

# Journey of faith leads to helping special needs children

BY SUE DESAUTELS

As Clap Your Hands celebrates two years of community service, I am humbled by the journey of how this all began.

In the spring 2013:

"Do you love me?" the words that flooded my mind at 3

a.m. Waking up in the middle of the night for weeks was getting old fast. I remember thinking, "Is this menopause? Was this my new normal? Will I ever sleep through the night again?"

"Do you love me?" The question was like a constant ringing in my ear. Why that question? After many failed attempts at trying to get back to sleep, I slipped downstairs to pray. "Lord, you know I love you. What do you want me to do?"

An amusing thought came to my mind: "Buy a sewing machine." I actually giggled at the thought of buying a sewing machine. Do they even make sewing machines

anymore? I thought the only people who still sewed were hippies and cults. Where would I even go to buy one of those dinosaur machines?

Over the next few days I pondered the answer to my question. Each night I continued to wake up at 3 a.m. and each night my mind was flooded with the same question, "Do you love me?"

Again I left the comfort of my bed to go downstairs to pray, "Lord, I don't sew, I have no desire to sew, and I'm too old to learn to sew." Now I'm not seriously old, but too old to try something I have no interest in learning. After all, I didn't know if this was God's voice. I thought my arguments were valid, but when I became, quiet the voice was steady and constant, "Buy a sewing machine."

The next day, I casually mentioned it to my husband. "I think God wants me to buy a sewing machine." My husband looked confused and said, "Really?"

We both chuckled and feeling a little embarrassed, I stated, "I believe he wants me to buy it for someone else."

The very next day, Ron came home with an \$85 brother sewing machine from Wal-

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Mart. I took it upstairs to our office and waited on God to give me a name.

Sweet sleep lasted only a few weeks and then the 3 a.m. call began again. I tossed and turned until I finally gave in and went downstairs. I silenced my mind and began to pray. "Lord, I bought the sewing machine; I'm just waiting on you to give me a name."

When I finally fell silent, I heard the voice in my head say to me, "Open the box." I actually opened my eyes and looked around. Again and again the voice repeated, "Open the box. Open the box. OPEN THE BOX."

The next day I brought the sewing machine back downstairs and opened the box on my dining room table. I remember looking at the sewing machine and thinking, we will never be friends. I took out the owner's manual, only to be frustrated that I couldn't understand the directions. So

I did what any mature adult would do, I started to whine, "I can't do this."

A new thought came to my mind: Google the phrase "how to sew" on YouTube. The first lesson was how to thread your sewing machine. I watched that video 87 times. I remember thinking, "I'm going to be in my 80s before I finally learn to sew something."

Now what? Will I be able to help my special needs granddaughter become independent?

In spite of the original diagnosis we received about her disabilities, we all worked together to help her become the very best she could be.

Would learning to sew help her in her journey? I could now sew looped material into my granddaughter's pants, which could help her with dressing.

Feeling confident about my "looping" skills, I asked my granddaughter's therapists if they needed me to make them anything that required loops. They desperately needed therapeutic products that they could offer the children to comfort and calm them down, especially during stressful situations.

Back to Google again on "How to make a weighted

blanket." I became obsessed with trying to learn new ways to make therapeutic products for the children in our local community.

I asked my friends if they wanted to help.

My mother, (who is 87 years young), had not sewn in more than 50 years, but she decided she wanted to help and she went out and bought a sewing machine of her own.

I believe God gave me an amazing team of dedicated volunteers. Each one is gifted in a particular area to make the best product for "our" kids.

I never had any intention of becoming nonprofit until a young man came into my life. Rex Porter was friends with one of my therapists. He was home on a medical leave but wanted to have a purpose, to make a difference. He came to my home one evening with his friend to see how he could help. He had so many great ideas. He told us we had to become nonprofit.

Up to this point, my volunteers and I were using our own money to make our products, but it was becoming more and more challenging. Rex was elected as our public relations officer.

Even though he was battling

cancer, he spoke to quilting guilds, sat through meetings and poured over the legality's of becoming a 501c(3) nonprofit.

Rex passed away this summer, but he definitely left an impact on all of our lives and he will be greatly missed.

We were once told that our granddaughter may never clap her hands, yet she claps every day for herself and others. She is my inspiration and the reason why we are called Clap Your Hands.

We celebrated our one-year anniversary of becoming nonprofit in November. We began this year with a goal of donating 800 therapeutic products. As of Sept. 30 we have donated 820 products to our local community. We are honored and humbled to be able to do what we do.

I humbly believe that God opened this door for us to walk through, and we are excited to see where Clap Your Hands goes in 2016 and beyond.

**Sue Desautels** is founder and executive director of Clap Your Hands. She and her husband, Ron, live in Summerville with her mother, Pat. They have four children and 10 grandchildren.



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