

EVERYONE NEEDS TO BE NEEDED

REVOLUTIONARY COMMON SENSE
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We are all born helpers. Think of young children who try their hardest to help Daddy in the yard, or want to push the vacuum cleaner with their tiny hands. As we grow, we help with chores around the house. And at different points during our adolescence, we may decide we're not too keen on helping, but we usually do it anyway. As adults, we come full circle: we help because it feels good, because we believe in a cause or an organization, or because someone tells us they need our help. We *need* to care about others; to feel responsible for something or someone outside of ourselves. It feels good to be needed; *we need to be needed*—all of us.

Volunteering at church, being a youth leader, cleaning up a park, and a variety of other helping activities create that wonderful feeling of being needed. Helping also shifts our focus to others—we put our own dilemmas aside for awhile. In giving to others, we give ourselves a gift.

Sadly, we have exempted many children and adults with disabilities from both the responsibilities and joys of helping. We may feel they're unable to help. But this simply is not true!

When my son was in kindergarten, he used a manual wheelchair that he could push only for short distances. However, this didn't cause any real problems since his classmates were more than willing to help. In fact, they fought over who would have the *privilege of pushing!*

One day, Benj came home and said, "Mommy, I wish someone else in my class used a wheelchair." I thought he meant he didn't want to be the only one who was "different." But to be sure, I asked him why. He replied, "Cause I would like to help someone, too!" He saw how important his friends felt when they helped; Benj wanted to feel needed and important, too. From then on, we made sure to find ways Benj could help others. Because he had used a computer from a very young age, he was able to help his peers who didn't know much about computers.

*Nothing makes one
feel so strong as a
call for help.*

George McDonald

When people with disabilities are *expected* to help others, they will—like the rest of us—rise to the occasion. They'll feel needed, valuable, and important, just as other helpers do. But the benefits don't stop there. When we see what people with disabilities can

do to help others, we'll see abilities and strengths we didn't see before. We'll learn how competent people with disabilities really are. And when a person with a disability volunteers in the community, connections are formed and friendships are made, both of which can lead to employment, independent living, inclusion, and real lives.

We can no longer afford to deny people the pleasures and responsibilities of helping. Everyone has something to contribute. *Someone* needs the assistance of the child or adult with a disability in *your* life; create the opportunity and then share in the joy!