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Giving Back at Any Age

With the holiday season here most of our thoughts tend to turn to giving. Giving gifts, providing joy, and for many a time to give back to the community. However, as we age giving can become more difficult, we aren't able to do the things we once did, we cannot physically volunteer, instead so many of our community seniors feel that all they can do is write a check and be done with it. However, what we fail to fully appreciate is that the benefits of charity are not just emotional but can in fact be physical.

Aviva- A Campus for Senior Life in Sarasota is not only leading the way in senior led charities but are also seeing the benefits that charity can bring to its residents. The retirement community, whose residents on average are somewhere between 80 to 100 years old, has found incredible ways to empower seniors to give back to the greater community. As a community Aviva has helped its residents create dozens of charity based organizations, that are completely resident run, led, and supported.

How powerful can the health benefits of charity work be? Take Aviva resident Sandy Klein as an example. Sandy came to Aviva's skilled nursing facility, Benderson Rehabilitation, after suffering a stroke which left her having trouble with her motor skills. After months of physical therapy, Sandy felt strong enough to move to Aviva's Independent Living community, Kobernick. When she moved, Sandy was still having trouble with her hands as they would shake making certain tasks hard to do. It was at Kobernick where a fellow resident suggested she try knitting to help strengthen her hands. Sandy who had always loved creative pursuits was skeptical but craved an outlet for her artistic passion. Within months, Sandy had poured her creative juices into knitting and found strength return to her hands.

It was her new found passion for knitting that led her to start the Aviva resident Kobby Kaps program. The program brings residents together to redecorate and revitalize donated baseball caps which can then be donated to children undergoing chemotherapy and other cancer

treatments. Aviva's Kobby Kaps program, led and organized by Sandy, produces on average 100 hats a month which are then sent to local hospital patients.

The work of the Kobby Kaps program is incredible but the Aviva community is even more inspired by the change it has seen in Sandy. Since starting this charity program, the community has seen Sandy grow stronger physically and embrace opportunities for a new life at Aviva. Where she once needed the help of a walker she now walks uninhibited on her own, where her hands once shook uncontrollably she is now the first person to take photos of her and her friends on her smartphone.

Empowering our senior populations to get involved in the community at large is arguably one of the most powerful and beneficial things we can do for them. Aviva has seen the results not just in Sandy but in hundreds of residents. By giving them opportunity, the community has seen residents thrive physically and completely change in a matter of weeks. Now, Aviva's residents are essential aspects of the philanthropic and community service sector of Sarasota. On a daily basis these seniors who otherwise would have been confined to their apartments are teaching at community centers, working with at-risk youth, working with local philanthropies like the Jewish Housing Council, and ensuring the future of Sarasota. Even the many centennial residents of Aviva, many who are Holocaust survivors, are finding ways to give back, even if it is as simple as sharing their story with the younger generation.

They are doing all of this not because it is necessary but because it is important to them. Aviva's residents want to give back to Sarasota, give back to the very community that has given them a place in which they can age gracefully and on their own terms. However, what they may not see but the healthcare professionals who care for them do, is the incredible health benefits this autonomy has given them.

As we celebrate the holiday season, the staff at Aviva hopes to challenge the entire Florida community, to change the way they think about giving back. We have seen the lives of our residents change dramatically when they are simply given the opportunity. Our challenge to the community is this, are there people in your community who could benefit not from being given things but by being given opportunity? As the old adage goes "give a man a fish and he will eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime."

Aviva- A Campus for Senior Life is Sarasota's only rental senior community offering all levels of care. The campus is comprised of several communities including Kobernick Independent Living, Anchin Assisted Living, Anchin Memory Care, and Benderson Skilled Nursing & Rehabilitation. For more information on Aviva's innovative approach to senior living please visit our website avivaseniorlife.org