

EDITOR'S NOTE

As a child, whenever Christmas drew near, I looked forward to watching *A Charlie Brown Christmas* on TV. In the holiday special, Charlie Brown is feeling down despite the Christmas season and bemoans its commercialism.



**CHARLOTTE
KELLEY**

To lift his spirits, Charlie goes with his friend Linus to look for a tree for the school's Christmas play. However, the small tree he selects doesn't go over well with the other kids, who are all looking forward to a great big, shiny aluminum tree.

"I'll show them," Charlie says, bringing the little tree home to fix it up into something grand.

But his attempts fail, and his little tree sags to the ground from just one ornament. "Everything I touch gets ruined," he says, and walks away.

But Linus approaches the sad tree, and says, "I never thought it was such a bad little tree. ... Maybe it just needs a little love." He then takes his blanket and lovingly wraps it around the bottom of the tree, perking the sapling right up. The other kids follow suit, decorate the tree and within seconds, a glorious, thriving tree takes shape.

And that's all it took: just one person who believed in that little tree to start the chain to bring it fully to life.

In this issue of *Health Progress*, themed on Helping Youth Thrive, I encountered stories throughout Catholic health care and community partners about how just one mentor or advocate in a young person's life, someone who believes in them and their potential, can help them flourish.

In her article about the Community Advocacy Project for Students in Lubbock, Texas, Amy Onofre, the program's director, explains how the initiative pairs advocates with at-risk students at their schools to help kids set goals and navigate academic and life struggles, letting them know their voices matter. In another article, Sr. Lisa Maurer, OSB, director of mission integration and formation for Duluth Benedictine Ministries, who also

serves as an assistant football coach at the College of St. Scholastica in Minnesota, talks about the importance of having a value-laden playbook for life, especially when working with young people. Having one, she notes, can encourage youth to think about the values most important to them so they can confidently make decisions.

In another story about career training and job shadowing in Catholic health care for middle and high school students, we learn how experiencing just one day imagining themselves as health care professionals can transform a child's dreams. When asked if he had known what a physician assistant was before spending a day with one particular program, a student answers, "No, but I'm going to do it."

Also, thriving doesn't stop when we get older, it only continues, as evidenced by writer David Lewellen's article about intergenerational programs to pair younger and older people together. Whether by connecting generations through housing, art collaborations or in children's classrooms, both younger and older participants gain social connection and meaning in their lives. "We give them power; they give us power," says one older resident about the young children she encounters daily in her intergenerational living facility.

Even as I started planning this issue, *Health Progress* Editor Betsy Taylor began an academic leave to pursue professional development. Her endeavor is just another example of how we continue to flourish in all stages of life.

So, as some of you may start to see your own Christmas trees close in on their final days in the New Year, look around to see if there are any opportunities where you can help spark new life and hope. After all, providing love and a listening ear to those around us never goes out of season.

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