


## Angels Among Us

**IN THE CLASSIC** holiday movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey obtains his wings from his guardian angel, Clarence, on Christmas Eve. However, there are angels among us, dispensing wings in the form of kind acts to those in need every day of the year.

Founded in 2002, the Wayland Angels is the brainchild of Pam Washek. Grateful for the support of friends and family throughout her battle with cancer, she wondered what happened during a crisis to people who were new to the community or were reluctant to reach out for help. Pam contacted the network of friends and family who had provided meals and rides for her, asking if they wanted to continue to support their neighbors in need. Their response was the beginning of the Wayland Angels organization. Wayland was one of the very first recipient communities created at Lotsa Helping Hands, a web-based service for caregivers nationwide and abroad to organize the efforts of family and friends during a crisis. The Angels rely on Lotsa Helping Hands to schedule the required activities of recipients and the volunteers who serve them.

Shortly after the creation of the Wayland Angels, Sudbury resident Susan Grayson-Johnson found herself facing breast cancer. After a devastating reaction to Lipitor left her unable to walk, she, too, was overwhelmed by the kindness of neighbors and loved ones. She wanted to give back, but wasn't sure how. An article in the local newspaper about the Wayland Angels led Grayson-Johnson to contact Pam Washek, who suggested that she start the Sudbury Angels, which debuted in May of 2005.



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The beauty of both organizations is that volunteers can give as little or as much time as they have available on an ad-hoc basis, once a week or once a year. Their mission is to help families with short-term, non-medical emergencies. There is no pressure or obligation after sign-up. An email is automatically sent to all Angels by "activity" or required task, and those who are able to participate do so within the confines of their own schedules. Volunteers provide meals, local transportation, shopping, pet care, errands, or even something as simple as sending a

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greeting card or arranging a visit. Recipients are encouraged to identify themselves, although it is not required, since people are usually more willing to help those they know.

The typical duration of an assignment is three months, at which point the situation is reassessed by a coordinator who determines whether or not the family merits additional support. Financial need is never a con-



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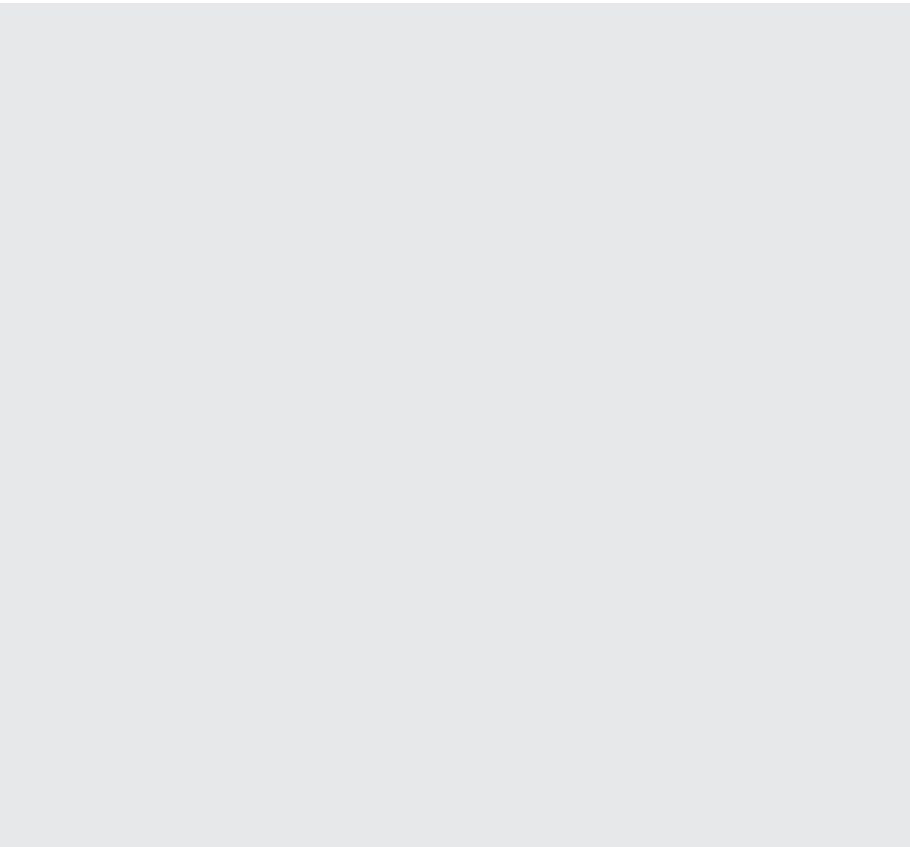
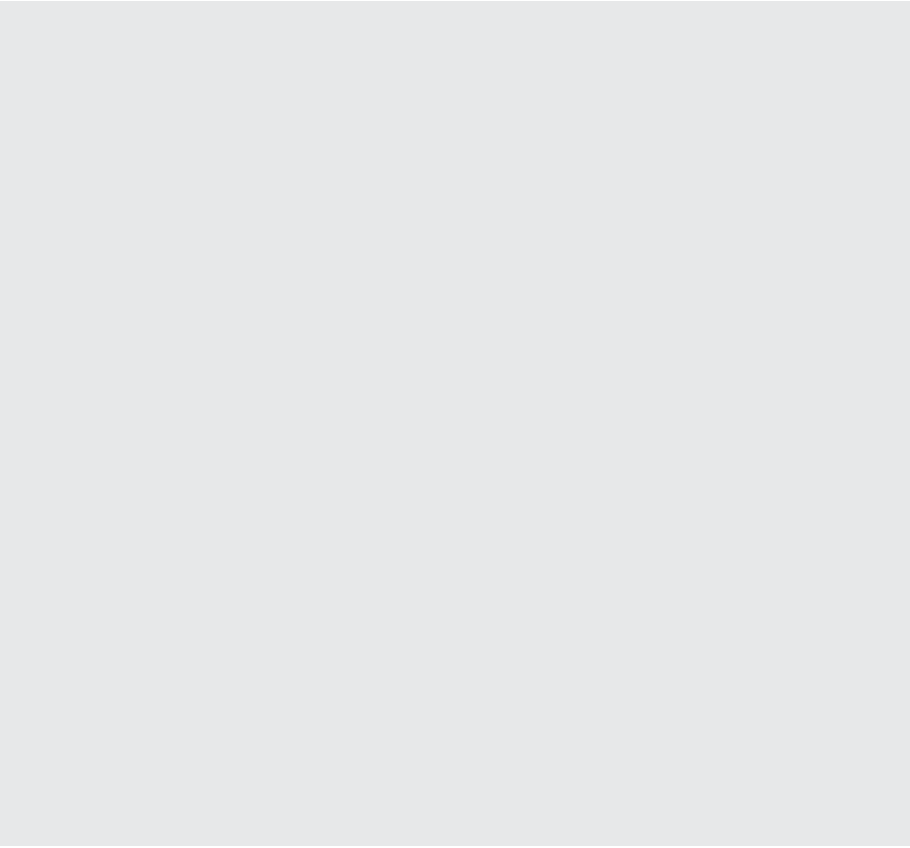


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sideration. The Angels community tends to increase whenever a new recipient is added; new volunteers join and usually stay on. Recipients are typically so grateful for the support that they often sign up as Angels themselves, once they regain their health. While the concept of neighbors helping neighbors has not changed much since the days of our parents and grandparents, the method of communication has evolved from word of mouth to the use of email.

According to Washek, the ideal population of a town served by the Angels is between 8,000 and 20,000, simply from a management and logistics perspective. Therefore, it lends itself well to a suburban environment. There are Angels organizations with a total of approximately 2,000 volunteers in the neighboring towns of Concord, Carlisle, Bedford, and Wrentham, to name a few. While they are all based on the same model, town dynamics dictate how the organization will function on a day-to-day basis. For example, the Sudbury Angels have a thriving high school and middle school program, aptly named the Angels on Earth, while the Wayland Angels field transportation requests for patients from Boston-based hospitals. This is dictated by the professions, skills, and personalities of the volunteers, who give a unique flair to each Angels organization.

Wayland residents, pioneers of the Angels volunteer community under the direction of Washek, continue to rally around their own.




One of the original volunteers, Jacqui Brisson found herself on the receiving end of the Angels' generosity and marvels at the unending kindness of complete strangers and the unbelievable feeling of being so connected to the community through the outpouring of support. The meals, flowers, and groceries she received gave her caregivers the time to focus on other priorities during her illness. Another Angels recipient characterized it in this way, "While I focus on my kids, the Angels community is taking care of me."


Grayson-Johnson says she has been accused of being a Pollyanna, a role that she happily accepts. "Everyone has something to give. This is not a movie; this is a real-life pay-it-forward. Kids can learn a valuable lesson from parents who role-model charitable behavior." Listening to her speak about the Angels, it is clear that it is more than just a hobby; it's truly her life's passion. Stories abound about the program, from the gratitude of the blind man who needed rides to visit his wife in a rehabilitation hospital or the college-aged boys who gave blood to the American Red Cross on behalf of a local youth after the Angels helped their mother. Ellen Sutherland, who suffers from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), was able to attend her daughter's dance recital, thanks to the generosity of an Angels volunteer who had a van able to accommodate her wheel-chair.

When describing the Sudbury Angels, Colleen Logomasini sums it up well by saying, "Whatever they need, I'll do with great pleas-



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ure.” Logomasini is a Visiting Angel, a registered volunteer who does not live in Sudbury, but works here. She owns the Personalities Spa in Sudbury and provides manicures and pedicures to Angel recipients going through chemotherapy.

When asked how they envision the Angels organization to look in 10 years, Washek and Grayson-Johnson agree. They would love to see the Angels become a household name, with an Angels community in every town in Massachusetts. They both hope volunteerism will become a way of life for all of us. With their tenacity and dedication to helping those in need, there is no doubt these Angels have earned their wings many times over. 

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT:**  
[www.waylandangels.org](http://www.waylandangels.org)  
[www.sudburyangels.org](http://www.sudburyangels.org)

