



SENIORS in SERVICE

GEARED UP TO SERVE

GEARED UP News

Seniors in Service presents
the News You Need to Know
About Community Service in Tampa Bay

Shine Bright, Shine Far, Be a Star!



In December, we took time to celebrate and honor our volunteers' service and dedication at our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon. It's the highlight of our year! Seniors in Service volunteers are the stars of Tampa Bay, providing a guiding light to lead others through illiteracy, adversity, hunger, and loneliness. Volunteers from every service area gather to enjoy lunch, raffle prizes, awards, and dancing!

This year's theme, "Shining Bright Together", encompasses how each volunteer plays a vital role in making our community a brighter, warmer, and more compassionate place. Through their service, children are learning, veterans are supported, hungry families have access to food, lonely seniors have a friend, and so much more! Individually, our volunteers share their unique talents to shine light into the lives of those they directly touch; united, we cast a brilliant glow over our entire community.

One of the stars of the show was "Stardust," our shooting star who helped celebrate outstanding volunteers with special awards. This year, we welcomed over 150 new volunteers into service, increasing our galaxy of shining stars. We also celebrated our most dedicated volunteers, who are embedded in their community and continue to serve day after day, year after year, some for over 20 years!

Special thanks to the amazing superstars from Grant Park Christian Academy and Faith Action Ministry Alliance. The students and staff helped make our Hillsborough event a success by greeting guests and helping to serve drinks and food. They brought immense joy to the day and helped ensure our volunteers left with a smile!

Thank you to our event sponsors Publix Super Market Charities, Aetna, WellMed, Moore Insurance Options, and all the local businesses who donated items for our volunteers to enjoy lovely raffle baskets!



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CEO Corner



At Seniors in Service, setting goals and resolutions is not just a beginning of the year tradition. In fact, our team sets intentional SMART goals to help us stay focused EVERY SINGLE WEEK. We meet each Monday and share our goals as a team to be brave, hold ourselves accountable, and see how we can support one another. On Friday, we celebrate the goals we accomplished!

This year our theme is: "Discover Purpose. End Loneliness". We know we have the solution to the loneliness epidemic. We see it every day. It's putting yourself in service to someone else that gives life meaning. We just need to reach more people with this extraordinary medicine.

As we enter our 40th year, I recognize that we are so blessed with grant funding that sustains us. But we need more – more people, more funding, more reach. Please think of who you know who might be attracted to this mission, who might resonate with our grand vision to "Discover Purpose. End Loneliness." We need board members to help us craft the strategic vision and we need passionate donors who can help us push forward.

We can make Tampa Bay a place where no one is lonely and there's no problem – no matter how big – that doesn't have a group of passionate volunteers raising their hands to say, "I can help!" and through that service find purpose and meaning for their own life. Please join us in 2024 in whatever way feels right for you!

-Robin Ingles, CEO

New Upgrades Coming Soon!

Shoutout to the Juvenile Welfare Board for providing a \$33,564 grant to help upgrade our technology equipment! Thank you for your support in helping us improve our website, data tracking, and technology to engage more volunteers in the community!



A Young Hero is on a Mission to Keep Veterans Warm this Winter

When a young boy named Grayson learned that Tampa Bay's homeless veterans struggled to stay warm through the winter months, he jumped into action to help Operation: Veteran Connect collect winter clothing for our annual Warmth for the Winter Campaign. Grayson created an Amazon Wishlist where people could donate items online, and he designed his own flyer to share with friends and family to raise awareness.

Operation: Veteran Connect is currently working with 120 veterans who are at risk of homelessness. Many of them only have shorts and flip flops. As the weather gets colder, their need for warm clothing becomes critical. We host a Warmth for the Winter Campaign each year to raise donations for veterans, such as socks, sneakers, gloves, hats, sweatshirts, and blankets. These newly donated items are distributed on Veteran's Day as a way to express our gratitude for those who have given so much to our country.

Thanks to Grayson's help and our 34 AmeriCorps members, this year's Warmth for the Winter Campaign was a success. Grayson is officially Operation: Veteran Connect's youngest community volunteer and donated a total of 94 new items to keep veterans warm this winter.

Become an Operation: Veteran Connect member and make a positive impact on veterans in your community. Scan the QR code or email OVC@seniorsinservice.org to learn more.



Staying Connected During the Holidays and Beyond

For many, holidays are beloved for the sense of togetherness they instill. It's a time to rest, spend time with family, friends, and loved ones. But for others, it's not quite as joyful due to loneliness and isolation. Thankfully, our TelePals program matched 78 clients to volunteers to make friendly phone calls so no one would feel alone during this time, the holiday season, and beyond.

"Thank you for pairing me with Ms. Evelyn. Today is her birthday and we celebrated together in person. It was very special and I'm excited to have made a new friend. Thank you for facilitating this process."

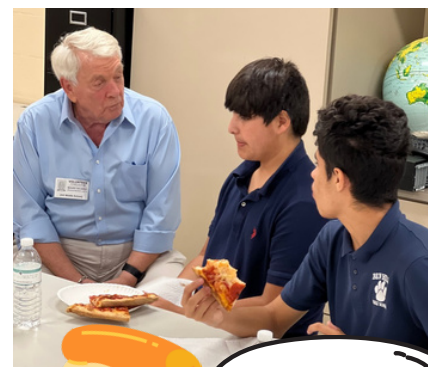
-Emily, TelePals Volunteer



Interested in becoming a TelePal? Make a positive impact on isolated seniors in your community. Scan the QR code or email TelePals@seniorsinservice.org to learn more.



Middle School Boys Need Male Role Models for Success



For the past two school years, members of the Bryan Glazer Family JCC Men's Club have served as mentors for 20 eighth grade boys at Ben Hill Middle School. Their impact is undeniable. Mentees showed improved confidence in the classroom, increased school attendance, and better academic performance. Inspired by the program's success, Kiwanis Club of Carrollwood joined in to serve as mentors for 20 seventh grade boys.

Mentors meet with students twice a month during lunch to share wisdom from lessons learned throughout their career and life experiences that will help students build a brighter future. Each mentoring session is designed around a specific topic such as character development, bullying, goal setting, and career paths. The whole group discusses it together. Then small groups break out, so the mentors can dive into it deeper and stimulate meaningful conversations.

During each lunch-time mentoring session, students are served pizza to reduce the amount of time they stand in line in the cafeteria and maximize the time for mentoring. However, the financial strain of providing the pizza ongoing prompted a generous donation from Elliot Arocha, the owner of Junk Liberty, a local Carrollwood business. As a former Ben Hill Middle School student and a resident deeply invested in the community, Elliot understands the importance of giving back. Thanks, Elliott!

Ed Datz has been a champion in leading and developing the Male Mentoring Program at Ben Hill since the beginning. He shared, "The boys love having someone who cares and will listen to them. They are very open about their family life, athletics, schoolwork, friends, and what's great and not great. This is a window into a new generation of boys that I never would have had without the mentoring program. I love being able to share lessons learned from my own life to build up the next generation. As volunteers, we learn just as much from the students we are mentoring, and our lives are enriched in a very powerful way."

Looking ahead, our goal is to continue to expand mentoring groups in more middle schools throughout Tampa Bay. With a minimal commitment level and profound rewards, this volunteer opportunity offers the chance to shape young minds by sharing your wisdom. If you are passionate about making a positive impact, join our volunteer group and become a mentor for the next generation!



Junk Liberty

Interested in becoming a mentor?
Make a life lasting influence on a student today. Scan the QR code or email RSVP@seniorsinservice.org to learn more.



Compassionate Care Creates a Change of Heart

Our volunteer Kitty helps veterans learn how to use the internet to access and track their VA benefits in the Veteran Service Office (VSO). When she offered to help Joe create his account, Joe abruptly responded, "No, and I don't want one! I am old school and I like to get real people's help, that's why I'm here!" That's how it goes with volunteering sometimes; people can be stubborn!

Kitty shared, "While Joe was waiting on the VSO officer, he was in eyesight of me. I was helping another veteran register for an account and made the process easy and fun. There was lots of laughter as I explained how to see medical records, drug prescriptions and notes from doctors. I could tell Joe was intensely listening, and I was praying that the training would impact and reverse his decision."

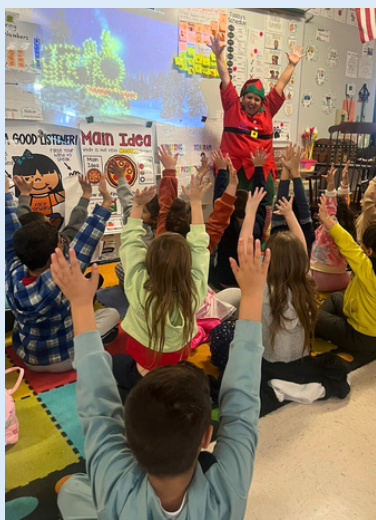
After waiting 40-minutes for his appointment with the VSO, Joe approached Kitty to say, "I think I could do that; I won't promise to use it, but I will let you set me up for an account." Kitty said, "Fair enough, let's do, this". They laughed through the whole process, and Joe was so apologetic for his initial reaction. Now, Joe has easy access to medical information to improve his health and well-being.

Operation: Veteran Connect volunteers are veterans or military family members who speak the language of service. They understand the struggles veterans, like Joe, face and provide the patient, compassionate care veterans deserve.

See more ways Operation: Veteran Connect is supporting Tampa Bay's veterans by scanning the QR code or emailing OVC@seniorsinservice.org.



Did you know OVC members get training on crucial conversations?



We're Making Students Cry?

Our Readers in Motion program includes passing out backpacks full of educational supplies to newly registered students in K-2nd grade. Last month, when we were finishing up in Ms. Todd's class, she instructed all the students to put their new items away, so they could get back to their lesson. One little boy held on tight to his backpack, holding it to his chest, in tears. He said he had never received anything before. He couldn't stop crying and let go of his backpack until a hug and a little reassurance from his Classroom Grandparent helped him calm down, put his backpack away, and join the lesson.

Readers in Motion focuses on giving economically-disadvantaged children who may not have access to books and engaging learning materials at-home, the opportunity to learn beyond the classroom. This generous gift ignites a love for learning!



Readers in Motion is a tutoring and mentoring program offered in high-need classrooms throughout Hillsborough County where students receive extra one-on-one help from our Classroom Grandparent volunteers. We also engage the entire family in learning for lasting impact through at-home Reading Challenges for prizes each month and hands-on STEM family events. Each year, every student enrolled in Readers in Motion also receives a backpack filled with fun educational supplies to get them excited for learning.

“Are You Depressed?” Flipped to Service and Purpose

‘Are you depressed?’ My doctor would ask that question EVERY visit. I was tired of being alone, disabled and not being part of a community. Every day I sat in my chair trying to figure out what to do with my time.

Then I met Carmen with Seniors in Service. She told me how volunteering could change my life! And she was right!! Now I serve as a Senior Companion to a woman with dementia. I visit her three times a week and we talk about her family, reminisce about her life growing up in the big city of Philadelphia, and share recipes we both like to cook.



I look forward to every week. Getting dressed and heading out with my uniform on and my volunteer badge gives me purpose. Becoming a Seniors in Service volunteer brought me back to life. Now when the doctor asks if I'm depressed, I share all the great things I get to do as a Senior Companion with a BIG SMILE!"

-Ann, Senior Companion Volunteer

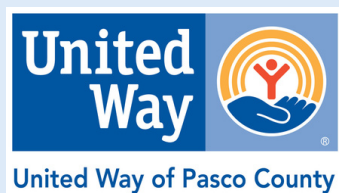
Are you looking for new purpose and social connection this year? Learn how you can become a Senior Companion by scanning the QR code or emailing SCP@seniorsinservice.org.



Community Support Helps Expand Health Buddies

United Way Pasco and Florida Medical Clinic Foundation are helping isolated seniors like Julia, improve their well-being through social connection and health coaching.

"I didn't know who my Health Buddy would be when I first signed up, and I was even a bit apprehensive about having conversations with a young adult. I'm happy to say that I connected so perfectly with my Health Buddy, Liz! She is a Med Student at USF Morsani College of Medicine- How lucky am I!? She is so intelligent and an old soul. Now I even keep a picture of Liz in my living room with all of my best pictures! She is a treasure to me. I didn't realize how lonely and depressed I was and now I see how much I was missing out on. Liz and I talk about everything! From tools to help me feel more comfortable as I age in place to talking about our family history. I was a world traveler and love to learn about different backgrounds. Liz has brought such joy back into my life as she tells me about her travels, and has taught me a lot. I hope she has learned a bit from me as well." -Julia, Pasco County Health Buddies Client

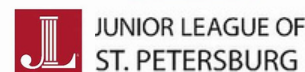
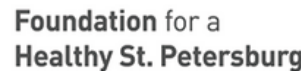


United Way Pasco committed \$5,000 to support Health Buddies in Pasco County. Through this grant we'll be able to help more seniors living with chronic conditions self-manage their care, reduce hospital visits, and improve their mental and physical well-being.



Florida Medical Clinic Foundation committed \$4,974 to provide healthy meals to Health Buddies clients who face food insecurity or struggle with proper nutrition. Health Buddies volunteers attend training provided by a registered dietitian and use that information to help coach their clients toward better eating habits. Nutritious food delivered to their door reinforces this information and introduces clients to nourishing, new foods. It also provides a conversation starter for Health Buddies and clients to talk about the foods they ate and how they made them feel.

Thank you to our funders!





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