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The Goodness of America

Friend-finding Mission

Donna Herter of Rochester, Minnesota, was concerned that her 24-year-old son with Down syndrome did not have friends, so she took to social media for help and was blown away by the support she received in response.

Though Herter's son, Christian Bowers, has Down syndrome, he likes to engage in regular fun activities such as bowling and video games, but he struggled to make friends once he finished school.

"[He was] just constantly asking where his friends are, why doesn't anybody want to come over and spend some time with him," Herter told CBS News. "We would go to Walmart or the store and he would invite half the store to come home with us and play video games with us. And of course, nobody would. And he just doesn't understand why."

It saddened Herter to watch her son struggle with loneliness, so she decided to put up a post on her Facebook page to see if any local guys would like to come and spend time with her son for two hours. She even offered to pay \$80 to anyone who was willing to visit her son.

She was shocked to find that her request received 5,000 comments within hours of being posted. Not only did people volunteer their time to help, but many parents offered suggestions as well.

After discussions with several of the people who reached out, Herter narrowed down her choices to seven men, who now visit Christian once per week on a rotating schedule.

According to Herter, Christian meets people at special-needs events, but also "craves a friendship with somebody who is neurotypical. He doesn't want to only hang out with somebody with special needs."

One of Christian's new friends, James Hasting, told CBS News he was heartbroken that Herter felt compelled to pay people to spend time with Christian. Hasting works with people with disabilities and said the time he has spent with Christian has encouraged him "to look at the world for more than what we see on the surface."

"Just because someone is different than what you are used to, it doesn't mean that they aren't the same at heart," he elaborated.

Beyond new friendships, the post has already created new opportunities for Christian. According to CBS News, he was invited to spend time with local firefighters, went bowling with local Marines, and was named honorary mayor of the nearby town of Wentzville for the day.

Herter said Christian's new friendships have made an enormous difference.

"He every night goes to bed with a smile on his face. He tells everybody about his new friends. He gets so excited talking about life now and what he's doing," Herter said.

Blessed With Hot Water and Heat

When Stephanie Peach of Monroe, Wisconsin, learned that her favorite Pick 'n Save grocery store worker had gone without a boiler system for more than a year, she stepped in to help.

Peach was enjoying one of her typical encounters with Pick 'n Save employee Dennis Raiten when



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Raiten mentioned that his boiler system went out 15 months ago and he had had no heat or hot water in all that time.

Peach decided to launch a fundraising campaign for Raiten on May 26 to help raise money for a new boiler, and within just three weeks, Raiten had the funds he needed to purchase a new one.

The page raised more than \$6,500, surpassing the \$5,000 goal, which Peach had increased to also cover the costs of some additional bathroom renovations Raiten needed. One of the donors gave \$100 to the page and commented, "Dennis is always friendly and we were sad to hear he had no heat last winter. He is a hard worker ... and deserves to have comfortable living at home."

Peach also gifted Raiten an air-conditioning unit so that he could stay cool this summer.

Raiten told NBC 15 he was "flabbergasted" by Peach's kindness and generosity.

Peach is hopeful her story will inspire others to be kind to others who may be quietly struggling.

Firefighters Swing Into Action

The Verdigris Fire Department in Verdigris, Oklahoma, went far beyond the call of duty when they helped a local family install a tree swing for their little ones.

Meaghan Perceful's young daughters, Magnolia and Maren, had been asking their parents to put up a tree swing in their yard for months, but the family did not have a ladder tall enough to reach any of the tree branches.

Perceful posted on the local Verdigris Community Page asking if someone could lend them a large ladder or a bucket truck to help get the swing over the one branch that they could possibly reach.

One user suggested she reach out to the local fire department. She was surprised when the department seemed happy to help free of charge.

"Just a local fire department and four wonderful fire fighters, making two little girls' day!" she posted on Facebook on June 1, alongside several pictures highlighting the fire department's swing-hanging efforts.

Perceful said the firefighters also brought hats for the two little girls and allowed them a special visit inside the firetruck, News 9 reported.

Female firefighter Ariel Shepherd was among those who helped install the tree swing. She said she hopes to have inspired the two little girls.

"It's the type of job where people will say, 'I didn't realize girls can be firefighters.' That's cool to hear girls and women and be recognized," said Shepherd.

Chief Mike Shaffer said the opportunity to bring the Perceful family joy was as important to his firefighters as it was to the family.

"It's a whole different experience for firefighters to create memories that aren't attached to traumatic incidents," said Shaffer.

— *Raven Clabough*



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