

GREETING CARD PROGRAM

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BRIEF HISTORY OF GREETING CARDS IN THE U.S.

Giving greeting cards to friends, lovers, and family is a tradition that goes back more than 200 years, but it gained popularity in the mid 1800s. At that time, it was a tradition for the wealthy. Greeting cards were costly and fine pieces of art. With the popularity of postage stamps, greeting cards became mass produced and more affordable. By the 1900s, the post office was handling an extra 11.5 million cards during Christmas week alone. We can't forget the day-to-day cards for birthdays and anniversaries. They put Hallmark on the map.

Today, there has been a resurgence of handmade cards. A handmade card is regarded as a card made from the heart. As Activity Professionals, not only is this an awesome program that will be enjoyed by the residents, but it is also a practical way to make money for your department.

HOW THE PROGRAM STARTED

This greeting card program started when I was working in a long term care facility. Every week, I went shopping for residents who needed my service. The most requested items were greeting cards (happy birthday, get well, and thinking of you cards). The birth of this program came when I purchased a \$2.75 birthday card for a resident. The resident loved the card but was stunned at the cost. (She recalled when cards cost 25 cents.) That was six years ago. Since then, I have done this program in a long term care facility, Alzheimer's community, and assisted living with individuals with various levels of cognitive impairments.

Greeting cards are emotionally and visually stimulating. Creating the cards develops a sense of personal satisfaction for participants. This project is good for large and small groups and in a 1-to-1 program.

HOW TOS

We hold the greeting card activity twice a month. Most residents make three cards at each class, and the cards are free for anyone in attendance. For a 1-to-1 visit, put everything you need in a zipper-closing bag, grab a glue stick, and you have a satisfying program to enjoy bedside with a resident who is unable to attend group activities.

Residents, staff, and family members can buy the cards for \$1.00 each. The holidays that bring the most in sales are Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter, and Thanksgiving. Other types of greeting cards are available year-round. At our annual bazaar, packets of assorted greeting cards are sold in gift packs. We make hundreds of dollars in sales annually, making this a program that is financially self-sustaining.

Basic Supplies Needed:

- rubber stamps and ink pads
- templates
- card stock paper or unlined index cards
- glue sticks
- parchment paper
- colored paper
- verses
- clip art
- pressed flowers
- butterflies
- wallpaper border

- gift wrap paper
- paper punches
- glitter glue
- paper edgers
- ribbons
- buttons
- envelopes

Borrow supplies such as rubber stamps and templates from staff, family members, and volunteers until you can afford to buy your own.

An important tool is the use of templates. Basic cookie cutters are great for tracing ovals, hearts, etc. Templates are also available in many card-crafting books.

If you look on the back of any greeting card, you will see the stamp of the card maker. Our greeting cards are no exception. We have several labels that represent our signature. Most often it is "Made by the Card Crafters at Saint Elizabeth Court." Residents especially enjoyed being part of the decision-making regarding our "personal signatures."

As the years have gone by and we have perfected this activity, a computer and color copier have become invaluable. If you do not have these tools, don't let this stand in your way. Some of the most beautiful cards we have made are black and white with silver glitter glue.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ Contact stationery stores about donating their old card stock to your facility. Some stationery stores have donated hundreds of envelopes because the gum was of poor quality. We designed cards to fit the envelopes.
- ✓ Consider contacting a printing company, picture-framing company, and art supply stores and ask them for leftover card stock paper.
- ✓ Look for beautiful paper napkins, especially seasonal and holiday ones. Open the napkin and separate the tissue sections. What you are left with is a very thin tissue napkin. Rub a glue stick over the front of your greeting card in progress. Gently lay the napkin over the front of the card stock. After the glue dries, trim excess napkin. You will be amazed at the beauty. Add some glitter, ribbon, butterflies, or just a verse, and you have the start of a beautiful card.
- ✓ Based on your residents' skills, you may find it easy to type "Happy Birthday" or "Get Well" wishes on sheets of peel-and-stick labels. The verses can be typed in a business card format on the computer. That gives you full sheets of repeated verses.

If you are interested in starting a program in your facility, take some planning time, pick a start date, and have fun.

Karen is the Activity Director at Saint Elizabeth Court Assisted Living Community in Providence, RI. In addition to her full-time profession, she is a co-instructor at the Community College of Rhode Island. Karen resides in Warwick with her husband, Manuel, where they have raised six children together. CF