



# Seniors in Service Honored with Florida Blue Foundation Sapphire Award for Improving Mental Well-Being in Tampa Bay



Left: Seniors in Service CEO Robin Ingles accepts award from Florida Blue CEO Pat Geraghty at the 2023 Sapphire Awards.

Right: Seniors in Service team members at the Florida Blue Sapphire Awards

Seniors in Service was proud to be selected out of over 100 nominations for a 2023 Florida Blue Sapphire Award! This award recognizes outstanding organizations that are distinguished by exemplary leadership, innovation, and documented outcomes in creating excellence in services in Mental Well-being.

The Sapphire Award is a testament to the unwavering commitment and empathetic care our volunteers provide to the people they serve every day. Our Resource Advocates help vulnerable individuals navigate the complex maze of community resources to access safe housing, nutritious food, transportation and more, reducing stress and supporting self-sufficiency. Our Senior Companion volunteers provide friendship for isolated seniors, improving their mental-well-being through social connection. Our volunteers who are veterans leverage their shared military experience to encourage and support fellow veterans, active military members, and their families.



CEO Robin Ingles on stage at the 2023 Sapphire Awards among the other finalists for organizations, programs and individuals receiving a Florida Blue Sapphire Award for their leadership and innovation in services that support Mental Well-being.

Our tutors and mentors help struggling students build the emotional intelligence they need for academic and lifelong success.

Volunteering results in better mental well-being for both volunteers and beneficiaries, helping them build new friendships, sustain healthy relationships, and lead meaningful lives!



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Pictured Below: CEO Robin  
Ingles with National Director of  
AmeriCorps Seniors Atalaya  
Sergi!



## CEO Corner

One of the most inaccurate stereotypes about seniors is that their best work is behind them. We know this because of the hundreds of senior volunteers we see positively impacting our community daily!

Seniors need what we all need, love and work, a sense of connection, bonds that matter deeply, and a reason to get up in the morning.

But for so many decades, seniors have been consigned to a world that's both isolated and cut off from that sense of purpose. Many feel invisible. Society has consciously and systematically separated people by age where we have relatively little contact with one another. It's time to make a change!

At Seniors in Service, multiple generations work together on our staff and as volunteers in our community. We know that bringing generations together is mutually beneficial and creates a greater sense of joy. That's why we believe it's so important to develop opportunities for senior generations and let old, young, and all the people in the middle mix in the context of daily life.

Rachel, one of our college-aged Health Buddies volunteers, learned her client Agnes was struggling to eat solid foods while she waited to receive new dentures. Rachel recently had braces and remembered how her teeth ached! Rachel shared with Agnes how her mom blended her proteins, like chicken, with barbeque sauce to make it "sloppy joe" style. Agnes gave it a try and was thrilled to enjoy solid foods again. Now she's excited to cook!

Even though Rachel had not dealt with this common generational issue herself, she was still able to pull from a relevant experience. Oftentimes you might not think someone from a different generation may be able to relate to you or understand you, but we're here to tell you they can.

I encourage you to break down age-related barriers in your own life and seek out opportunities to engage with people from different generations. And join us at the Bridging Generations Breakfast on September 15, 2023 at Palma Ceia Country Club from 7:30-9am to honor all the volunteers who connect generations for the good of all Tampa Bay.



Scan the QR code to learn how you  
can be a part of the Bridging  
Generations Breakfast.

[www.SeniorsInService.org](http://www.SeniorsInService.org)

*-Robin Ingles, CEO*

# Keith Smith Wins Volunteer of the Year!



Each year Volunteer Florida selects a Florida AmeriCorps member who best exemplifies national service to honor as the Volunteer of the Year. In April, our very own Keith Smith, an Operation: Veteran Connect member, received this award for his exceptional service. Mr. Smith is a Vietnam veteran whose name may be ordinary, but his service to his fellow veteran brothers and sisters is anything but.

As he sits high in his sturdy pickup with a long trailer, he navigates through the busy Tampa traffic with the expert skill from his military service. His mission? To deliver precious cargo to veterans leaving temporary housing at New Beginnings and help them transition to their own apartments. Mr. Smith delivers donated beds, sofas, chairs, and tables to create a home and give hope that living independently again is possible.

When Mr. Smith discovered that veterans needed bicycles for transportation to get to work, he immediately sprang into action. He set up a bicycle repair garage, rekindling skills from his youth, and collecting donated bikes throughout the community to repair and put back into use.

For Mr. Smith, the significance of this award went beyond mere recognition. It represented long-awaited appreciation for his service and the welcome home he deserved. Upon receiving the award, Mr. Smith shared:

"While a few of you may know some of the things we as servicemen experienced during and after returning home from Vietnam, I now realize that most of you don't. We can't unsee what we've seen. We can't put into words what we've heard, and it's all burnt into our minds with the emotions we felt at the time. I say that because of all the things I have experienced since my time in the service, nothing has made me feel welcomed home until receiving your award today. Tonight, I feel proud to be an American, I feel blessed to have been able to serve my fellow countrymen and especially the Veterans we serve and the staff we work with. In my heart I know there is no other organization that does so much good to help us all become better Americans."

Mr. Smith shows the power of extraordinary service, helping one veteran at a time create a living space they can call home. His dedication and commitment to his fellow veterans make him a deserving recipient for Volunteer of the Year.



# St. Pete Inducts Classroom Grandparent Barbara Burnett Into Senior Hall of Fame



Congratulations to our very own Barbara Burnett, a Foster Grandparent Program volunteer, for being inducted into the St. Pete Senior Hall of Fame! Each year the Senior Hall of Fame honors a select group of St. Petersburg volunteers for their significant contributions toward enriching the quality of life for others. Those chosen for induction are role models for leading meaningful, vibrant lives, and their compelling stories demonstrate their commitment to causes, organizations, and to the community at large.

Barbara Burnett, or “Grandma B” as her students lovingly call her, is an active and influential member of the St. Pete community. In 2017 Grandma B joined Seniors in Service as a Foster Grandma where she actively volunteers in the classroom, serving over 60 hours every month. Grandma B tutors students who are struggling to learn the alphabet and hold a pencil. She takes the time to go back to the basics and correct each step along the way. Grandma B provides hands-on assistance to students at risk of being held back and watches them grow and excel.

Grandma B’s love for serving others extends beyond the classroom and radiates kindness throughout St. Petersburg. Since 2005 she has volunteered at over 10 organizations impacting the lives of everyone she meets. In the past 18 years, she has created lifelong relationships with the youth of her community. With two years of bible college and a Master’s in Human Services, she uses her skills to foster social connection, mentor children, educate on health topics, and spread her passion for literacy.

The legacy of the Senior Hall of Fame is to preserve and foster an appreciation for these remarkable individuals, and there isn’t a more deserving volunteer. Grandma B is a symbol of consistency in the lives of St. Pete children, where her devotion to mentoring is nothing short of glorious. Barbara Burnett has forever changed the lives of St. Pete residents by being a leader in her church, a wellness advocate, a literacy champion, and a resource for every neighbor. When you cross paths with Grandma B, you have a friend for life.



Left: Barbara is pictured with Seniors in Service Program Coordinator Kim Skrovanek



Right: Barbara with The City of St. Petersburg Mayor Ken T. Welch, Leisure Services Administrator Mike Jeffries and Councilwoman Brandi Gabbard.



## Mayor Jane Castor Showers Our Classroom Grandparents With Praise!

Seniors in Service was honored to welcome City of Tampa Mayor, Jane Castor, to our Foster Grandparent in-service training in April! Mayor Castor partners with Seniors in Service through her "Castor's Classroom Companions" initiative to place volunteers into classrooms in three Tampa elementary schools, a project funded by AmeriCorps Seniors.

Together we are making a positive impact on the community by tutoring young children and showcasing the importance of service in Tampa.

Mayor Castor praised our Foster Grandparents and surprised them with 'Castor's Classroom Companions' t-shirts. One volunteer was overheard saying, "The Mayor is thanking us, but I'm the lucky one who gets to be with the kids!"

Support from Mayor Jane Castor, City of Tampa, and AmeriCorps means more children will improve literacy and emotional intelligence skills through tutoring and mentoring from Classroom Grandparents. **Scan the QR code to the right to watch the Fox 13 News story and get a closer look at that day, including testimonials from our outstanding volunteers!**



## Presenting Health Buddies: "Companionship as Medicine"

Seniors in Service Program Coordinator, Aria Garling, had the privilege of presenting our innovative Health Buddies program at the 2023 Florida Blue Foundation Community Health Symposium. Presenters at the symposium included national, regional, and Florida-based experts on a variety of issues affecting health, communities, and health care policy. This year's symposium focused on the topic of mental well-being.



Health Buddies improves mental well-being for isolated seniors living with chronic conditions by pairing them with a Health Buddy. Health Buddies are caring, trained volunteers who provide companionship, health knowledge and encouragement. Participant data indicates that by the end of the 12-week Health Buddies intervention, clients reported decreased feelings of nervousness, depression, hopelessness, worthlessness, and restlessness plus improved ability to self-manage their health. 98% of Health Buddy clients did not visit the emergency room!

We were honored to have the opportunity to share with other health-minded symposium attendees how Health Buddies is improving mental wellbeing for Tampa Bay's most vulnerable seniors by providing "companionship as medicine".





Please join us for a very special event highlighting the impact Seniors in Service has made in the community with YOUR help! Together, let's build a better tomorrow for future generations. Tickets are \$100 per person or sponsor a table for \$1,000.

For more information, contact Amy Manning at [amanning@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:amanning@SeniorsInService.org) or (813) 492-8918.



Scan the QR code to learn how you can be a part of the Bridging Generations Breakfast.

[www.SeniorsInService.org](http://www.SeniorsInService.org)

Congratulations to Jim Archer who was named Ben Hill Middle School's Volunteer of the Year and Adored Grandpa. This summer Mr. Archer plans to mentor musically talented children in a summer program called Kids with a Cause! We're so proud of the difference Mr. Archer makes in the lives of his mentees or as he says, his "1,021 grandchildren"!



Operation: Veteran Connect member, Janet Lawrence, receiving the Patriot Reward at the Homeless Empowerment Project Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast for her work with Veterans. Congratulations Janet! Thank you for your continued service to our country's Veterans!

## Community Foundation Tampa Bay Lifts Up Students Beyond the Classroom



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
TAMPA BAY

Emotional Intelligence is vital for students to learn because it teaches them crucial life skills needed for academic and lifelong success. Thanks to a \$49,851 Positive Education grant from Community Foundation Tampa Bay, our Foster Grandparent volunteers will receive expert training and resources to help struggling children build Emotional Intelligence. This training will be provided by Frameworks, a Tampa Bay nonprofit organization that empowers educators, youth services professionals, and parents and guardians with the research-based information they need to help children develop social and emotional skills. Now, our classroom volunteers can help students develop a positive self-image, take responsibility for their actions, and forge positive relationships with the people around them, helping them succeed in school and beyond.

# Thank you to our funders!



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# Classroom Grandparents Show Up for Mayor Jane Castor!



Our Foster Grandparent Program volunteers who serve in select Tampa schools as part of the Castor's Classroom Companions initiative congratulated Mayor Jane Castor and City of Tampa Council Members at the City of Tampa's Oath of Office Ceremony! Look how amazing those grandmas look in their t-shirts gifted by the mayor.

