

COOPERATION, AN UNDERRATED VALUE

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ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORAH TINT

By Cynthia Blayer

Last January, when the local temperature hovered around ten degrees, my building and several others were affected by a nearby water-main break. No water for several days, the DEP outside drilling round the clock—first trying to locate the break and then fix it. We brought them coffee and donuts at night and thanked them. We learned that our local representative was posting updates on Facebook, through a group called Park Slope Together. I joined.

The situation was resolved and I continued to check Park Slope Together from time to time. Questions about physical therapist recommendations, restaurants, housing, lost

pets and injured family members were met with numerous helpful answers. Someone wrote about their neighbor, a recently widowed woman who was deeply depressed by the loss of her husband, hadn't had a job in many years and had not handled her own financial matters. Within minutes people chimed in—one person recommended a widows' support group, another offered to craft the woman's resume. Another time someone posted about an injured street cat they wanted to help but had no car to get to a vet. Soon several people with cars asked for the location and volunteered to stop by. Someone had a cat carrier—help was on the way.

It's a good feeling to be part of a community that tries to help one another. Park Slope Food Coop was started for this reason. Almost 50 years ago, 12 friends and neighbors began the Coop, so that people in the community could work together to have healthy food available at reasonable prices.

At a recent General Meeting, some of that cooperative spirit was evident in the vote to bring back childcare, which passed 134 to 18. When some staff members expressed concern about the additional work this would create for them, the couple who presented the issue—both teachers, and parents of two young kids—volunteered their time and that of other parents they knew to make it work. They would help in any way they could—cleaning and setting up the childcare room, staffing it and starting a committee to oversee things.

When some pointed out that people needing childcare at the Coop were in the minority of the overall membership, General Manager Joe Holtz said that “as a cooperative all voices count, even when they are not in the majority.”

And we do all get to have our say—at General Meetings, in letters to the *Gazette*, by voting. But then we have to put aside our differences and cooperate and come up with a workable solution for the greater good. The effects of lack of cooperation can be seen regularly in the outside world—mass layoffs and millions without health insurance, pollution rather than sustainability, war. But we can do better. In our relatively small community at PSFC, we can put aside polarizing anger and work together coop-

eratively. In the end, only cooperation will save the day.

Cynthia Blayer, a longtime coop member, has served on the Environmental Committee and as a board member of the Mid-Atlantic Food Cooperative Alliance (MAFCA).