



Is your altruism myopic?

By virtue of the fact that you are reading this particular article in this particular publication, it is reasonably safe to assume that you are either a member or a friend of the American Counseling Association. As such, you have often heard the analogy that ACA is like a family. The members and friends of ACA share many common beliefs about and are committed to helping people in need. This is one of the answers most often given when graduate students are asked why they have chosen the counseling profession or when those with many years of practice are asked what drew them to and kept them in the profession. They want to help people. They are altruists in the best sense of the word.

According to the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, fourth edition, the definition of altruism is an “unselfish concern for the welfare of others, selflessness” or “instinctive cooperative behavior that is detrimental to the individual but contributes to the survival of the species.”

As with most things that are basically good, however, there are sometimes holes or blind spots in our definition or comprehension of altruism. For many of us, one such hole, blind spot or anomaly is that when we think of altruism, we stop at the first part of the definition. We look only outside of the ACA family in our concern for the welfare of others. We see the homeless, the individuals experiencing emotional, interpersonal, intrapersonal or developmental pain, but we often overlook members of our family. Further, we do this to such a degree that it is detrimental “to the individual” (in this case, the counseling profession itself).

The ACA Foundation is committed to seeing to it that those who are in need survive. We also recognize that to make certain that happens, the

profession itself, and the practitioners within the profession, must survive. Stated somewhat differently, the ACA Foundation believes we can do more as a family or group than we can accomplish as a bunch of individuals.

Whether it is assisting graduate students through scholarships, making certain that counselors who work with children in need have reading resources through our Growing Happy and Confident Kids program, helping colleagues who have experienced a disaster get back into practice through our Counselors Care Fund or giving special recognition to those individuals who have done an exemplary job within the profession, the ACA Foundation nurtures members of the counseling profession. In turn, this helps them to help others.

Being a family, the ACA Foundation depends on ACA members and friends to contribute to these programs in order to sustain them. It serves as a repository for the contributions from members over time so we can assist members when the need arises. If we had 45,000 members who each contributed \$5 per year, we would have slightly less than one-quarter of a million dollars each and every year to sustain our profession through the programs mentioned previously.

That is less than two cups of Starbucks coffee per member. How about it? Would you be willing to do your part toward that end? There is a spot on your ACA membership renewal form to indicate your contribution to the ACA Foundation. Please give it your serious consideration! ♦

Howard B. Smith is immediate past chair of the ACA Foundation.