

About Giving Gifts to Staff

Extendicare is in the business of bolstering hearts, not bruising them. Yet hurt feelings and embarrassment are sometimes the result when family members offer gifts to staff members as a gesture of thanks for the care and service provided to a resident . . . and to their surprise are met with the response, “Thanks, but I’m afraid I can’t accept this.”

Far from being hard-hearted, the *Standards of Conduct* — formed by Extendicare more than 20 years ago — prohibit staff members from accepting gifts or tips solely to reassure residents and families that quality of care can in no way be influenced by gift-giving. It’s a sound, sensible policy that reflects the spirit of our commitment to residents, and we continue to stand by it today.

But let’s just pause a moment. There are gifts and then there are gifts. The *Standards of Conduct* are not intended, for example, to stop an appreciative family from bringing a bouquet of flowers, basket of fruit or box of chocolate for the enjoyment of all staff. And therein lies the key to this delicate issue: the enjoyment of *all* staff. While it’s natural for families to develop a relationship with a specific staff member such as a health care aide, it’s also important to remember that in fact it’s *teamwork* that makes good care possible. The aide would be first to tell you about the staff behind the scenes — in the kitchen, laundry or office, or on the night shift — who also contribute to each resident’s quality of life.

We hope that explains why your big-hearted gesture of thanks to a staff member may have been met with a puzzling response — and why it’s difficult for us to make exceptions without setting a precedent and compromising the well-being of all who live and work in the home.

Then we have the families who are determined to do their hearts’ bidding, and have exercised a great deal of imagination in the way they honour Extendicare’s *Standards of Conduct* while still making their appreciation felt. Here are some examples of what has worked for families and our long-term care homes in the past, and what might work for you:

- The power of the written word: countless families have written letters to the administrator to thank staff for their efforts; some copy the vice president (whose name and address appear on Extendicare’s “We Want to Hear From You” quality assurance cards).
- Most homes have family/community advisory boards that support resident activities; some boards even have charitable status. A donation to the board would benefit both residents and staff.
- Similarly, many homes have active residents’ councils that are often working enthusiastically to fund a special project.
- Families at several homes donate money to the staff Christmas party; others make a donation to the local Alzheimer association on the residents’ and staff’s behalf.
- Families may choose to donate or bequest money to the home itself for whatever purpose they desire, or to fund a project currently underway at the home. If the home has charitable status, a tax receipt can be issued for a cash donation. Please speak with the administrator if you would like more information about this kind of gift. Projects have included wheelchairs, televisions, stereo equipment, pianos, art, books, indoor and outdoor furniture, and more. Also, some families have chosen to donate the item itself instead of donating money. (Regretfully, homes are not allowed to issue tax receipts for this kind of donation or bequest.)

And now — allow us to take this opportunity to pass along our heartfelt thanks to all of *you*, our wonderful families, who have been so good to us over the years!