

12/20/2024

To the Watertown Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Commission:

Thank you for taking the time to consider allowing the Caring Crafters group to fall under the Class 1 category of Senior & Community Center sponsored programs. After the Senior Center's recent policy updates, we received a Class 2 designation. While we see ourselves as a "community service group," we are also a program that helps your Senior Center members. We have been running in partnership with the Senior Center for almost fourteen years and would hate to have to part ways because of the terms associated with this reclassification.

In January 2025, Caring Crafters will enter the fourteenth year of our mission to create a friendly and welcoming environment for everyone to gather, while donating handmade items to the greater community to touch lives, one stitch at a time. Members meet to socialize, explore ideas, and create items that we distribute locally and elsewhere. Caring Crafters helps the Senior Center by giving its members an activity that allows them to share their passions with like-minded individuals and interact with the community on a larger scale.

Currently, we have forty-two members that regularly attend meetings, along with six members who just drop off items. We have members living in Jefferson, Dodge, Waukesha, and Milwaukee counties. Most are long-time Senior Center members who take part in other Center activities. The group is multi-generational, with many members being older than retirement age. Most of the members meet the Senior Center's age requirement. A handful are under fifty years old, with only one not reaching fifty within the next five years.

Socialization and engaging activities play a significant role in mental health, especially for seniors. Caring Crafters meets bi-monthly, for several hours at a time. Members are welcome to come when they can and leave when they need. Quite a few of our members are widowed, without family nearby to interact with face to face. Several of our members have commented over the years that they look forward to these meetings and are truly upset when they miss them and cannot socialize with the larger group.

In our fourteen years, we have provided many charity groups, programs, and service groups with countless hand-crafted items. Currently, we make various baby items (hats, blankets, and more), winter accessories for all ages, prayer shawls, chemo hats, lap robes, and blankets. Locally, we supplied items this year to Watertown Hospital, Marquardt, the Bread Basket Pantry, UW Cancer Center Johnson Creek, Jefferson County Christmas Neighbors, Gianna's Joy Lake Mills, and the Beaver Dam School District. We also gave items to groups in Horicon, Madison, Milwaukee, and Waukesha. In December over one hundred items, mostly blankets, were given to Heat for Heroes, a statewide non-profit helping Wisconsin veterans and their families. We also sent items

headed to North Carolina to help hurricane victims. The group once again contributed items to Operation Christmas Child with boxes going to recipients in Malawi. Year-to-date the group has donated over 2,500 items. Since our group began, we have donated over 52,000 items locally and worldwide.

We provide these gifts of warmth and joy, based purely on donations. Most of those are physical items and not monetary ones. The few cash donations we do receive are meant for supplies for a specific project. We do not currently charge Caring Crafters members a fee to join in activities. Most group members have limited incomes, and several rely on us to supply them with yarn to work on their projects. The fees related to the reclassification of the group are out of reach right now, especially the security deposit.

Everyone likes to feel useful and that they are making a difference. Most don't know how to start doing that or feel that their contributions are too small to matter. Caring Crafters helps our members contribute to the community on a large scale, locally, nationally, and globally. We are slowly gaining recognition for our contributions, which includes the possibility of an upcoming interview in January from a Madison news station that we hope to have filmed at the Senior Center.

We have been at the Senior Center for a long time and hope we're seen as an asset to the programming there. We try to make sure any space we use is cleaner than when we got there. We use community events we take part in as extra promotions for the Senior Center. The group helps wherever we can, including supporting the Senior Center's Giving Tree program with handmade gifts.

Again, we ask that you please consider reclassifying Caring Crafters back to Class 1 Senior Programming. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Leslie Krueger-Co Lead

Jean Osterhaus-Co Lead

Caring Crafters