**Compassion Exercise No. 2: Pen Pals**

**Introduction:** Have you ever gotten angry with someone who you felt was rude to you, only to find out later that something bad happened to them earlier that day? Did you go from angry to sympathetic with the flip of a switch? Did you feel bad for making a snap judgment about that person?

Everyone experiences difficult situations in their lives, and the compassionate person recognizes this, even if those situations are not readily apparent.

**To Begin:** Facilitators will supply participants with a pen and a few sheets of paper, or have participants bring their own.

**Instructions:** Ask each participant to think of a time in their life, or a present situation, where they felt emotionally challenged. Perhaps they felt embarrassed, sad, angry or uncomfortable. Recommend that they choose a situation of moderate severity vs. something that has caused them great trauma.

After they have chosen this experience, they will spend about 15 minutes writing a short letter. This letter will be addressed “Dear friend.” In it, they will write about the experience as if they were going to mail this short note to their friend.

Once the letters are written, invite a few people to read their letters out loud. Or, if the group is comfortable doing so, pair off and have people only share with a “buddy.”

**Guidelines:** Before the first letter is read, establish the following “rules”:

* DO NOT give advice.
* DO NOT “one up” their story.
* DO NOT judge.
* DO thank them for sharing.
* DO be supportive.

**Alternative:** If someone is unable to physically write a note, they can verbally tell their story, by beginning with “Dear Friend” and recounting the tale. For example, “Dear Friend, Last week I was feeling a little under-the-weather. I seemed to have caught a cold and spent the day wrapped in a blanket with tissues in one hand and a cup of tea in the other. I’m better today…”

**Facilitators Can Share Too!** Don’t be afraid to write your own letter and share with the group – just avoid talking about the staff or residents within your community. Pick a personal story, one that may even be humorous, to close the session.