Small Gestures, Big Impact

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By Sheree Quiles

We often get so busy with the daily demands of work and life that we sometimes forget the big impact small gestures can make. But when a recent gas explosion on East 116th Street and Park Avenue caused two buildings to collapse, I was quickly reminded.

From the start, The Community Kitchen was alert to our clients' and community's needs. Immediately after the explosion, our staff began calling our registered local seniors to find out if they'd been impacted by the blast and to offer help if needed. Our director, Daryl Foriest, rushed to the Salvation Army as well to offer assistance and also delivered emergency pantry bags to the local public school. Four children affected by the explosion are students there. In a time of displacement, it's a blessing for their families not to have to worry about where the next meal will come from.

One of Food Bank's partners, Emblem Health, contacted me and arranged to send over a social worker to offer counseling to our clients. Antonio Ocasio arrived the next day and quietly sat with some of our seniors. His presence seemed to be reassuring. Although none of our senior clients were directly impacted by the explosion, many live in the neighborhood and have been emotionally affected by what happened. It's impossible not to be. That day was devastating, and our seniors are constantly reminded of the tragedy as they go about their daily lives.

A few days after the explosion, as I greeted new guests during our senior program's breakfast, a man named Mr. Bishop took my hands. He told me how grateful he felt when he received a reassuring phone call from us. He said the staff was warm, and made him feel special. Mr. Bishop's words made me pause, take a deep breath and gently squeeze his hands. I'm glad that our small gestures of caring had such a huge impact on him and all of our clients.

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