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## **LINK-N-LEOS OFFER PEER SUPPORT THROUGH BLANKET DONATION**

**LATROBE, PA., December 13, 2013...** Peer support can be a valuable tool when children and adolescents are under emotional stress. Youth receiving care from the Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Unit at Excelsa Health Latrobe Hospital will experience that empathy through a warm, fleece blanket thanks to members of the Link-N-Leo Club of North Huntingdon. The club donated 25 handmade blankets December 2.

Two Link-N-Leos officers and club advisor, Phyllis Werder, presented the blankets to Judy Welty, clinical coordinator, Nursing and Diane Wilson, case worker. The club made the blankets in various sizes and patterns; each blanket was individually wrapped in a holiday theme.

“It is a great feeling to bring comfort to these children and help others,” said Kira Eaiertl, senior at Norwin High School and current president of the Link-N-Leos.

The group wanted to sponsor a project separate from their normal volunteering with the community food bank. A member pitched the idea of making blankets, and the group embraced it. They hoped to focus on helping children and contacted Excelsa Health searching for an opportunity; the Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Unit eagerly accepted the donation.

“We completed all of the blankets in just hours,” said Mike Grott, a senior at Hempfield High School and current vice president of the club. “Some of the adult Lions volunteered to work with us and that was a great help.”

The Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Unit plans to give patients a blanket to keep with them during their stay on the unit. The staff intends to record reactions and feedback from the children to send back to the Link-N-Leos.

“Some of these children have to take care of themselves; many feel alienated or bullied or feel like no one cares about them,” said Welty. “When we give them these blankets and tell them that someone from their peer group made it for them, it will help them feel like someone cares about them.”

The Link-N-Leos club plans to expand the program to include the opportunity for people to sponsor blankets for children. The leadership also plans to present the program to other Leo clubs in the area to encourage their participation.

The Link-N-Leos were chartered in 2011 and are sponsored by the Irwin Lions Club, the Norwin Lions Club, and the Stewartsville Lions Club. Adolescents ages 12 to 18 are able to join as the club logs service hours with the Norwin Food Bank and assists Lions Club members with their projects and activities. The Lions clubs hope that membership in the Leos will encourage participation in the Lions later in life.