‘Tis the season of giving, receiving, generosity, kindness, and thinking of others. As we play with the new gifts we have received over the holidays and think about the year ahead, there is one story I would like to share with you. This story reminds me of the impact we have on each other’s lives. It reminds me of the type of life I want to live in the New Year.

In March, a long-time 4-H supporter named Rhonda indicated she would like us to find someone who would benefit from going to 4-H overnight camp, could not afford it, and would enjoy the experience. Out of the goodness of her heart, and because God had blessed her, she wanted to pay for this child to attend camp. Although we have many youth who come through our program, finding the right one was difficult. However, in the last moment it all came together.

We met Chris and his mother, Wanda, when a 4-H family asked Chris to take their place during a day camp. Chris was a little shy to start with, but that didn’t last long. As we introduced him to the others, Wanda told us what a blessing this had been. Times were tough for their family, with her husband unemployed and illness, and for her son to have this opportunity, it was just a blessing and she genuinely appreciated it. You just couldn’t help but fall in love with Chris. He was a typical 11-year-old boy having fun, but he always was polite and respectful, genuinely appreciative of this opportunity.

One topic the kids talked about a lot was weeklong overnight camp at Betsy-Jeff Penn in Reidsville, N.C. The youth told Chris about the camp like it was a faraway magical place. They really wanted him to be a part of it. Now mind you, even with the help of United Way funds, it is more than $300 per child to attend. You could tell Chris really wanted to go, but he knew that it was something his family could not afford, so he did not even ask his parents about it.

Suddenly the spark hit us. We remembered Rhonda’s gracious offer to sponsor a child. After a flurry of calls to reach Wanda, we explained we had a sponsor if Chris wanted to go to camp. Wanda very quietly and sadly said, “I know he would love to go to camp. He loves you all so, but we just cannot afford to send him.” Quickly, we jumped in and explained we had someone who would pay for him to go. It took her less than 20 minutes to get to our office, accept the offer, and
pick up the paperwork. She was grinning from ear to ear and had tears of joy coming from her eyes. She kept telling us that we just didn’t know what a blessing this was. Apparently, when she talked to her husband about the camp, he also had some good news; he had gotten a job and would begin work the following week. She said it was as if this call was the turning point in their lives. We were in tears by the time she left.

Chris went to camp and had the time of his life. He did all the regular stuff, like swimming and archery, but more importantly, he gained life skills, which have made him an even stronger person. Wanda says Chris is still talking about camp and says it was, “The best experience of his life.” There is one thing left to do. Chris and Wanda want to meet the lady who sent him to camp. Rhonda, Wanda, and Chris are going to meet for this first time this week. Each of them gained something incredible from this experience; Rhonda positively impacted a child’s life and future. Wanda received renewed hope that there are people out there, complete strangers, who will be there for you. Chris got to go to camp, but that is not the biggest thing he gained. He experienced something that would not have been possible if it had not been for the generosity of a complete stranger who cared about him before she met him. That is something that will stay with him for the rest of his life, and Chris will be giving back to others in the future and receiving the greatest gift of all.

Being able to witness this happen and share it with you is the greatest gift I could give and receive. Just something to think about as we ring in the New Year.

For more information about 4-H, please contact Shea Ann DeJarnette, Extension 4-H agent with North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at 671-3276, by E-mail at Shea_Ann_DeJarnette@ncsu.edu, or visit our website at http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.