



# 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



### "Lucky to Have You": A Celebration of Volunteer Impact



We hit the jackpot with two unforgettable volunteer appreciation events in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties, celebrating the extraordinary volunteers who help power our mission every day. The "Lucky to Have You" theme was more than a catchy slogan; it's a heartfelt expression of gratitude for our Classroom Grandparents, Senior Companions, and Operation: Veteran Connect members who touch countless lives every single day.

These events were filled with joy, laughter, and connection. Volunteers were treated to delicious meals, belly laughs courtesy of comedian Barry John, and lively music by Raul Castellanos that had everyone dancing in their seats - and some on their feet! But the true highlight was hearing our volunteers' incredible stories of impact.

We kicked things off with a powerful reflection activity. Volunteers shared heartfelt moments, challenges they've overcome, valuable lessons they've learned, and even funny stories that brought smiles to our faces.

"One boy told me, 'I have one grandma at home, and I have you.' He often asks for a hug, and then comes back three more times for extra hugs. Some days, I need the hugs more than they do!" **-Classroom Grandma Plummer**

"I'm a retired nurse, and serving as a Senior Companion has been the most rewarding chapter of my life. I'm helping my client write a book about her experience as a schoolteacher, and we practice different languages together. It's a joy to learn and grow side by side." **-Carmen, Senior Companion**



"At the beginning of the school year, a kindergartener named Jayden told me he hated school. After working closely with him for a while, he looked at me and said, 'Grandma B., I love school!' That filled my heart."

**-Classroom Grandma B.**



"Serving as a Senior Companion has taught me to just listen. I don't always need to have an answer or a fix. Sometimes, the most important thing is to simply be present." - **Lauren, Senior Companion**



"I love knowing that I've helped a child read, spell, or do math, and that they believe in themselves a little more because of it."

**-Classroom "Granny D."**

These celebrations are more than events; they are reminders of the incredible power of service and the deep, lasting connections it creates. To each and every one of our volunteers: we are so lucky to have you!

**Do you want to be a part of next year's celebration? It's your LUCKY day! We're training a new batch of Classroom Grandparents this summer. Contact us at [FGP@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:FGP@SeniorsInService.org) or (813) 670-7684 to join the next orientation.**



## 2025 Board of Directors

### Officers

Dr. Daphne Fudge, Chair  
Early Education Advocate

Steve Marciano, Vice Chair  
BayCare

Dr. Fred Hicks, Treasurer  
Early Learning Coalition of  
Hillsborough County

Mark Hall, Secretary  
Egnyte

David Heizer, Immediate Past  
Chair  
Humana Market Point

### Members

Tracie Bergman  
Hillsborough County Schools

Marina A. Choundas, Esq.  
Foley & Lardner LLP

Bill Stamp  
Independent Consultant

Jenna Stock Wunsch  
Raymond James

Debbie Viveiros  
The Bank of Tampa

Robert C. Wood, CPP, CFE  
Allied Universal Security  
Services

Kevin Zwetsch  
Brick Business Law, P.A.



## CEO Corner

*"Emotional Embedment."* It's a phrase I recently learned, and I can't stop thinking about how perfectly it captures what we do at Seniors in Service.

Whether it's in a classroom, a veteran's apartment, or a storm-ravaged neighborhood, our volunteers don't just show up to complete a task. They show up with heart. They stay. They listen. They connect. They become part of the story. That's emotional embedment.

It's more than belonging, it's being so deeply connected to others that their struggles pull at your heart, and their victories feel like your own. It's what happens when compassion turns into commitment.

That's what we're building here. Not just a network of volunteers, but a web of meaningful relationships, woven together with care, empathy, and love.

Let's be honest: this kind of connection takes effort. It's not always easy. But it's so much better than easy. It's real. It gives our lives purpose. It opens our eyes and fills our hearts in ways we never expected.

If you're looking for something deeper than a to-do list... if you're ready to be part of something personal, powerful, and life-changing... then keep reading. This newsletter is full of ways to get emotionally embedded. And we can't wait to welcome you in.

*-Robin Ingles, CEO*

## When First Responders and Volunteers Team Up, Lives Change!

Shout-out to St. Petersburg Fire Rescue and Pinellas County Government for partnering with Seniors in Service to train first responders on the Health Buddies program! We're honored to be part of your team's resource toolkit!

This partnership is a game-changer for everyone involved. When paramedics respond to repeated 9-1-1 calls from seniors who are anxious, isolated, or simply in need of a friendly voice, they now have a new option: connection instead of crisis. By referring those seniors to our Health Buddies program, they're helping to break the cycle of loneliness that too often leads to unnecessary emergency calls.

Leo is a perfect example. He used to call 9-1-1 regularly, not because of a medical emergency, but because he felt overwhelmed and alone. That changed when a paramedic introduced him to Health Buddies. Now, Leo gets regular calls from his volunteer buddy Andrew, who checks in 2 to 3 times a week to offer encouragement and talk through health challenges. Just 12 weeks later, Leo has made fewer ER visits and reports feeling healthier, more confident, and more connected.

If you or someone you know could use a little extra support managing chronic conditions or just wants to hear a friendly voice a few times a week, we've got a Health Buddy ready to help. Reach out today by scanning the QR code below or contact us at [HealthBuddies@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:HealthBuddies@SeniorsInService.org).





## Students are Turning Pages to Brighter Futures

Thanks to generous support from Believe in Reading, magic is unfolding in the minds of young students through our Readers in Motion program! Each month, Kindergarten through 2nd-grade students are invited to participate in fun and engaging reading challenges that do more than boost literacy; they help build strong family connections and inspire a lifelong love for learning.

The concept is simple but powerful. Students select from a collection of specially chosen, age-appropriate books and are challenged to read five books each month. They earn an exciting prize for every challenge completed - a brand-new book to grow their home library.

But the real magic happens at home. Research shows that when parents and caregivers read with their children, it strengthens vocabulary, boosts academic achievement, and builds a foundation of trust, curiosity, and communication. These reading challenges don't just develop strong readers; they help create shared moments of connection between children and the adults who care about them.

Thank you to Believe in Reading for supporting our reading challenges and investing in education, families, and a life-long love of learning.



**Want to help children love reading too? Whether as a Classroom Grandparent or a supporter of programs like Readers in Motion, there's a place for you in this story. Email us at [FGP@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:FGP@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to learn more.**

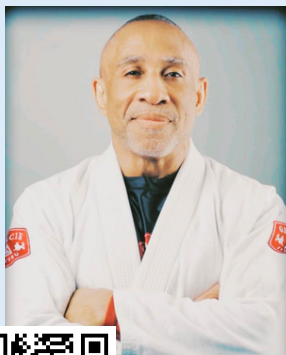


## How Jiu-Jitsu Turned Trauma to Triumph



Sometimes, the path to healing starts with just one small step. For Shanique, a military veteran, that step came in the form of an introductory jiu-jitsu course with Saulo through Operation: Veteran Connect. What began as a simple training turned into a life-changing journey of growth and empowerment.

After facing trauma in the military that left her struggling to interact with others, especially men, Shanique found herself isolated and unsure of how to move forward. But through her personal classes with Saulo, something incredible happened. She began to break out of her shell, regain her confidence, and take control of her well-being. Today, Shanique feels stronger, more connected, and ready to face the world again.



Her story is just one example of how veterans can make a profound impact by serving other veterans. Saulo's support and mentorship embody the heart of Operation: Veteran Connect, a program designed to empower veterans through shared experiences, specialized training, and meaningful connections. These volunteers are creating a network of strength, understanding, and resilience.

We're deeply grateful to the Wawa Foundation for their generous support of Operation: Veteran Connect. Their belief in the power of veterans helping veterans is making a tangible difference in lives like Shanique's, showing what's possible when we invest in each other's well-being.



**Are you a veteran looking to make an impact or connect with others who understand the journey? Email [OVC@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:OVC@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to learn more.**



## We've Got Hot, New Wheels, and We're Hitting the Road to Serve You!



We've got some shiny new wheels, and they're all about making a BIG difference! Say hello to our brand-new van and trailer, ready to cruise through Tampa Bay to bring our mission to life in new and exciting ways.

Our team's been hard at work mastering the art of van driving, and we're gearing up to go out on some incredible adventures. But the van isn't just about getting from point A to point B, it's about delivering love, service, and support to every corner of our community. Whether we're enhancing community outreach, connecting families to literacy resources, recruiting new volunteers, or helping seniors prepare for hurricanes, this van is more than a vehicle, it's a lifeline.

We're so grateful to the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County for helping us secure this incredible resource to better serve our neighbors. If you spot us out and about, don't just wave, snap a pic with the van and tag us on Facebook! Help us spread the word as we roll into communities to make a bigger impact!



## Are You Storm Ready?

Hurricane season is officially here. Are you prepared? Many seniors in our community aren't, and that's why we're stepping up with our NEW Senior Disaster Support Program! With unique challenges like mobility limitations, health concerns, and isolation, seniors are often the most vulnerable during storms.

This month, our Seniors in Service van embarked on its first disaster mission, delivering Hurricane Resource Guides packed with life-saving tips to mobile home parks in Pinellas County. These guides are just the beginning. Our program empowers seniors with preparedness, relief, and recovery support, because no one should face a storm alone.

We're calling on compassionate volunteers to join us in making a difference. Whether you're helping a senior build an evacuation plan, delivering emergency supplies, or offering a kind ear during the rebuilding process, your time can be life changing.

A heartfelt thank-you to the Red Cross, Community Foundation Tampa Bay, Tampa Bay Resiliency Fund, and Community Care Corps for their generous support in making this program possible.

**Are you ready to step up? Become a Senior Disaster Support Volunteer today and help us create a safer, more resilient community. Email us at [SDS@SeniorsinService.org](mailto:SDS@SeniorsinService.org) or scan the QR code to get started!**



**American  
Red Cross**



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
TAMPA BAY







## Empowering Independence for Seniors with Vision Loss



Imagine losing the ability to read a cherished letter from a loved one or navigate your grocery list without help. For many seniors with conditions like macular degeneration, cataracts, or diabetic retinopathy, this is a daily reality. Vision loss doesn't just impact sight, it can steal independence, heighten feelings of loneliness and anxiety, and create barriers to enjoying life's simple joys.

That's where the volunteers at the Low Vision Support Group come in. For more than two years, this dedicated team has brought hope and connection to over 100 participants, creating a space where seniors can share their experiences and learn about new tools to regain independence. Thanks to their support, the group has introduced life-changing technology like Meta Glasses, an assistive device designed to break down barriers.

Meta Glasses are game-changers. They read documents, help with medication management, and even assist with daily navigation. Volunteers in the Low Vision Support Group have been instrumental in training and supporting seniors in using these glasses. By hosting monthly Meta Glasses User Group meetings, they provide hands-on guidance, share practical tips, and create a community where everyone can thrive.

This work would not be possible without the generosity of donors like the Interfaith Social Action Council of Sun City Center and the passion of our volunteers. Their efforts ensure that even seniors on fixed incomes have access to this empowering technology and opening the door to greater independence.

*Interfaith Social  
Action Council*



## Pizza, Purpose, and Life Lessons

We wrapped up another incredible year of mentoring at Ben Hill Middle School, where more than 100 students found inspiration, guidance, and a sense of belonging, thanks to the partnership of the JCC Men's Club, Young Life, Jets Pizza, and the generous support of The Saunders Foundation. These dynamic mentors gather with students twice a month over pizza lunches to dive into meaningful conversations.

Topics like goal setting, managing stress, and handling bullying were on the menu, but the real impact came from the connections formed. One Ben Hill teacher shared, "The students who are the most engaged are the most successful in the classroom. This Mentor Group gives them the chance to be around men and women who model success, and it's making a real difference in their growth."

Contact us at [RSVP@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:RSVP@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to start your mentoring journey.

**JET'S PIZZA®**

THE  
**Saunders**  
FOUNDATION



## No One Should Grieve Alone: Rosalind's Mission of Compassion

When Seniors in Service received a call about Greg, an elderly widower who needed help getting an ID, Operation: Veteran Connect member Rosalind stepped up to help. She thought it would be a quick trip to the DMV, but she uncovered a life in quiet crisis.

Greg's wife had passed away just one week earlier. Grieving and frail, he was surviving only on peanut butter. His sister, the only family he had left, was in Pennsylvania and desperate to bring him to live with her. But without a valid ID, Greg couldn't fly.

Rosalind helped him search through paperwork to locate the documents he needed, then drove him to the DMV to get his ID. Afterward, she treated him to a warm meal, his first in days. "He was so hungry," she later shared. "You could just see it."

When they returned to his house, Rosalind discovered his vital medications hadn't been delivered. Without hesitation, she took him to the pharmacy herself.

Greg hadn't traveled in years and was anxious about the trip, so the next day, Rosalind brought him to the airport, walked him inside, and made sure a wheelchair assistant would help him through security. She had just arrived back at her home when the phone rang. His flight was canceled. The flight attendant told her Greg was confused, anxious, and crying uncontrollably. Rosalind knew she couldn't leave him there alone.

She got back in the car, picked him up, and brought him back to his house so he had a safe, familiar place to sleep. Then, at 4:30 the next morning, she drove him to the airport again, this time staying until he was safely on the plane.

Because of Rosalind, Greg is now in Pennsylvania, in the care of his sister, no longer grieving alone. Her selfless actions remind us that sometimes, the greatest impact comes not from grand gestures but from showing up in simple ways when someone needs you most.

**Want to create a big impact with small acts of kindness? Join Operation: Veteran Connect and help veterans like Rosalind make a difference. Email [OVC@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:OVC@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to learn more.**



## Serving Side by Side: Volunteering Becomes a Family Mission



*Pictured above: Members of the Senior Companion Program in Hillsborough County*

At Seniors in Service, we've seen how volunteering doesn't just transform lives; it brings families closer. Whether it's couples serving together in school classrooms or food pantries, these shared acts of service become powerful moments of connection and purpose.

Take Lenita, a devoted Senior Companion whose story reminds us how service often grows beyond the person who signs up.

For over two years, Lenita has visited the Jones family, offering friendship, support, and a caring presence that has brightened their days. When Mr. Jones began struggling to get in and out of his home due to being in a wheelchair, Lenita knew he needed more than a listening ear; he needed a solution.

Without hesitation, her husband joined her mission. He lovingly built a sturdy ramp for Mr. Jones. There was no fanfare, just a deep desire to help someone his wife cared about. These stories of teamwork and compassion inspire us every day.

**Make volunteering part of your family's mission! Email us at [RSVP@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:RSVP@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to get started.**





# Thank you to our funders!





**SENIORS in SERVICE**  
GEARED UP TO SERVE

**1306 W Sligh Ave  
Tampa, FL 33604  
(813) 932-5228**

NONPROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
TAMPA, FL  
PERMIT NO. 1094



**AmeriCorps**



**AmeriCorps  
Seniors**

Follow us on social media  
@seniorsinservice



## In This Issue:

- "Lucky to Have You": A Celebration of Volunteer Impact 1
- CEO Corner & When First Responders and Volunteers Team Up, Lives Change! 2
- Students are Turning Pages to Brighter Futures & How Jiu-Jitsu Turned Trauma to Triumph 3
- We've Got Hot, New Wheels, and We're Hitting the Road to Serve You! & Are You Storm Ready? 4
- Empowering Independence for Seniors with Vision Loss & Pizza, Purpose, and Life Lessons 5
- No One Should Grieve Alone & Volunteering Becomes a Family Mission 6
- Thanks to Our Funders! 7

A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE (800-435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.

## Time's Ticking! Join the Next Wave of Classroom Grandparents

We're gearing up for the 2025-2026 school year by training 175 new Classroom Grandparents this summer to be ready on day one! **Will you be one of them?**

Congratulations to our latest group of Classroom Grandparents, fresh from orientation and ready to make a difference in classrooms across Tampa Bay! Watching these exceptional individuals dive into training reminds us why this program matters so much. They're not just preparing to help; they're preparing to become trusted mentors, cheerleaders, and role models to children who need them.

Our training covers everything you need to feel confident in the classroom, from how to build strong connections with students to fun, creative ways to support teachers. And the best part? You're never alone. We provide ongoing support, guidance, and a team that's with you every step of the way.

**If you have love to give and time to share, we have a seat waiting for you. Now's the time to join us.**

**Sign up today and learn more! Email [FGP@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:FGP@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code. Don't let this opportunity pass you by, join the Classroom Grandparent family!**

