



THE GET WELL GANG

Warming Heads and Hearts of Cancer Patients Throughout Canada and Beyond

By Lorraine Payette

“To warm the heads and hearts of cancer patients”
- The Get Well Gang motto

A simple gift can sometimes lead to overwhelming joy for thousands of people. In Gretchen Huntley's case, it was a gift of a hat she made as a way to memorialize her dear friend, Celeste Rausch, and presented it to a relative of a friend who was dealing with cancer. Little did she know that this gesture would reach so many people.

“To date our group has donated over 27,000 caps across Canada and a few into the US,” said Huntley, founder of the Get Well Gang. “Our hats are shipped to over 72 locations across Canada.”

Huntley first hand crocheted a 100% cotton cap of her own design which she donated at the TD Bank in Gananoque in February, 2003.

“The first version was a bit awkward,” she said. After she received help writing it down, and

when people saw the finished product, they wanted to help.

Soon, several bank employees were crocheting caps and making them available for donation. Those who didn't crochet pitched in cash to help pay for shipping and distribution.

“I have no idea of the number of people who make hats, as they are spread far and wide across Canada,” says Huntley. “Many people just deliver the hats to their local cancer centres and drop me a note with the number of hats and the locations where they have delivered them. We have a large group of crafters in Ottawa, and a wonderful group in Brockville. In the spring of 2014, I had a little get together as a thank you, and we had about 30 people attend. They came from Gananoque, Kingston, Brockville, Ottawa and even Havelock.”

Thus the Get Well Gang was born. Knit patterns were developed, and there are now nine patterns available: two children's patterns (one each in knit and crochet), four women's (two knit, two crochet), two men's (one in crochet, one knit), and one unisex with optional flower. Patterns are free and anyone who can knit or crochet is encouraged to make and donate caps for the cause.

“Absolutely no money changes hands,” says Huntley. “These are gifts of caring from ‘The Get Well Gang’ to the recipient. To personalize the gift, each hat carries a card signed by the person who handcrafted the hat. Even people who don't crochet want to get involved, so some cards are signed by the person who generously donated the materials.”

To participate, buy a ball of 100% cotton, and then knit or crochet a hat using a pattern of your choice, or one from the selection on the website at www.getwellgang.ca. It is important that the hats be made of 100% cotton to guarantee maximum comfort for the recipient. Make sure to print out gift enclosure cards from the website, sign the front of the card, attach it to the hat, then donate the completed project and drop Huntley a note.

“That is all it takes,” says Huntley “no dues, no politics, no meetings – just a group of people who care, and want to give a little of themselves to someone going through a difficult time.”

Hats may be requested by contacting Huntley through the website, or through their Facebook page, or by picking them up at KRCC, or many of the cancer centres across Canada. The Get Well Gang is not a registered charity, therefore cannot provide tax receipts, but they do appreciate cash donations to help pay for shipping. They ask that crafters supply their own materials.

To learn more or to become involved as a Get Well Gang member/volunteer, please go to www.getwellgang.ca. LH