they come to the 2x/month Fleece Fridays (FFs) or work from their home(s)! We have a regular email distribution of 28 who support KCMWL in some fashion. Usual number of volunteers at our FFs was about 6, with monthly individual hours ranging from 2 hours to nearly 90. We enjoy great camaraderie with our love of Kiawah, crafting, and serving. Our non-Kiawah-owner workers (not in our email distribution #s) range from grandmothers in PA, SC and MO, to kids and crafters in CT, ME and FL – their products are either delivered by family or mailed.

In 2017, several devoted KCMWLLers took on more leadership roles in addition to their skills as producers of KCMWL items:

- Ruth Flynn, as the on-island contact to help run Fleece Fridays; participate in strategy development, planning and distribution; overseeing the just-started children's book collections; providing legal perspective as she was a lawyer before retiring; and available to help however needed;
- Jane Payne, an on-islander who helps with supply intake; taking and managing inventory; doing distribution; participating in planning; and being "at the ready" to pitch-in however and whenever needed;
- Sally Reed, a part-timer handling the Toiletries Program, including in-take, inventory, compiling kits and distribution;

- Jeanne Spray, a part-timer (and champion quilter!) heads the quilting and fabric products for KCMWL;
- Cathy Lavin, a full-timer with background in non-profit marketing and fundraising, who helps in strategy and distribution, and who is always willing and ready to assist in however KCMWL needs help.

All volunteers are valued; the above ladies are additionally treasured as we couldn't keep KCMWL going without them! In many instances, the volunteers' husbands and other family members are vital helpers too.

KCMWL Product Line

We now have a large variety of products Made with Love:

- Fleece 2-sided tie blankets in large ($\geq 54" \times 60"$), medium ($\geq 48" \times 60"$), small ($\geq 36" \times 36"+$), for use with kids and adults
- Fleece single or double-layer tied blankets in "comfort" ($\sim 24" \times 18"$) for youngsters kids and "wee" ($\sim 15" \times 12"$) for babies
- Pillows ($16" \times 16"$), either fleece-tied or sewn-squares from the fleece corner-cuttings
- Toiletry kits in Basic (about 6 general-use items), Family (larger assortment and sizes), Gift (for use in reward/appreciation gifts to staff/kids, and for kids to give as gifts to parent/guardian)
- Quilted fabric totes and other bags/purses for use during Teacher Appreciation month (May), or for rewarding teacher or parent/guardian
- Knitted and crocheted, as well as some fleece, blankets and wearables for kids and adults including scarves, lap blankets, shawls, hats, mittens and booties/slippers

We are expanding our line even further in the upcoming season. These are all logical extensions and repackaging of, and new uses and recipients for, our core products:

- Packaged Blanket, Buddy (a small comfort-fleece animal), Pillow and Book for new readers at the elementary schools.
- Puppy Pocket Pillows, fabric or fleece, that are a rectangular puppy face with a pocket that holds an age-appropriate donated book.
- "Stores" for kids at Christmas and Mother's Day where they can "shop" for KCMWL toiletries, wearables, and (we hope) recycled cards. "Payment" will be the child-"buyer" writing a note to or drawing a picture for a senior-citizen.
- Art-class projects to use donated cards and make recycled greeting cards for kids to give as gifts.
- Bulk supplies of toiletries, and the buckets that will hold them, to enable schools to distribute "on demand". Plus, allow kids to choose as rewards for desired behaviors.
- Bulk supplies of "comfort blankets" for each teacher and counselor to have "on hand" to give to children in need to assist in getting the child to "open up" about problems, foster situations, grief counseling, or divorce.
- Baby gifts to students' mothers+ at the start of school.
- Baby products to OLM for pre and post-natal classes.
- Elderly/senior blanket and cards distribution at an area nursing home (TBD).

KCMWL will be supporting a nascent program under our umbrella called "*We Read. With Grampy and Big Dog*". Part-timer Sam Bromage is working with Frierson School on Wadmalaw Island to do a 2-day/week program reading to and with elementary school-aged kids using a cuddly stuffed dog, and featuring a large braided rug Made with Love by Ruth Flynn from selvage edges cut off of fleece. Kids will gather around the rug and read or be read to from books donated to KCMWL.

We have tried to get the schools especially to give us estimates for the number of items they will need, and they've promised to do so for the upcoming season so we can set goals. In the meantime, KCMWLeers are producing items so we will be ready when the numbers – expected to be in the dozens of pillows, hundreds of blankets and thousands of toiletry items – are given to us.

Kiawah Cares

We are most grateful to Kiawah Cares for giving us this platform to serve the Sea Islands. We appreciate, too, the support to get rooms scheduled, tags and brochures made, publicity done and for making connections with Sea Island groups. We also appreciate the help of The Sandcastle staff, from their doing room set-up to making space for supplies to help in scheduling to their enthusiastic support and promotion.

KC's Marsh Tacky Fundraiser gave the chance to publicize KCMWL efforts, too. The "raffle" idea was hatched, managed and bought by Sally Reed: her "Wine Sunset Beach Basket" – complete with wine-themed fleece blanket, pillow, custom tote, wine selections, wine holders, lucite glasses and cocktail napkins – was highly praised and prized, and will be our future "go to" fundraiser, for sure.

Conclusion

KCMWL is now in summer hiatus from formal meeting times that will resume in late-September. But that doesn't mean our volunteers aren't working hard! We are building our supplies, adding to our inventory, and coordinating with school and other liaisons to keep things rolling.

We've asked KC to spread the word through their communications tools that we always need more fabric, more fleece, more toiletries, more children's books, more yarn, more used cards, unused envelopes, and, of course, more volunteers!

Here's to a great first full-season...and to many more to come. THANK YOU!