Donna Edmondson  
Volunteer Caregiver  
Faith in Action of the Greater Kanawha Valley  
Charleston, WV

I grew up in Clarksville Tennessee near Nashville, TN. At the age of 19, I became a  
professional model and this eventually led me to being cast as a Hee Haw Honey on a  
syndicated television show. I later married, had a daughter, and became a professional  
photographer. I volunteered a great deal at my daughter’s school and for Meals on  
Wheels.

When my daughter went away to college on the West Coast, I fell into a deep  
depression and had to give up volunteering for Meals on Wheels. I received all the  
health care possible and fought this extremely difficult illness for a year. Once I felt I was capable, I decided to serve as a volunteer again. Someone mentioned Faith in Action of the Greater Kanawha Valley, and it was the perfect match. After driving my first client to her appointment, I was hooked.

I enjoy making friends and the elderly I serve have so many life stories they love to  
share, but they are often desperate to have someone with whom to share. Of  
course, some clients I drive can be a real pain, too. However, I am good at handling all  
types of personalities and can always get a smile out of them. Many want to tell me  
everything, and often share personal things that they probably should keep to  
themselves. Nothing shocks me anymore, I’m like a doctor and I’m really good at  
keeping a straight face. Sharing time with them is often extremely entertaining.

Of course, many stories are heartbreaking. They have no family, or even if they do, their  
children are unwilling to help.

I have found it true that when you suffer from loneliness or depression (or anything  
mentally draining), serving others is a natural healer. Our Christian faith teaches us that  
serving is important; but serving is not beneficial only for the person being served, but  
also for the person who serves. I know that my work as a volunteer caregiver helped  
bring me out of my depression. I want so much for others to have this experience.

My dad was my inspiration for serving. My parents divorced when I was young, and my dad and my grandparents raised me. Every once in a while, my dad would take  
us kids to a nearby nursing home to visit with the older people living there, and then we  
would sing a few songs. Honestly, we never wanted to go but my dad made us. My dad  
is my role model, and his example of serving others stuck with me. He often would say  
“It’s a man’s walk, not their talk,” and I knew that to mean how solid of a person they  
were in their actions.

In our world, older people need so much compassion, attention, and help from those that will volunteer to serve. I will never understand why there is ever a lack of people willing to give of their time. It’s a parent’s responsibility not only to teach, but also to show their children by involving them in acts of service. I’m grateful I had that parent. Volunteering has taught me to keep my head up, and eyes open to all the ways I can help others.

Even though I mainly drive people to their appointments. I have become close friends  
with one of the people; I started driving many years ago. She has family in the area, but  
they have very little to do with her. Thankfully her brother will visit when he is in town.  
I’m her best friend, and she is certainly one of mine. I visit her three times a week when  
I’m not in Nashville now that she is in an assisted-living facility. With some of the friendships I have made, I cannot help but wonder...had I not been here, what would have happened to these incredible women?

I can’t put a price on the joy and peace I receive from volunteer caregiving. It’s a  
peace you get when you are helping someone in need. It feeds the soul in a way that no  
anti-depressant can.  
  
***Social Media Post #1***Finding the right service work that works for you is essential. Many people are prone to want to help children. Many seem to be fearful of the elderly—maybe because it  
reminds them about getting old themselves and dying. They do not find them as cute.  
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***Social Media Post #2***I cannot put a price on the joy and peace I receive from volunteer caregiving. It’s a  
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