



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

Upcoming Events

Brunch Buddies!

Join Seniors in Service over Zoom every other Friday from 11:00 - 12:00 pm for Brunch Buddies! Brunch Buddies is a VIRTUAL opportunity to engage with other like-minded volunteers for an hour of connection, guest speakers, bingo, and more!

Each week there will be a different theme and/or guest speaker. See April and May's topics below!

Register at:

<https://seniorsinservice.link/BrunchBuddies>

Brunch Buddies Special

Topics/Guests:

- **April 16th** Special Topic - Our local real estate market with Moira Sandoval
- **April 30th** Special Guest - Carina Shrestha will join us to share the wonderful resources offered by the Senior Connection Center.
- **May 14th** Special Guest - Geri Burke will join us to discuss the various support options offered by Care Patrol

Welcome RSVP Pinellas!

Seniors in Service has been awarded a competitive grant from AmeriCorps Seniors to engage seniors in Pinellas County in community service through the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), addressing inequities in food-security, education, health, economic stability, and digital inclusion by engaging seniors in community service. "This competitive award is significant, made possible by our proven success with RSVP in Hillsborough and Pasco Counties, especially in our response to the pandemic," said Seniors in Service CEO Robin Ingles. Services under our new RSVP Pinellas grant begin April 1st.

"We already engage volunteers ages 55 and better in Pinellas, and now there are even more opportunities to harness the power of seniors to change the world," Robin shared. "We welcome all existing RSVP Pinellas volunteers, and we invite all community members age 55+ who are eager to share their passion, skills, and experience to serve our community". Seniors in Service offers opportunities to volunteer remotely or in-person following guidelines to ensure participants remain healthy and safe. Whether you're passionate about helping a child read, offering companionship to a lonely senior, delivering food to a hungry family, assisting a struggling Veteran, or even guiding a neighbor to use a computer for accessing online services – Seniors in Service can connect you to the volunteer opportunity of your dreams!

During COVID-19 more impoverished children struggle with reading, more homebound elders have become invisible, more veterans struggle to access benefits, and more families face food, housing, health, or financial insecurity for the very first time. The pandemic also shed light on the digital divide, making essential online services out of reach for many who lack access to computers or the skills to use them.

Got an hour? Give an hour!

What: Seniors in Service Retired & Senior Volunteer Program

Who: Individuals aged 55 and better support children, families, veterans, and seniors in a variety of ways based on their interests

Requirements: Age 55+ with a passion for making a difference

Commitment: Flexible to meet your schedule!

For more information, contact Sarah Rosenbaum at (813) 582-2162 or srosenbaum@seniorsinservice.org. Or visit www.SeniorsinService.org to discover other opportunities to serve where you live!

Follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/seniorsinservice

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A Message from our CEO

Things are starting to look up. As the one-year mark on the pandemic lockdown passed, it felt like we could finally exhale. The vaccine is now available to most people and we can see the beginnings of the world opening once more. I feel relieved, but I've just started to deal with my deep sense of sadness and loss.

2020 was filled with "coping" and damage control. Many of us didn't recognize the turbulence we experienced for what it truly is: slow, sustained, shared trauma. Now, as we slowly step back into our normal lives, we are starting to see the emotional, mental, and physical imprint that 2020 left. The effects of isolation on all people young and old are staggering and long-lasting. If you're feeling these effects, please know: you're not alone.

The "crisis" may be ending, but the healing has only just begun. Don't retreat to life as you knew it before the pandemic – step out, not back. Engage with the community you have missed. It doesn't take much. It can be as simple as a handwritten letter or as involved as in-person tutoring over the summer. It's completely up to you.

Seniors in Service offers opportunities for connection and engagement at all levels – from craft projects and pen-pals, to telephone reassurance and virtual tutoring, to assisting at local food pantries, running errands for homebound elderly, and in-school mentorship. We made it this far together. Don't turn back now. Step out with Seniors in Service.

-Robin Ingles, CEO

Correction

In our excitement in awarding Norman "Norm" Bungard the Operation: Veteran Connect Hero of Service Award, we erroneously indicated he was a World War II Veteran. Norm, in fact, is a Vietnam-era Veteran whose service in the '60s included a hardship tour of duty in South Korea as an agent with the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC).

He is quick to add that he is proud of his service even though he never served in a combat role. He has high admiration for those who served in combat and considers them heroes of the highest order. Norm did not serve during WWII, or the Police Action (war) in Korea, or Vietnam; his service was during the Vietnam-era.



Service Moments



Parent Engagement Events go VIRTUAL!

Readers in Motion hosted its first VIRTUAL parent engagement event this February in collaboration with Bricks 4 Kidz. Our family events have become quite a staple, engaging our K-1 students, their siblings and even parents in various creative STEM activities. We knew this year's events would look different, but we did not imagine they would be this exciting!

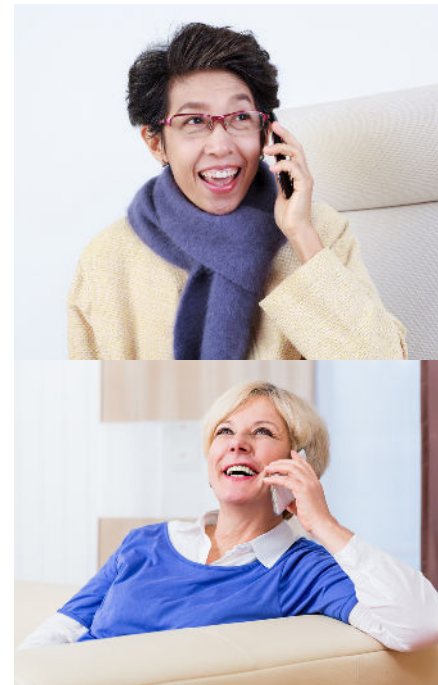


We arranged parent pick-ups for the LEGO® materials needed through a parent pick-up drive at Oak Grove Elementary. With their parents' help, students logged onto Zoom and joined the live instruction where they saw their friends, teachers, and volunteers! Bricks 4 Kidz LEGO® experts walked families through building 3-D LEGO® hearts to celebrate Valentine's Day! 48 students joined; teachers and volunteer mentors participated as well. We are thankful that we could still provide this opportunity to our students enrolled in Readers in Motion!

Our parent engagement events were extra special this year as the Readers in Motion students and families attending tutoring sessions at Children's Board Family Resource Centers joined as well! We hosted in-person Bricks 4 Kidz activities at the North Tampa and Temple Terrace locations where families built 3-D LEGO® cars, trucks, helicopters, and planes! The creations even had battery-operated features, which elevated them to be mobile robotic toys! These captivating events would not be possible to our Readers in Motion families without the Children's Board of Hillsborough County's continued support!

Volunteers Fight Loneliness with Connection

Research shows loneliness eclipses obesity and even smoking as a predictor of early decline/death. Seniors need social connection to preserve health and remain independent. TelePals offer socialization and wellness checks through telephone reassurance. TelePals like Betsy make weekly calls to let isolated seniors know they have a friend who cares. Betsy and her TelePal, Barbara, connected from the get-go. "I think the world of her," Betsy explains. "I would love to meet her someday, and I hope that I do." Betsy and Barbara talk for about an hour once or twice a week. They talk about everything from health concerns to childhood memories to the goings-on in their neighborhoods. TelePals make a difference while positively affecting their own lives. Betsy says it best, "I look forward to my conversations with her. It's made me want to be more like her in my own life." **Make a real difference and make a friend.** Visit www.TelePalNow.org or call Becky Ford at (813) 819-0725 to sign-up today!



Service Moments

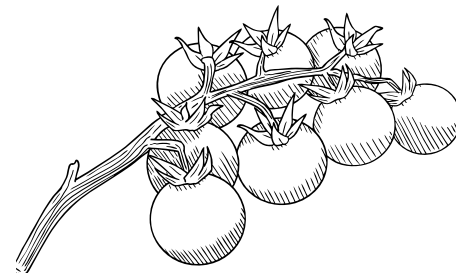
Continuing Love and Care – In-Person and By Phone

Volunteers help isolated homebound elders or veterans live independently, with dignity, in their own homes. Some have continued to serve their clients as TelePals, while others have ventured back to in-person service. "They've really stepped up to the plate, keeping their relationships going over the phone or back in person." Jeremy, Senior Companion staffer, explains, "Some people might be surprised by how much the volunteers love their clients. The level of love and care they show is unbelievable." The love is mutual, and client Betty Fuego said it best: "My companion means so much to me. The older I get, the more she helps and encourages me. She's become not just a companion, but a true friend."



Building Hope, One Tomato at a Time

Isolation stemming from mandatory stay-at-home orders and social distancing brought fear and loneliness to Sun City Center's senior community in March of 2020. Food insecurity also skyrocketed, and a growing sense of uncertainty paralyzed many. That was not the case for Sun City Center residents and Seniors in Service volunteers Don and Connie. After witnessing changes in their neighborhood, they decided to create positive change, resulting in their infamous tomato deliveries. Their packages brought smiles and sunshine, letting recipients know: "You're not alone." A year later, Don and Connie continue their efforts and deliver their small bursts of happiness to neighbors, friends, and now, even strangers. Over the last year, Don and Connie gave out 775 pounds of tomatoes through 214 deliveries. In an event THIS March, hosted by Beth-El Ministries, Don and Connie personally gave 40 bags of tomatoes to grateful recipients, along with an encouraging smile and word. Don explains, "Our motto is 'Building Hope, One Tomato at a Time.'"



Get GEARED UP - There's an opportunity for everyone!

Support isolated seniors through in-home companionship or telephone reassurance, tutor children in literacy, help families gain access to food, or support veterans as they navigate the healthcare system.

Sign-up today! www.SeniorsinService.org

Service Moments

Chronic Conditions Can't Stop Connection!

Brian once had a life full of activity and independence until a diagnosis changed everything. His chronic condition caused exhaustion and forced Brian to remain indoors more often than he ever had. Brian's isolation became dire after the mandatory social distancing caused by COVID-19. Thankfully, a Seniors in Service staff member reached out to Brian to let him know that he's not alone. Instead of suffering through loneliness, Brian joined Health Buddies! Seniors in Service paired Brian up with a student volunteer from USF named Ben. With similar interests and friendly natures, Brian and Ben became fast friends. Brian describes their interactions warmly, stating, "I've had long chats with my volunteer. We're looking forward to meeting in-person one day - we even have plans to shoot pool!" Ben equally enjoys their chats, "Everything is going great! He is a lovely gentleman... I'm learning a lot about his life experiences."



Partnering Up for PTSD

Operation: Veteran Connect volunteers make an extraordinary impact in our community by serving Veterans, active military, and military family members. Volunteers partnered with the Franciscan Center in Tampa during AmeriCorps Week to help spread the word about their program, Operation Restore. Operation Restore serves first responders, military members, and Veterans who may be suffering from PTSD. Volunteers stuffed, stamped, and labeled 489 outreach packets. "We left with a sense of accomplishment," Janet, an Operation:



Veteran Connect volunteer, explained. "It took team work to accomplish our mission, and it was great to work together to make it happen." Make a difference for Veterans, military members, and their families in your community. Visit <https://seniorsinservice.link/VeteransMilitary> to get involved or call Glarisol Traspalacios at (813) 492-8935.

Volunteers Serve Friendship and Food to Residents of The Landings at St. Andrews



COVID-19 has exacerbated the already dire problem of senior food insecurity in Tampa Bay. Many are unable to grocery shop or visit restaurants for fear of infection. The Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Pasco County teams up with partner organizations, like Grace's Food Pantry and Christo's Restaurant, to keep seniors fed and healthy. Christo's Restaurant in Pasco County received a grant from United Way of Pasco to provide 200 meals per day to residents of The Landings of St. Andrew. But there was a problem: they needed volunteers to deliver the food. Seniors in Service reached out to Grace's Food Pantry at The Landings of St. Andrew to help. Founder Grace Sepulveda and her son Ed collect food donations and deliver them to residents of The Landings. Between Seniors in Service and Grace Food Pantry volunteers, over 200 meals went to grateful recipients every day for a month. Residents didn't just get food – they also received friendly visits each day from volunteers, helping them to stave off isolation and loneliness.

Partner Highlight Volunteer Highlight

Kelli Casto, Saving Our Seniors



CONGRATULATIONS to Tampa Bay Lightning Community Hero Award recipient Kelli Casto! Kelli Casto made it her mission over the last 5 years to assist struggling seniors. In 2016, Kelli founded Saving Our Seniors, an organization that provides durable medical equipment to seniors in need. She didn't stop there! Saving Our Seniors added a mobile food pantry to address the increasing number of homebound seniors who are unable to get food due to the pandemic. The new service has provided nearly 1,000 clients with meals each week. To date, Saving Our Seniors has helped more than 5,000 seniors across Tampa Bay maintain their independence, personal safety and dignity.

Seniors in Service partners with Kelli and Saving our seniors by engaging volunteers to assist in delivering meals with the mobile food pantry, equipment delivery, assisting with front-desk administrative duties, and more. We are proud to call Kelli and Saving Our Seniors our partner.

Jane McGrady, Continuing Her Commitment to Volunteering

Jane McGrady volunteers through the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program in Pasco County. Jane spent her career making a difference as a family law attorney in New York. A year and a half ago, she retired and moved to Florida. It didn't take long for Jane to realize that she is not content to sit at home and do nothing. She cares about serving the community and is always willing to get involved. "There are so many opportunities to help the community and connect with others. Seniors in Service has enabled me to meet new people and engage in meaningful activities." Dedication and commitment to volunteerism are evident in everything Jane does. Since beginning her journey with Seniors in Service, she has served in a multitude of capacities. Jane has served as a Guardian Ad Litem since 2019, assisted at Make a Difference Food Pantry, participated at various events, and even represented Seniors in Service in the community. "Jane's willingness to serve benefits not only RSVP Pasco, but also the community," Ann, RSVP Pasco Coordinator, explains. "She jumps right in and shows up." Thank you, Jane, for getting GEARED UP!

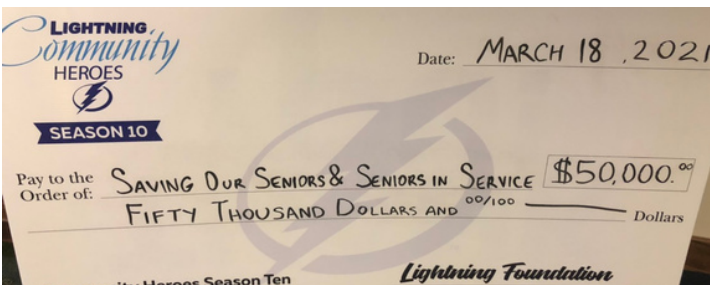


Thank you to our funders!



Congratulations to Kelli Casto at Saving Our Seniors and to Kristen Brown at TRIBE Seminole Heights - both recent recipients of the Tampa Bay Lightning Community Hero Award. The Community Hero Award recognizes grassroots Heroes whose noble efforts make a positive impact on others.

Each Tampa Bay Lightning Community Hero is presented with a \$50,000 grant on their behalf to benefit the charities of his or her choice. Both Kelli and Kristen independently chose to share a portion of their award with Seniors in Service - a tremendous honor and tribute to our enduring partnership with each of them.





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ANYONE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE - IT CAN BE AS SIMPLE AS WRITING A CARD.



Students and community members spread joy and connection through Letters with Love. What seems like a simple craft project genuinely touches the hearts of our seniors.

"Their kindness and generosity has brought joy and comfort to the lives of the beneficiaries of their cards." - Connie, Seniors in Service Staff Member who delivers Letters with Love.



What kind of difference will you make?

Check our Volunteer Opportunities at www.SeniorsInService.org to find the opportunity of your dreams or follow us on Facebook - Just search "Seniors in Service"