



# SENIORS in SERVICE

GEARED UP TO SERVE

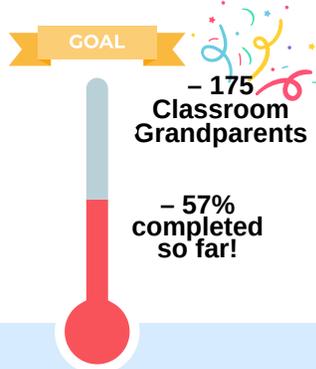
## GEARED UP News

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

### From Backpacks to Bigger Dreams

Ezekiel cannot stop smiling! He just received a brand-new backpack from his Classroom Grandma! His mom shared that he could barely contain his excitement as he showed her all the fun supplies that were loaded in the backpack. Each school year our Classroom Grandparents help stuff and distribute backpacks full of educational resources to motivate learning for our Readers in Motion students, thanks to the Children's Board of Hillsborough County.

But those backpacks represent something even bigger. Through our Classroom Grandparent Program, seniors find renewed purpose while helping students build confidence and succeed in school. It's a win-win: children get one-on-one attention, support, and stability, while volunteers gain friendship, joy, and a deep sense of fulfillment from helping kids grow and thrive.



We already have 100 NEW Classroom Grandparents bringing joy and learning into local classrooms, but we urgently need 75 more to reach our goal for this school year. The kids are ready. The classrooms are waiting. And there's a spot just for you.

**Sign up today and be the reason a child and you discover a whole new sense of purpose. Scan the QR code or email [FGP@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:FGP@seniorsinservice.org) to learn more.**



Children's Board  
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY  
[www.ChildrensBoard.org](http://www.ChildrensBoard.org)

### The Power of Showing Up



Operation: Veteran Connect has been learning the power of belonging. Initially we thought stability for veterans meant a roof over their heads, furniture in their apartments, and the basics to make life manageable. And we did that helping 75 veterans transition out of homelessness.

But when we went back a year later, reality hit hard. Some of those same veterans had lost their homes. Others had even lost their lives. The veterans were lonelier than ever. One veteran put it plainly, "When you live in poverty, no one invites you over for dinner." That simple statement was a wake-up call. We realized something painfully clear: stability takes more than shelter, it takes a place of connection and belonging.

So, we shifted gears. We launched a pilot program inside an apartment complex that's home to over 40 veterans who face poverty and isolation. Twice a month, we host game days, skill-building sessions, and meals. Veterans who once kept to themselves are opening up, and trust is taking root. We're learning the power of anticipation: having a date on the calendar to look forward to may seem small, but for veterans living in isolation, it is a sign of belonging.



**Have a heart to listen and show up? Join Operation: Veteran Connect and help us create community. Email [OVC@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:OVC@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to get started.**



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Robin proudly accepting "Leadership with a Golden Heart" nomination at the 2025 SAGES Golden Hearts Awards.

## CEO Corner

Hope isn't just a feeling, it's a process we build together, one steady block at a time. Each kind word, every encouraging smile, every moment of genuine connection becomes part of a foundation strong enough to change a life. Hope isn't a magic wish, it's tangible, teachable, and, most importantly, something we can help create for others.

At Seniors in Service, our volunteers are the builders of hope. They tutor children, check in on seniors, and stand beside veterans. Their consistent presence sends a simple but powerful message: "You matter. You're seen. You're not alone."

And time and again we see the impact, students gain confidence, seniors find joy, and veterans discover purpose.

Research shows that hope grows through relationships. Every connection our volunteers make strengthens someone's belief in themselves and inspires them to take steps they might never have imagined. A simple phone call, a patient smile, a helping hand, these are the small acts of hope in action that build big change.

The world could always use more hope. And the beautiful truth is—you can be the one to provide it. By volunteering with Seniors in Service, you're not just giving your time; you're giving someone the building blocks they need to thrive. Sign up to volunteer today.

*-Robin Ingles, CEO*

## Painting Brighter Days for Seniors Living with Dementia

Art and creative expression serve as powerful tools in improving the quality of life for seniors with Alzheimer's and dementia. We had the joy of hosting an art day at Ruth's Promise Adult Day Program in Pinellas County. Participants lit up as they created art, shared laughter, and expressed pure joy. It was a powerful reminder of how creativity can spark connection, comfort, and happiness.



Thanks to support from the Alzheimer's Association Center for Dementia Respite Innovation, our Senior Companion Program is expanding our dementia-specific respite efforts across the Tampa Bay area. Together, we're creating meaningful engagement for seniors while offering caregivers the gift of rest and renewal.

Ruth's Promise provides safe, joyful space where older adults can stay active and cognitively engaged, a true lifeline for both seniors and their caregivers. We're honored to partner with them and provide compassionate volunteers who help power their mission of care, expression, and creativity.

**Want to make brighter days for our neighbors living with dementia? Become a Senior Companion volunteer. Scan the QR code or email [SCP@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:SCP@seniorsinservice.org) to learn more.**

CENTER FOR  
**DEMENTIA RESPITE  
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## Grandma Powell Is the Heart of the Classroom



Walk into Ms. Nordstrom’s kindergarten classroom at Maximo Elementary, and you’ll notice something special right away. Sure, there are crayons scattered across tables and the happy buzz of five-year-olds learning their ABCs. But at the heart of it all is Classroom Grandma Christine Powell, a steady, smiling presence who brings warmth, patience, and a whole lot of love to every child she meets.

Grandma Powell isn’t just helping kids learn their letters and sounds, though thanks to her, every single kindergartner in her class mastered them last year, with most already reading at a first-grade level. She’s also the one holding little hands when the cafeteria feels too loud and scary, bringing shoes and jackets for students who need them, and greeting each child by name so they know they matter the moment they walk through the door. Ms. Nordstrom says she’s transformed not just the students, but the entire classroom environment sharing, “When I felt like I was drowning my first year, she was the calm in the storm. Every student I’ve ever had is better off because of her.”

Grandma Powell is one of many volunteers in our Classroom Grandparent Program who find a new sense of purpose while helping kids build confidence, master new skills, and feel loved. But we need more hearts like hers. This year, we need more Classroom Grandparents to reach our goal. You can make a difference that lasts generations.



**Sign up today and help us fill classrooms and little hearts with love, learning, and hope. Reach out to us at [FGP@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:FGP@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to learn more.**

## 175 Rides and Counting



Even a simple ride to the doctor can carry immense meaning. Across South Shore, our Companion Transportation Program has now given more than 175 rides to seniors who need a little help getting to medical appointments. But these rides are so much more than transportation. They are comfort, kindness, and connection wrapped up in the front seat of a car.

One passenger, preparing for a liver transplant, faces fear and uncertainty each week as she heads to appointments at Moffitt. Every time, she’s met with the same warm smile from her driver, Diane, a retired nurse who knows just when to talk, when to listen, and how to make a tough day a little lighter. The tears at the start of each ride are always replaced by a heartfelt “thank you” and a cheerful “see you next week.” That’s the difference a caring neighbor can make.

Then there’s Kate, a volunteer who drives a passenger with significant vision loss to quarterly appointments in Sarasota. Kate went the extra mile to learn the safest ways to guide someone without pulling or causing imbalance. Together, they now walk down sidewalks with confidence and grace. It’s not just about reaching the destination—it’s about preserving dignity along the way.

We are especially grateful for supporters like The Mabel and Ellsworth Simmons Foundation, whose commitment keeps this program rolling, quite literally. Because of them and folks like Diane and Kate lives are being touched in ways big and small.

Do you have a set of wheels and a heart for helping? Join us. **Email [RSVP@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:RSVP@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to contact us today!**



*The Mabel & Ellsworth Simmons*  
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION, INC.

## A Veteran's Journey Back to Purpose



Sometimes the heaviest battles our veterans fight are the quiet ones fought alone, long after the uniform comes off. Operation: Veteran Connect community volunteer Bernie knows that story all too well.

In the late '80s, she was stationed in Panama, surrounded by danger, cut off from family and friends, and carrying the weight of trauma that followed her long after her service ended. Life moved on, she started a business, remarried, built a family, but the isolation stuck like a shadow. Little by little, her world grew smaller until even reaching out felt impossible.

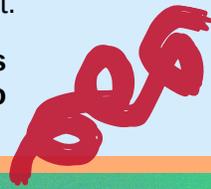
That began to change the day she crossed paths with an AmeriCorps member serving through Operation: Veteran Connect. For four years, they gently encouraged her to join. At first she said no, she didn't believe she had the skills or the confidence to be part of something bigger than herself. But eventually, she took the leap, signing up for one year of service.



What she found was more than volunteer hours, it was purpose. Friendships pulled her out of isolation, new skills gave her confidence, and serving others lit a spark she thought she'd lost for good. Through the Veterans Art for Healing program, she discovered a passion for art that helped her and other veterans process the wounds of the past. Today, one of her paintings hangs proudly in the VA, a symbol of courage, healing, and hope.

Now after completing her second year of service, she's training to become a certified instructor in therapeutic art, ready to help even more veterans find the healing she's discovered. This is what Operation: Veteran Connect is all about, helping veterans rebuild confidence, find community, and discover purpose again. And you can be part of it.

Sign up to volunteer today and help us write more stories of hope and healing for the veterans who've given so much for all of us. Email [OVC@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:OVC@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to learn how you can get involved today.



## Neighbors Helping Neighbors Come Rain or Shine



There's something powerful about folks coming together, swapping stories, learning new skills, and looking out for one another. That's exactly what's happening through our Senior Disaster Support Program, made possible through generous supporters, including Wawa.

From hands-only CPR to hurricane kit giveaways, this program is helping older adults prepare for whatever Mother Nature throws their way. Recently, our team visited BayPoint Towers and Colony Cove, where residents gathered to share experiences from storms Helene and Milton and talk about what they learned and what they'd do differently next time.

These events are community in action. Folks trade storm stories, share safety tips, and leave with not only hurricane kits filled with essentials, but also peace of mind knowing they're not facing the next storm alone. As Cora, one of the attendees, shared, "I didn't realize how much help was out there. I feel more confident and better prepared now. I even learned new things, like how to store my emergency contacts and medical information on my phone!"

Still, there are so many more seniors out there who need support, and we can't do it without you. Sign up to volunteer or rally your workplace, church, or group to adopt a senior community.



The Wawa Foundation



Join us in building stronger, safer neighborhoods where neighbors truly look out for one another. Email [SDS@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:SDS@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to sign up today!

## Friendship on the Line: The Power of Health Buddies



A simple phone call can do more than you might imagine. Just ask the folks at Pasco County's Mobile Integrated Health program. Their community paramedics work tirelessly to help seniors stay safe and independent, and they've seen firsthand how the Health Buddies program is bringing friendship, wellness tips, and a new sense of community to adults with chronic conditions.

Heather, a Community Paramedic in the Mobile Integrated Health unit, shared the story of a father and daughter she referred to Health Buddies. The father, Reggie, homebound and staring at the same four walls day after day, began to look forward to calls from his Health Buddy, someone who traveled, shared stories, and brought the outside world in. Each call was a reminder that life was still happening beyond his walls, and that he was still part of it.

But the real miracle was Reggie's daughter. She had been so busy caring for her father that she'd stopped caring for herself. After joining the program, she started fixing her hair, going for walks, even joining a gym. "It was like she came back to life," Heather said. "The empowerment this program gave them was amazing to see."

These calls aren't just conversation, they're connection. For some seniors, knowing they had someone to talk to the next day was what kept them from calling 911 when they felt overwhelmed. For others, it's the friendship, encouragement, and routine that bring a sense of purpose back into their lives. As Heather put it, "People feel empowered. They feel like someone cares."

The Health Buddies program is free and open to anyone 18 and older who could use a friendly, consistent voice on the other end of the line. Whether it's swapping stories, sharing a laugh, or just knowing someone will check in tomorrow, it can make all the difference.



**Lend an ear, share a story, change a life. Sign up to be a Health Buddy today. Email [HealthBuddies@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:HealthBuddies@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to sign up today!**

## A Taste of Heritage and a Heart Full of Service

We're proud to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, a time to honor the vibrant culture and contributions of Hispanic and Latino communities, and to recognize the incredible volunteers whose compassion and dedication brighten lives every day.

This month, our Hispanic Senior Companion volunteers celebrated one another with a potluck full of homemade dishes, laughter, and camaraderie, a reflection of the spirit they bring to every life they touch.

That same spirit shines through volunteers like Ada, who says, "Each senior that I've met, I've learned something from and I have taught something to." For her, volunteering means serving others while building lasting friendships and connection. Whether carpooling to events or swapping stories at monthly meetings, Ada treasures the sense of belonging that comes from being part of a caring community. These gatherings are a space to learn and lift one another up, a reminder that while volunteers serve in different homes, they're all part of the same family at Seniors in Service.

**You can be part of this, too. If you're 55 or older and want to make a difference while joining a community full of heart and purpose, become a Senior Companion volunteer. Email [SCP@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:SCP@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to sign up today!**



## A Gift of Connection

Thanks to the generous support of Better Living for Seniors Pinellas, Seniors in Service can continue doing what matters most, connecting isolated and homebound seniors with caring companions who bring comfort and friendship. Their grant helps sustain our Senior Companion, TelePals, and Group Companionship programs each one a lifeline that reminds older adults they are seen, valued, and never alone.

Every connection tells a story of hope. Take Joyce, a lifelong helper with a gift for listening, who visits with Stacy, an artistic St. Pete native eager to share her creativity and conversation. Or Ms. Kathy and Mr. Chan, whose bond grew over shared memories and treasured keepsakes. These relationships have transformed into genuine friendships that bring meaning and happiness to both hearts involved.

Because of partners like Better Living for Seniors, we can continue creating these moments of connection that restore dignity, spark laughter, and remind both seniors and volunteers what it means to belong. For older adults, companionship eases loneliness and renews hope. For volunteers, it offers purpose and the chance to make a real difference through friendly conversations and weekly visits.

**Become a Senior Companion and help keep growing the kind of friendships that make life a little brighter for everyone. Email [SCP@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:SCP@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to get started.**



## Leveling Up for the Future

We're thrilled to share that we've been selected for the 2025–2026 Annual Capacity-Building Initiative, presented by the Nonprofit Leadership Center and the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg!

This exciting opportunity comes with a grant to help us grow smarter and stronger focusing on what keeps our mission thriving: leadership, adaptability, and innovation. As part of this initiative, our team will take part in the Core Capacity Assessment Tool (CCAT)—a nationally recognized process that helps nonprofits sharpen their strategy, strengthen operations, and plan for a bright future.

We can't wait to learn alongside our peers, and explore new ways to boost our tech, data systems, and professional development all so we can better serve the seniors and students who depend on us.



# Thank you to our funders!





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## Make a Difference in Your Own Unique Way

Across Pasco, Pinellas, and Hillsborough counties, RSVP volunteers are proving every day that there's no one-size-fits-all way to serve just big hearts finding the right fit!

Take Jan, who greets Veterans at the VA Outpatient Clinic in New Port Richey with a warm smile that sets the tone for a great visit. Or Shirley, who's brightening days at ECHO's resource center in Brandon. Meanwhile, Arlene and Kimberly are spreading cheer at Grace's Food Pantry in Hudson, helping families put food on the table, and Elaine is putting her filing skills to good use with St. Vincent de Paul.

And over at Ben Hill Middle School, a team of dedicated mentors is shaping the next generation. By sharing life lessons, listening with patience, and offering words of encouragement, these mentors are helping 7th and 8th grade students build confidence, character, and hope for the future.

From food pantries to VA clinics to middle school classrooms, RSVP volunteers are showing that giving back looks a little different for everyone and that's what makes it so special.

Ready to find a new purpose? Email [RSVP@SeniorsInService.org](mailto:RSVP@SeniorsInService.org) or scan the QR code to join the RSVP family today!

