

# Volunteers Are The Heart of Hospice

**M**uch has been written about the tenets of hospice care and the development of the hospice model – how care is given to patients and their families on a 24/7 basis, by an interdisciplinary team of professional clinicians and staff. The compassionate “heart” of any hospice program, however, is the selfless work of the volunteers who serve throughout the community.

At Visiting Nurse/Hospice Atlanta’s hospice division, over 300 volunteers work to support our program. On any given day we see committed folks sitting with patients, comforting families, playing with children while the parents minister to their loved one — and these are just the men and women who work directly with patients and families. Members of the Junior League of Atlanta give their time as training camp counselors for Camp STARS (our annual bereavement camps for children and families), while a local garden club may plant a “healing herb garden” for friends and families to enjoy. Other individuals are out raising money for patients who need additional resources. All these activities and more are what give a hospice program the “feeling” of compassion and the depth of caring.

Volunteerism is the willingness of people to work on behalf of others without the expectation of monetary gain – to do all you can with what you have. Henri Nouwen, the internationally-renowned priest and author of 40 books, once wrote: “When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.”

Atlanta is blessed with a wealth of “friends who care” from every walk of life. Each of them is free to choose how he or she contributes. Hospice Month is the perfect time to thank the men and women who choose end-of-life care for their volunteer path. Our hats are off to all of you – because of you, our community is a better place.



**BY MYRA DOWNS, RN,  
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