

Weaving the Social Web: Threads Guild Community Contributions

Article by Moe Lyons, November 2021

When most of us think of the Threads Guild, we no doubt picture the annual Yard and Yardage sale: cheerful, productive women with meters and meters of leftover material, rescued perennials and tasty treats. We picture them industriously creating wonderful quilts, tending profuse gardens, and sitting together knitting while chatting up a storm.

And of course we'd be right. What we wouldn't know is that there is so much more.

The initial intent of the organization was not only social but practical, in that they could buy their supplies in quantity. This was not, however, just any stereotypical group of women focused on domestic tasks, but a bunch of movers and shakers. Before too long they became involved in the community in many more ways than merely its beautification.

I recently had a conversation with Val Mayes, President of the Guild, who first joined up in 2007. She filled me in on the Guild's social initiatives.

From the beginning, this was a broad-based organization. "It was always about getting people together," says Mayes, "teaching, skill-sharing, spreading knowledge around, sharing the joy." Yard and Yardage, for example, is more than a fundraiser. It's a chance for people to get really good stuff at affordable prices. It's a social occasion, part of community support and outreach.

Since 2010, Guild members have participated in "CLICK for Babies." This is a North American grassroots campaign designed to help caregivers and babies make it through what the group calls "the period of PURPLE crying." These are the early days, when babies cry a tremendous amount and nearly drive the people around them mad, thus sometimes being in serious danger of shaking and abuse.



Knitted and Crocheted Hats from 2012

The organization invites knitters, crocheters and crafters to create purple caps and booties, which are then distributed to hospitals and birth centres in November and December, along with the *Period of PURPLE Crying* resources. These are then handed out to new parents.

The program has a two-fold intent. One is to raise awareness and stimulate conversation amongst the people involved in producing and distributing the materials. The main purpose is to provide a visual reminder to the parents. When they are having a difficult time coping, they see the purple caps and booties and remember what they learned in the hospital about normal, early increased crying, and can refer to the materials they have received. “I wish somebody had told me about this when I was in that place,” Mayes said.

“One of the great things about this project,” she continues, “is that knitting a hat is a really good practice project, a way for people to learn a new skill. And we provide the yarn for people if they need it.” Over the years the Guild has provided over 200 hats.

Another fun and fabulous activity the knitters and crocheters engage in is creating Knitted Knockers. These are special handmade breast prostheses for women who have undergone mastectomies or other procedures to the breast. Guild members create the shapes, which are then shipped off to be stuffed.

According to their literature, “Knitted knockers ... are soft, comfortable, beautiful and when placed in a regular bra they take the shape and feel of a real breast. Knitted knockers can also be used to fill the gap for breasts that are uneven and easily adapted for those going through reconstruction by simply removing some of the stuffing.”



The idea came to the Guild three or four years ago through member Joanne Bieler, currently of Nelson, who had heard about the Knockers from Sheryl Richmond, the local coordinator. Sheryl says she would love more people to get involved, and she supplies the materials locally. People can contact her at sherylnia@telus.net if they'd like to get in on producing these delightful little items. “They're great to create while travelling!” she says.

They are made in a full range of sizes, and use a very specific pattern. The organization provides the wool, mostly in “flesh” tones, although if someone wanted a wild psychedelic colour scheme they could probably be accommodated. They are free to recipients by going to <https://knittedknockerscanada.com/>, where folks can also find patterns and video tutorials to make some themselves.

Since 2012, the Guild has underwritten a magazine subscription at the Nelson and District Public Library. It used to be “Threads” magazine, but it is no longer available so currently the subscription is for “Quilting Arts.” The library saves back issues and at the end of the year gives them to the Guild, which makes them available to members and others. Mayes says what people want to be doing goes in waves, and right now there is a high level of interest in quilting.



A big annual push is creating beautiful items to go in the W.E. Graham Community Services Society Holiday Hampers. This is the third year the Guild has been participating in this effort. People can make whatever they want, and offerings range from scarves, hats and mitts to cloth gift bags, serviettes, dish cloths, table runners and decorations, adding a definite festive note to the seasonal hampers.



The organization also rises to the occasion when there is a need. Guild members have been the contact or collection agency for other charity drives, such as cloth dolls for African children, quilts for people in Australia after the bushfires, and quilts for Lytton and other parts of BC after 2021’s devastating forest fires. Members are also very conscious about sharing and the environment. As Mayes says, “At Yard and Yardage, we get to share our plants with the community. And we are very aware that all that material is being kept out of the landfill, and being sent around again.”

“We’ve always felt that the Threads Guild was about community: weaving people together,” says Mayes. “The community supports us, and we support the community.” With over 90 members, they can get a lot done.