



**Personal Reflections**  
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## **Personal Reflections: A Community Eases Older Adult Isolation**

by Michael P. Nixon, Executive Director  
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**HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

It always amazes me to see how special – and often simple – expressions of caring can bring so much happiness and hope to anyone. These two words – Happy Birthday – did just that within my own family recently!

My mother celebrated her 90th birthday a couple of weeks ago, and this year her birthday was celebrated in person by the entire family. We have all been double vaccinated and we were all still wearing masks but having us all together for the first time in almost a year and a half had special meaning. And the words ‘Happy Birthday’ meant more to Mom than I could have imagined.

It wasn’t the gifts, and it wasn’t the amazing birthday spread the family prepared – it was our presence at Mom and Dad’s home that had special meaning this year. But it was also the sincere expression of love which Mom could tangibly hear and see which brought her so much joy... and a few tears!

Increasingly we are all beginning to experience these moments. With pandemic protocols starting to loosen, we have the opportunity to share special ‘in-person’ moments with friends and family, with our business colleagues and those with whom we offer our volunteer time. And I truly believe that these moments will be more special than ever given that we ‘have been away’ from each other for months.

But it occurs to me that this may also be a time when it might slip our minds that with or without a pandemic affecting our interaction and mobility, many people will continue to be isolated. Many in Halton have faced isolation as an ongoing issue – and unfortunately this is an issue which can inordinately affect older adults.

Community Development Halton, through its Age-Friendly Initiatives - led by our Director of these programs, Heather Thompson - is acutely aware of these issues and is at the heart of working with the community through its Older-Adult Isolation Table, and several other initiatives.



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One such project is [Connections Among Generations](#), an intergenerational outreach project, working with schools, retirement homes and other groups to write letters, create artwork and deliver messages of hope and kindness to older adults who live alone in Halton. Due to COVID-19, we know that many older adults are facing challenging times and may be experiencing a loss of social connections with friends and family. As a caring community, we would like to offer words of hope and encouragement.

The program engages people of all ages, including students, families, and older adults to contribute messages of kindness, caring and hope, which will be collected and distributed in the Good Food Bags, provided by [Food for Life](#), to over 800 older adults every month.

What a powerful and meaningful project this has become in such a short period of time. Wonderful little messages and engaging packages being prepared by very special and caring young people for our exceptional older adults. Messages such as, “[A circle is round, it has no end, and that’s how long I want to be your friend](#)” (along with a hand-knitted friendship bracelet!), or a beautiful hand-painted stone with the word ‘Hope’ on it along with a lovely note, “[A little note to say hello and let you know you are being thought of. May your day be filled with kind and sunny thoughts](#)”. These heart-felt messages and amazing packages are increasingly being received from our youth (and the youthful of all ages!), prepared, and delivered by CDH.

What makes it special to me – and all involved in the program – is that we know it’s making a difference in the lives of Halton’s older adults. We have received several beautiful, touching notes of appreciation from many who have received a package. I will share with you the sentiments from one of these notes. While reading it I could visualize the same joy – and perhaps tears of happiness - as I saw in my mother when she was reading her birthday cards...

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*“I am writing to let you know that I received my package today ... and I received a lovely letter and a puzzle. I had a very bad week this week, but I had two things that really cheered me up and made me happy: I have a new pet bird and receiving my package with the letter and puzzle. This made me so happy! Please tell the students who are contributing to the program by writing letters, making cards, puzzle, and other crafts, that this means so much to me and I know for other seniors too! Keep up the great work – thank you again!”*

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We can all make a difference in each other’s lives – and now more than ever it’s important to remember those who may be on their own. We may not be able to be there personally but sometimes even a simple phone call can go a long way to remove the walls of isolation which all of us have now experienced personally for over a year!

Warmest Regards,

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