



# Inspiring Kindness

*Spotlighting members who Give Back to their communities*

## Elaine Blair Devotes

**Local 1180 Coordinating Manager Elaine Blair knows that it takes more than one person to raise a child — and it takes a whole village to do it successfully.**

**Just one year after Elaine was born in Jamaica, West Indies, her mother passed away during child birth, leaving behind her and three siblings. Her grandparents immediately stepped in to raise them until Elaine, at the age of 22, moved to the United States.**



**Pictured above,** Elaine Blair walking in the Breast Cancer Walk with members of the NEC Medical Cadet Corps.

**Opposite page,** Elaine delivering food during the pandemic, and with her triumphant soccer team and their families.

Elaine grew up in a family-oriented community where everyone believed in looking out for one another — and that is how she lives her life today.

“I was taught to help each other in the community while I was growing up. My family was farmers and I would often see how they were always giving to those in need in the community, and how my grandfather and grandmother would have us take things to other people who had less than us,” she said.

One specific childhood memory is truly what brings Elaine to give so much back to her community today.

“I went to visit some family members in the city of Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies. One of my cousins took me to a place called Riverton City, one of the poorest neighborhoods, where people would take food from the dump to eat and feed their family. I decided that if I ever get rich, I will help those who are in need,” she said.

Emigrating to America was not easy for Elaine. When she arrived, her father arranged for her to live with her half-siblings, who did not treat her well, except for one brother who stood up for her from time to time. One of her father’s friends and his wife took her under their wings and helped her assimilate to her new surroundings. They even took her daily to fill out job applications until she finally landed her first job at Alexander’s Department Store.

“I was determined to make the best of the challenges I was facing, so I enrolled in a GED program while working and taking all the free certificate classes to get me qualified for the workforce, knowing I left two children behind in Jamaica to care for,” she said.

After Elaine got her GED, she then enrolled in BMCC, where she completed her associate’s degree in Business Administration before moving on to John Jay College of Criminal Justice for her bachelor’s degree in Forensic Psychology.

After getting her children from Jamaica and then tying the knot, one of the first places she lived in New York City was Detective Keith L. Williams Park, a block from Liberty Park. It was not the best of neighborhoods, and Elaine was constantly worried about not only her own children, but all the other children in the area, too.

“It was not such a lovely place to live. Drugs and killings used to happen in the park at nights, so I would make sure I was with my children when they needed to go there in the evenings,” Elaine said. “I prayed that one day this park would be a better place for the new generation.”

Elaine was predisposed to make the best of her situation and focused on ensuring her children felt confident and safe enough to succeed.

In 1993, Elaine started working for the City of New York and five years later, in 1998, moved her family to St. Albans, a five-minute drive from Detective Keith L. Williams Park.

“All this time, I was still giving back to the community,” she said. “Also, some of my family in Jamaica depend on me for support on a monthly basis, especially my older sister who is sick.”

She joined a local church to get involved in her community and started volunteering for a variety of CWA Local 1180 events and attending meetings — all of which further fueled her love for community involvement. Her marriage lasted for 17 years before ending with disappointment, leaving her to care for her four children with no family behind her for support. With God’s help, her determined spirit, and some of her church family, she continued to forge ahead, all while still helping those around her who were less fortunate.

That wasn’t enough, however, for the girl whose life got off to a rough start. With two completed college degrees in hand raising her children as a single parent, Elaine enrolled in the Murphy Institute (now the CUNY School for Labor and Urban Studies) for her master’s degree in Labor Studies.

While Elaine certainly would not consider herself part of the 1%, she is definitely one of the richest people in her community when it comes to kindness, passion, authenticity, friendships, and most of all, gratitude.

In exchange for all that life has given her, Elaine has been paying it forward ever since she came to America. She has donated time at a food pantry, volunteered during Hurricane Sandy, 9/11, and H1N1, is currently part of the Northeastern Medical Missionary Corps that works hand in hand with FEMA, the Red Cross, and other organizations during emergencies, and is also a member of NY Communities for Change.

Elaine’s upbringing, combined with her love of all things, sports, are what led her to give back to her community in the first place. Growing up, she was passionate about sports, competing in track and field, and playing netball (similar to American basketball) all the way through high school. She also played soccer and volleyball for fun. Upon arriving in this country, she continued to get involved in sports with the Northeastern Conference of Seventh Day Adventists Youth Department. Of course, Elaine’s children also played a variety of sports.

This is a new Communique feature spotlighting members who are committed to Giving Back to their communities. If you or someone you know would like to be featured, please send an email to [mrosenblum@cwa1180.org](mailto:mrosenblum@cwa1180.org) with your name, contact information, and your "story".

By Marci Rosenblum, Communications Director

# Her Life to Helping Others

From an early age, Elaine clearly has been a go-getter and "volunteer" seems to be her middle name.

In 2016, one of Elaine's church sisters asked her to join a soccer team she was forming in Queens. Since the sport was one she had played only for fun as a youngster, she was excited to give it a try. Little did Elaine know that she would end up as the team's acting manager.

The following year, Elaine was asked to coordinate the Queens Players Athletic Clinic (PAC). "I agreed with excitement, not knowing what I was getting myself into," she said.

Elaine started out with one coach and her own fledgling and inexperienced soccer team of just two players, with the expectation of recruiting additional players and preparing her new team to play against other teams in Brooklyn, the Bronx, New Jersey, and Long Island.

"I was on my own with the coach, it was disappointing, but I was willing to take on the challenge to build the team and give back to my community," she said. "I choose this neighborhood because there is a need to get our children involved socially, especially those who are less fortunate can't afford the cost."

She knew her team was playing against other teams that had been playing for years and that "we had a slim chance in winning," she said. "I decided that if we can't win in the match, we will win in the parade. I created the logo, the theme for the banner, and wrote the song. We won that year and continued every year."

Fast forward several years and she now finds herself not only coaching a full team of children ages three to 13 that brought home three medals this year alone, but she is also the Queens Soccer Commissioner for the adult league and Coordinator for the children's soccer league.

When there was not enough money to purchase trophies for her mighty team of winning soccer warriors this year, Elaine reached out to her local State Senator Leroy Comrie for certificates — and reached into her own pocket to purchase trophies.

She currently has 25 children and counting for next season.

"Looking back, I am smiling remembering how I used to load up my seven-seater van with approximately 13-15 children or more at nights dropping them off to their various homes after one of their sporting events," she



recalled when talking about how community and sports have always been integral parts of her life.

Soccer is not the only place Elaine allocates her spare time. She chairs the Local 1180 Queens Borough Community Coordinating Committee and is a chaplain/elder and the treasurer in her church. During the height of the pandemic while teleworking, she and a pastor friend who is wheelchair bound delivered food to health care centers weekly. Elaine said she cooked during the week to bring warm, homemade food for lunch. She also decorates for weddings, baby showers and parties for friends and even people she doesn't know — all at her own expense, of course — with the help of some borrowed items from her niece.

"My friends often call me a road runner and wonder how I do it," Elaine said. "I had a vehicle that I used to fulfill my dreams for the community, but now I am currently in need of one and hoping to get some funds to replace it. Although I do not have a vehicle, it still does not stop me from moving around to help. My daughter helps me to do so in her free time or loans me her car when she is not using it."

"I just love to see people smile, although at times it can be discouraging to know that some people are not grateful and are not willing to help to enhance community development, but I do not let this deter me. I am willing to pass on this legacy to those who are coming behind me. I took time out to always teach others what I know because it's rewarding."

As if all this isn't enough, Elaine has even loftier goals.

"One of my dreams is to have a community center, a big one, where I can help people of all ages, but more so, the youth and elderly, because that's where the lack of help is. I am also planning to extend this service to my birth home in Jamaica once the resources become available," she said. "Over the years, I have used my own resources to help those who are in need and I'm not looking for anything in return. I always let people know that my motto is to pay it forward. Those to whom I help, I ask them to just pay it forward, too." ■

