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

Cheers to Our Volunteers!

If there's one thing we know for certain, it's this: Seniors in Service runs on people who show up. And in 2025, our volunteers showed up with extraordinary generosity, giving 277,000+ hours to ensure more than 13,000 children, seniors, veterans, and families had the steady support they needed to move toward a brighter future.

To honor that impact, we gathered in December for our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheons in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties. Surrounded by the sparkle of Roaring 20's glamour, the rooms were filled with laughter, gratitude, and the unmistakable joy of being surrounded by people who choose service as their way of life.

CEO Robin Ingles spoke from the heart, "When you look closely at the biggest challenges our community faces, one common thread appears again and again: loneliness. Our volunteers are the solution. Every phone call, classroom visit, ride to a doctor, and check-in sends the same message: you are not alone."

Then our staff took to the stage to raise fluted glasses of sparkly juice and offer personal toasts to honor the unique ways volunteers bring light into someone's life:

"Cheers to you, our Companion Volunteers! You listen through the hard days and become a reliable source of connection until someone realizes they're not facing life alone."

"Cheers to you, our Classroom Grandparents! You turn confusion into 'aha!' moments… you are guiding lights who show students not just what they can learn, but who they can become."

"Cheers to you, our Operation: Veteran Connect Volunteers! Every hour served represents something life-altering… veterans received support not just to survive, but to thrive."

"Cheers to you, our Community Engagement Volunteers! You were everywhere… and your kindness leaves a trail of light wherever you go."

We're grateful to WellMed, Moore Insurance Options, and Publix Super Market Charities for helping make these celebrations possible, and to the volunteers from Progressive, City of St. Petersburg's Sunshine Senior Center, Faith Action Ministry Alliance, and the students at Grant Park Christian Academy for lending their time and hearts.

As we enter 2026, we extend an invitation and challenge to you. Help us find the lonely. The child who needs someone in their corner. The veteran who feels invisible. The senior who has no one to call. You can be the connection they've been waiting for. Learn more at www.SeniorsInService.org.



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CEO Corner



This year we're going back to the basics. The basics of connection. Smiling at the person you pass on the street. Helping your elderly neighbor unload groceries. Sharing a kind word with the woman at the grocery store. Sparking a conversation with the person in the elevator. It doesn't take much but it does take all of us collectively choosing to see and acknowledge one another as humans worthy of our attention. Not everyone has that in their life.

Our team witnessed this firsthand for Valentine's Day. Suncoast Credit Union provided us with hundreds of handwritten Valentine's Day Cards to distribute to throughout the community. Faces blossomed into smiles as seniors and veterans received an unexpected Valentine. One veteran at the VA shared, "I'm having my second surgery for cancer tomorrow, and this card means more to me than I can express."

These moments remind us why the small things matter. A card. A smile. A few honest words. They don't solve every problem, but they open a door and can soften the edges of a hard day. Today, we find ourselves in a divisive world that needs connection more than ever.

Transformation rarely happens in a few grand gestures. It happens in 10,000 little decisions, words, and actions you make every day. It's the basics that matter.

-Robin Ingles, CEO

The Kind of Volunteer You Never Forget



With grateful hearts, we honor volunteer Ms. Asleen Griffin for her 14 years of faithful service with our Senior Companion Program. While health reasons are guiding her into a well-deserved season of rest, the impact she leaves behind will continue to shape this program for years to come.

Asleen was a steady presence and trusted guide, especially for new volunteers finding their footing. Many recall how she welcomed them, offered encouragement, and quietly showed them the way. Asleen was never "just" a volunteer; she was a mentor, a cheerleader, and a true friend.

When her retirement was shared with the group, the response was heartfelt and unmistakable. Stories were exchanged, tears were shed, and gratitude filled the room. In true community fashion, volunteers came together to present Asleen with an envelope filled with contributions, a simple gesture carrying deep appreciation and love.

We thank you, Asleen, for every hug, word of encouragement, and year you gave so freely.

Want to start your volunteer journey? Sign up to be a Senior Companion today. Email SCP@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

Tampa Bay Lightning Honors Veteran Heroes



When Operation: Veteran Connect appeared on the Jumbotron during Military Appreciation Night, the entire arena paused to applaud the volunteers who bring hope, stability, and connection to veterans across Tampa Bay. In that moment, the heart of our mission was shining brightly for all of Tampa Bay to see.

It was an honor to have Operation: Veteran Connect (OVC) recognized as a Tampa Bay Lightning Foundation Community Hero. Their generous investment of $50,000 will support and expand OVC's vital work to compassionately and consistently show up for Veterans who too often fall through the cracks.

Representing our volunteers on the ice was Rosalind Washington, an Army Veteran and OVC volunteer whose story reflects the heart of the program. After losing her home, belongings, and car to back-to-back hurricanes, Rosalind was referred to Operation: Veteran Connect for help. She received furniture and essential items that allowed her and her daughter to start over, and that moment changed everything. Rosalind didn't just regain stability; she found her calling.



Today, Rosalind serves fellow veterans with the same compassion she once received. She coordinates furniture deliveries so no Veteran sleeps on a bare floor, teaches practical cooking skills drawn from her Army experience, and shows up in moments of crisis with calm, steady care. Her service is a powerful reminder of what's possible when veterans support veterans. Operation: Veteran Connect is built on trusted peer relationships and practical help connecting veterans to housing, food, healthcare, and community resources while addressing isolation, PTSD, and the challenges of rebuilding life after service. OVC uses the power and commitment of over 40 volunteers to support 825+ veterans each year, meeting them where they live and walking alongside them toward stability and connection.

To every Operation: Veteran Connect volunteer: thank you. Your service restores dignity, builds trust, and reminds Veterans that they are not alone. This recognition belongs to you. And a special shoutout to Jabil and the Tampa Bay Lightning for hosting an incredible celebration in the Jabil Community Hero Suite. Feeling the energy of the arena, surrounded by cheers and gratitude, was a powerful way to honor the meaningful work our volunteers accomplish every day.

Be the friendly face a veteran can count on. Volunteer with Operation: Veteran Connect and help veterans navigate life's challenges. Email OVC@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

JABIL

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING



Reeling in Connection

For many of the veterans we serve, one of the hardest parts of the day is simply getting out the door. Isolation can quietly shrink life down to the walls of an apartment. That's why moments like this matter. Operation: Veteran Connect and veterans from the Bahia community joined the annual fishing outing hosted by American Legion Post 138 and Veterans Depot. With fishing poles in hand and lunch shared afterward, the day offered more than an activity; it provided connection. Laughter replaced loneliness, stories were swapped, and for a few hours, veterans who often struggle to leave their apartment found joy in being together with their fellow veterans.

BayCare Invests in Companionship as a Path Toward Better Health



Some of the most powerful medicine doesn't come in a pill bottle, it comes through a phone call. We're proud to announce a renewed 3 year partnership with BayCare to strengthen community health and tackle one of the biggest challenges impacting well-being: loneliness. Their generous support will allow Health Buddies to continue expanding across Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, and Polk counties, reaching 400 individuals, people just like Helen and her husband.

Helen shared how lifechanging Health Buddies has been for her:

"My Health Buddy Alison is awesome! No matter how I'm feeling, whether I'm having a bad day or a good one, her calls always make things better. She first told me about a sleep app, and after I tried it, I found a setting with guitar and ocean sounds that I love. During our next call, I told her about it, and now she uses that one too! Sharing little things like that has been fun for both of us."

"Alison also looks up resources when I need them and always takes time to answer my questions. When my husband, Andy, had a heart attack and I ended up hospitalized the next day with edema, we were overwhelmed. We're both working hard to eat healthier, and the fresh produce deliveries from Health Buddies have helped so much. Alison sends recipes and cheers us on. I also live with Crohn's disease and am awaiting a liver transplant, so having her in my corner means everything. Seeing her name pop up on my phone instantly makes me smile. I'm so grateful Dunedin Fire Rescue told me about this program. It's truly been lifechanging."

Health Buddies pairs isolated seniors with trained volunteers who call weekly to chat about everyday life, wellness, nutrition, movement, and mental health, but most importantly, they connect as people. Managing a chronic condition can feel overwhelming, especially when loneliness magnifies every worry. When seniors feel scared or unsure, many turn to the emergency room simply because they don't have anyone else to call.

Health Buddies offers another path. It's a compassionate companion. Someone who listens and encourages small, manageable steps toward better health.

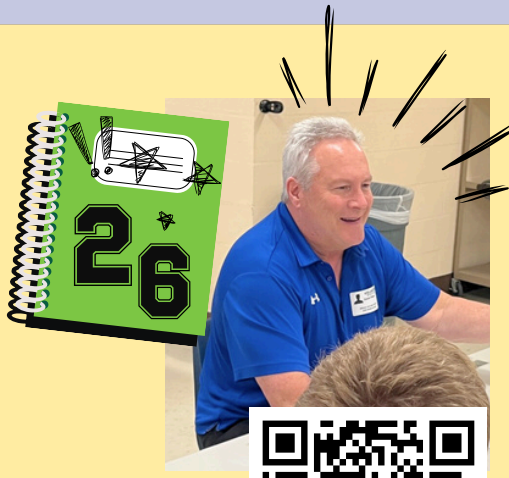
Because of BayCare's investment, more seniors will achieve better health, one phone call at a time.

BayCare



Your call can change a life. Sign up to be a Health Buddy today. Email HealthBuddies@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

Real Talk Leads to Real Growth at Ben Hill Middle



Mentors help solve tomorrow's problems today. With every conversation, they share life experience, encouragement, and perspective that can help kids make choices today that shape their futures. Middle school is a turning point. Students are figuring out who they are, who they want to be, and which voices to listen to. In a season full of pressure and uncertainty, having a caring adult show up just for you can make all the difference.

That's why we're grateful for our volunteer mentors who give up their lunch hour twice a month to provide individual and small group mentoring with 40 students at Ben Hill Middle School. They create space for real conversations about friendships, choices, goals, and the kind of adults these students hope to become.

Mentors say the impact goes both ways. "Preparing these young men to step confidently into the adult world is deeply rewarding," shared Dan, one of our mentors. "Every session, at least one student finds their voice and helps lead the conversation. When given support and encouragement, they're ready to grow."

This program is made possible through the generous support of The Saunders Foundation, whose investment helps students build confidence, belonging, and the skills to make thoughtful choices during these critical years.

As we step into a new year, consider stepping into this meaningful work. Share a lunch. Share your story. Help change a student's path.

THE Saunders FOUNDATION

Sign up to volunteer as a mentor today and help a young person discover what they're capable of. Email RSVP@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.



A Small Act That Fixed a Big Gap

Operation: Veteran Connect's presence made all the difference for a veteran found wandering the VA hospital lobby, confused, alone and unsure where his ride was. His memory was failing him, and no one noticed. Except Sylvia.

Sylvia, an AmeriCorps member serving with Operation: Veteran Connect for nearly three years, noticed him right away. She didn't hesitate. With patience and calm reassurance, she helped him retrace his steps, connect with staff, and remain safe until his ride arrived.

What could have been a frightening experience became one marked by dignity and compassion. Her actions also revealed a gap in care for veterans with memory challenges, one that the VA has since addressed to better protect others.

We're grateful to GTE Financial and Achieva for making moments like this possible. Their investment helps put volunteers like Sylvia inside veteran serving organizations to ensure more veterans have someone who notices when they need someone who truly cares.

Want to be that steady presence for a veteran in need? Volunteer with Operation: Veteran Connect and help ensure no one who served has to face life's challenges alone. Email OVC@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

When the Storms Come, So Does Community



With shock and grief-stricken faces, residents trickled into our Senior Disaster Support monthly activity at their 55+ community. It was the largest attendance we had ever had. The night before a fire had engulfed their neighbors' home, taking their lives. Sadness and fear brought people together to ask the questions, "Could this happen again? What can we do?" This tragedy sparked conversations about how seniors can prepare and support each other through all of life's unexpected disasters.

Education is key to being prepared. Senior Disaster Support was created in response to back-to-back devastating hurricanes. Yet, disasters take on many forms, including fires, medical emergencies, and even scams. Now, we're partnering with local experts like recently retired Fire Department Educator Lori Collins, who volunteers her time to lead practical, life-saving fire safety tips in the senior communities we serve. Everyone left the session with a new fire alarm and renewed peace of mind. Future meetings will cover Hands-Only CPR, Scam Prevention, and Medication Management to prevent accidental overdoses.

As we know, loneliness can be one of the most devastating disasters a senior can face. And it's sneaky. You don't even realize it's happening to you. Clyde is a great example of how Senior Disaster Support is foundational to fighting the disaster of loneliness.

Each month, Clyde quietly attended our activities, listening more than speaking. Living with a chronic condition and limited mobility, he was searching for something more. Eventually, Clyde gained the confidence to pull our team aside and asked how he could help. Now, Clyde serves food, hands out materials, and sits with neighbors to share stories and encouragement. Seeing Clyde step into service was like watching a light switch flip. This was his true self, redefining his purpose as a leader. Volunteering in community with others is the anecdote to loneliness.

When you're in a crisis, knowing someone is looking out for you makes all the difference. With support from SE Grocers, Sun Communities, and Sunshine Health, our Senior Disaster Support Program is helping seniors feel safer, prepared, and connected where they live. Because of our partners, this program is expanding to Dade City Senior Center, Sunshine Senior Center in St. Petersburg, and Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Wimauma, offering monthly sessions on disaster preparedness, fraud prevention, and safety year-round.

Want to be part of this work? Volunteer with the Senior Disaster Support Program and help a neighbor feel safer, stronger, and never alone. Email SDS@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

A Simple Visit Leads to a Lasting Friendship

CENTER FOR DEMENTIA RESPITE INNOVATION

"This is the beginning of a long-lasting friendship." Both Mr. Archie and Mr. Edwards knew it right away! They had just met for the first time through our Senior Companion Program, yet a bond had already begun.

Mr. Edwards, a widower and former tennis coach, recently moved into assisted living following an Alzheimer's diagnosis. Determined to remain as independent as possible, he was matched with Mr. Archie, a Senior Companion volunteer who visits him every week to provide companionship, brain stimulating activities like puzzles and games, and regular walks that keep both body and mind engaged.



His caregiver, Celine, an old friend who checks in daily, was relieved to have the extra support from Mr. Archie. She shared, "Both Mr. Edwards and I are very thankful for Mr. Archie. His time and dedication mean so much, and Mr. Edwards truly looks forward to their visits."

Thanks to support from the Alzheimer's Association Center for Dementia Respite Innovation, volunteers like Mr. Archie are better prepared than ever. Through the six-week Savvy Caregiver Program, they're learning how to understand dementia, adapt activities, and respond with confidence and compassion.

Want to make this kind of difference? Become a Senior Companion and be the steady presence someone is counting on. Email SCP@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.



The Kind of Friendship That Keeps You Going

Loneliness is quiet, and its weight is heavy. Our Senior Companion volunteers lift that weight. With support from the Senior Citizens Services Fund at Pinellas Community Foundation, we continue to reach low-income seniors and adults with disabilities across Pinellas County who need connection, consistency, and care.

At the heart of this program are relationships built on trust and presence. One of those relationships is between Willie Joyce Hall, known simply as Joyce, and Mr. Roscoe Prince, a remarkable 98-year-old whose outlook on life is as inspiring as his years are many. During their time together, they read, prepare meals, do gentle exercises, and enjoy movie afternoons. Joyce's steady companionship helps Mr. Roscoe remain independent while supporting both his emotional and physical well-being.

These moments of shared routines, conversations, and laughter are what make the Senior Companion Program so powerful. They reduce isolation, restore dignity, and remind seniors they are not alone. We are deeply grateful to the Pinellas Community Foundation for believing in the importance of connection and for investing in relationships that truly change lives.

PINELLAS COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
SENIOR CITIZENS SERVICES

Want to be that steady presence for someone who needs it? Share your time, your kindness, and your heart. Volunteer as a Senior Companion today and help an older adult feel seen, supported, and connected. Email SCP@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

Thank you to our funders!

















































































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The Student Who Needed One Person

Every teacher knows that student, the one who wiggles instead of listening, the one falling further behind, no matter how hard they try. In this case, it was Noah, a second grader who couldn't read. Letter sounds wouldn't stick. Lessons didn't hold his attention. But on Tuesdays and Thursdays, everything changed.

Like clockwork, Grandma Perri showed up. She pulled her chair close, opened a book, and offered patience without pressure. No audience. No judgment. Just one-on-one time with someone who refused to give up. Slowly, confidence grew. Then one day, Noah walked up holding a Dr. Seuss book and said, "I can read this." And he did.



His teacher, Ms. Klimon of Mango Elementary, shared:
"I believe that the extra time Grandma Perri has to spend with Noah one-on-one with no audience to judge makes a difference! I teach 2nd grade, and Grandma Perri has become a powerful literacy tool for my students."

That's the impact of a Classroom Grandparent, quiet, steady, and life-changing. As a new year begins, many people are looking for purpose. Sometimes, it's as simple as sitting beside a child and believing in them until they believe in themselves.

Ready to make a difference this year? Become a Classroom Grandparent and help a child discover what's possible. Sign up to volunteer today. Email FGP@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.