

TOMNET Support Sticks

An old man is dying. He calls his people to his side. He gives a short, sturdy stick to each of his many offspring, wives and relatives. "Break the stick" he instructs them. With some effort, they all snap their sticks in half.

"That's how it is when a soul is alone and without anyone. They can be easily broken.

The old man next gives each of his kin another stick, and says, "This is how I would like you to live after I pass. Tie your sticks together in bundles of twos and threes". He waits quietly as his family ties the sticks together. There are many bundles, some of two sticks, some of three sticks. "Now, break these bundles in half."

No one can break the sticks when there are two or more in a bundle. The old man smiles. "We are strong when we stand with another soul. When we are with others, we cannot be broken." *

We are strong when we stand together and support one another. This sentiment is synonymous with older men supporting older men in TOMNET without doubt. Encapsulated in the points below are TOMNET - like support features commonly experienced by its members.

- Social inclusion and integration, the uniting and combing of men into an all inclusive network.
- A feeling of embeddedness with a sense of legitimate belongingness.
- Perceived availability of help and support both anticipated and received when required.
- An interactive experience that generates altruism where concern for others prevails, often with a sense of moral obligation.
- An appreciation of reciprocity and mutual exchange of support.
- A range of resources provided by others and the self.
- Special assistance to cope in difficult times.
- Exchange of specific personal resources with generosity of spirit.
- Instrumental support that includes tangible giving, informational support and emotional support.

Basically, TOMNET-type support is at two fundamental levels where the health and well-being of men is enhanced by direct and specific acts at an interpersonal level and the consequences of their participation in a meaningful social context may be equally or even more life enhancing. It could be argued that being embedded in a positive social network adds another dimension to the giving and receiving of particular supportive activity that is commonplace in Tomnet.

In TOMNET we tie the sticks together. Bundles of two and threes and many more are conspicuous by their number. It is this plentiful bundling that is made available to all older men in our community.

All enquiries welcome.

* A story by Clarissa Pinkola Estes and quoted by David Kuhl, MD in "What Dying People Want".

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