



## Suncoast Credit Union tells seniors, "You have someone who cares."

Suncoast Credit Union has always been a company that cares about seniors. As words like "social distancing" and "quarantine" became part of our everyday language, Suncoast Credit Union stepped up for isolated seniors. They provided generous support to allow Seniors in Service to connect even more individuals as TelePals. Isolation for seniors didn't begin with COVID-19, nor will it end as the world begins to return to normal.

Now that many sources of COVID-19 emergency response funding have expired, Suncoast Credit Union is continuing its financial support for TelePals expansion. This expansion will include connecting vulnerable seniors with the most urgent needs to essential resources such as nutritious food, stable housing, technology, and health care. Loneliness has physical and mental consequences that can be devastating. TelePals provides a solution by engaging volunteers who regularly call isolated seniors to let them know they have someone who cares. For some, it may be the only conversation they have all day.

We are proud to partner with a company like Suncoast Credit Union who represents our shared values. In addition to supporting TelePals, Suncoast Credit Union employees SERVE as TelePals! They also provide education about financial literacy and avoiding scams to our volunteers through in-service training and Brunch Buddies. Mary McDonald represents Suncoast Credit Union as their Director of Community Relations and is passionate about improving life for all Floridians, especially those from traditionally underserved populations. Suncoast Credit Union and its employees generously support the community through philanthropy, education, and volunteerism. Their outreach programs and partnerships give back to our local communities every day.



**Double your impact and donate today!**

Suncoast Credit Union has committed up to

**\$35,000**

to ensure our most vulnerable seniors are not forgotten, and you can help too! For every dollar you donate to Seniors in Service through December 22, Suncoast Credit Union will match your donation up to \$35,000.



Scan here, or visit [www.SeniorsInService.org](http://www.SeniorsInService.org)

### We know TelePals are important, because they told us so...

**"This program is amazing for the disabled and lonely people. I hope that it never fades. I can feel the love through the phone, and I know it's not fake. I know they love me, and I love them"**

-Earlene asked her TelePal Betsy to share this with Seniors in Service

Cora has been receiving phone calls every day for over a year from her TelePal, Angie. With tears in her eyes, Cora shared, **"The TelePals program is the best thing you could have ever done. Angie brought me through some dark times. When COVID got me it was Angie who got me through. Not my family, not my acquaintances, Angie did."**

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## A Message From Our CEO

In the past few months, volunteers have excitedly returned to the classroom to tutor students, found joy in being together again for in-person training, and served others in ways that weren't possible during the pandemic. Since March of 2020, staff and volunteers have been reacting to an ever-changing situation to create innovative ways to continue to engage the community and reach those who are most vulnerable.

Though we're still cautious, it feels like we're beginning to return to normal, providing an opportunity to reflect on how we've changed in the past year and a half. There's no doubt COVID-19 brought challenges, and now that we're near the other side there's also an opportunity to see the growth created, skills learned, and partnerships developed to help us return stronger than ever.

When students and isolated seniors needed support more than ever, volunteers stepped up to the challenge and learned the technology needed to reach them through Zoom. We've heard true success stories of how virtual tutoring helped struggling students succeed and friendly conversation through TelePals brought individuals through a difficult time. Technology opened new opportunities to serve in ways we had never imagined and will help us extend our reach into communities long after the pandemic is over.

Brunch Buddies began as a way to connect when there were no in-person events, but it continues to grow even now. Twice a month seniors come together virtually for laughter, conversation, resources, and BINGO. Again, it's an opportunity we never imagined but continues to be a success.

As you may have read on the front page of this newsletter, Suncoast Credit Union recognized the need to reach isolated seniors at the beginning of the pandemic and through financial and volunteer support helped expand TelePals, leading to a partnership that continues to grow. Suncoast Credit Union knows the effects of isolation reach far beyond a pandemic, committing up to \$35,000 to continue to expand TelePals in the upcoming year.

We invite you to join us as we take the skills, opportunities, and partnerships developed through the pandemic out to serve the community stronger than ever.

*-Robin Ingles, CEO*

## A real-life superhero “Zooms in” to help children during the pandemic

Seniors in Service Foster Grandparent volunteer, Ernest Cross received a wonderful surprise when he joined a Seniors in Service Zoom meeting on August 30. The Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County (JWB) honored him with the KidsFirst Cooperman-Bogue Award and even surprised him at his home with a check for \$500. JWB’s KidsFirst Cooperman-Bogue Award honors outstanding individuals who have gone above and beyond to provide direct services to Pinellas County children and families, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the 2020-21 school year “Grandpa” Cross provided intensive, high-quality, one-on-one tutoring and mentoring to 3 students, helping improve their academic achievement by offering wisdom and love. But it was the impact he made on one of these students that made “Grandpa” Cross an obvious choice for this award.

When COVID-19 prevented volunteers from returning to classrooms, Mr. Cross learned to use Zoom to continue serving children who needed support more than ever. At-risk children who already faced adversity were filled with fear and uncertainty. One student, in particular, illustrates how “Grandpa” Cross, like a superhero, literally (and virtually!) “Zoomed in” to make a difference.



*“Grandpa” Cross holds his Kids First Cooperman-Bogue Award from the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County with his wife Queen.*

Without a father figure in his life, this student had shut down. But Mr. Cross discovered how to crack the hard exterior of a child who no longer trusts. For this young man it was drawing superheroes. Instead of forcing or swaying away from what some would consider nothing of importance to talk about, “Grandpa” Cross just knew, this is what makes this child feel self-confident, what lessens his pain.

Mr. Cross was also able to help him navigate the fear and uncertainty, to better cope with his challenges, and to benefit academically. After weeks of one-word answers, the boy began to open up. The bond grew so deep that the young man requested extra tutoring and begged Mr. Cross to continue with him during the next school year. Mr. Cross immediately reached out to his school contact to make that happen. **Even a global pandemic couldn’t stop “Grandpa” Cross from building trusting relationships with each individual student, such as using the language of art to bring out the superheroes in them all.**



*“Grandpa” Cross received a wonderful surprise when he was presented with the Kids First Award from JWB on a Seniors in Service Zoom meeting with his fellow Classroom Grandparents.*



## Volunteers help students LOVE learning!

With the start of the school year, Seniors in Service volunteers are back in action helping students improve their reading skills and introducing fun ways to learn science and engineering.



**"I can see not only the progress, but his joy!"**

Those are the words Sandra Diaz used to tell us about her son's improved reading skills as a result of virtual tutoring provided by Classroom Grandparent, Rachel Gibson.

Ms. Diaz shared, "He is enjoying reading so much more. Last week they were reading a book, it wasn't a story, it was an instructional book, and he was loving it. He was excited, he was into it. For him to read was a battle before, and now he loves it."



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## Ready, Set, Learn!

Building and racing robotic vehicles will get any kid excited about learning math and engineering, especially when they get to use their imagination and be creative!

Readers in Motion partnered with Bricks 4 Kidz to introduce students to STEM concepts at six Hillsborough Children's Board Family Resource Centers. Students used 3D LEGO® figurines with motorized components to craft LEGO® vehicles and raced them up and down the lecture room while parents marveled at their child's excitement over their creations. These kids are learning innovative STEM concepts without even realizing it!



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students will receive backpacks full of supplies to encourage success in the classroom and make learning fun through Readers in Motion

## It started with one phone call...27,057 hours later Argentina Nieves is still doing what she loves

Nineteen years ago Argentina Nieves called Seniors in Service to become a volunteer. She was placed at James A. Haley Veterans Hospital in Tampa and never left. This year Ms. Nieves was honored with a certificate recognizing her 19 years and 27,057 hours of volunteer service to Veterans.

Ms. Nieves has spent most of her time at the hospital helping quadriplegic or disabled veterans with daily tasks like laundry or cleaning. She prides herself on being a friend who will listen, especially for veterans who have no family. Over the years she has built strong relationships and many veterans see her as a trusted advocate who can help speak up for their well-being.

You can find the service opportunity you love too, through just one phone call. Contact Chris Noble at (813) 492-8916.



## Get the "Buddy" You Need for Better Health!

If you've been diagnosed with a chronic condition, you know it's not just your health that has been affected. Chronic conditions can lead to major changes in all areas of your life. Health Buddies understand that having a chronic condition can affect your independence, daily tasks, income, and access to transportation. These volunteers help connect individuals with community resources to improve their overall well-being.

Just in the last few months, they have helped find reliable transportation for an individual who was struggling to get to doctor appointments, signed up a dog owner who couldn't leave the house for a free pet food delivery service, and ensured a senior, who had recently had a stroke, received regular meals through Meals on Wheels.

If you need a "buddy" to connect you with the resources you need to adjust to your new normal, Health Buddies is here to help. **Sign up today at <http://seniorsinservice.org/health-buddies/> or (813) 492-8931.**

A recent Health Buddies client shared how his Health Buddy made all the difference in helping him manage his diabetes: **"I sometimes forgot to check my blood sugar or take my medication on time. Regular calls from my Health Buddy helped me stay on schedule. I looked forward to his calls. He made me laugh and we got to be friends. My lab work improved, and my doctor said, 'I don't know what you are doing, but keep doing it'."**



*This Health Buddies Team, including University of South Florida Interns and Seniors in Service Health Buddies Coordinator, Aria Garling, is ready to share resources and provide the best service possible.*

*(Pictured left to right: Rishé Gray, Aria Garling, Gregory Duncan, and Melannie Laya)*

## Partners In Serving

Our nonprofit partners play an important role in helping Seniors in Service engage volunteers in the community. We want to take an opportunity to recognize a few of these organizations and highlight the good work they do.



**Trinity Cafe** serves hot, nutritious, restaurant quality meals 365 days a year. With two successful locations in Tampa, they recently opened a third cafe in St. Petersburg, and our staff showed up to help serve a meal.

Trinity Cafe, a program of Feeding Tampa Bay, is changing the typical "soup kitchen" model and serving meals with dignity. Everyone is served a 3-course meal around a table with the hope of good conversation and the possibility to build community at each meal.



**Meals on Wheels of East Pasco** is best known for delivering hot meals to home bound individuals. Receiving nutritious food is vital, but Meals on Wheels services are so much more important than just a meal. Isolation can be devastating for a person's physical and mental health. Often times the Meals on Wheels volunteer is the only person a homebound client sees in a day, or sometimes a week. Volunteers offer a daily dose of human connection that helps keep seniors happy and healthy. They are the eyes and ears looking out for the well-being of the homebound population.



**Our Lady of Guadalupe Food Pantry** believes no one should go hungry. They are a great example of how the power of volunteers can help a community. This pantry is operated solely through volunteers and they serve over 700 families each week. They are located in Wimauma and open on Saturday mornings from 7:30-10:30 a.m.

**You can support the amazing work being done by these and many other nonprofit partners by becoming a volunteer.**

Contact Chris Noble at [cnoble@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:cnoble@seniorsinservice.org) or (813) 492-8916



## Operation: Veteran Connect Restores a Place of Peace

Operation: Veteran Connect understands the importance of having a beautiful outdoor space for meditation, comfort, and reflection. That's why they spent the day volunteering to clean up 8-acres of gardens at the Franciscan Center. The Franciscan Center offers the Operation Restore Program which provides veterans and first responders a safe, confidential environment to work through their most critical incidents and process the cumulative stress of risking their lives throughout their careers.



# The Tampa Bay Business Journal has selected Seniors in Service as a 2021 One Tampa Bay honoree!

We are thrilled to be one of the thirty-three Tampa Bay area nonprofits and corporations named as honorees for this year's One Tampa Bay awards. Seniors in Service was selected out of close to 180 nominations in part for our focus on financial stewardship and making the most of our resources to serve the community.

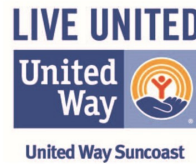
## Thank you to our funders!



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# Attention All Volunteers!

**Save the date and get ready for a celebration!**

**Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon**  
**TPepin's Hospitality Centre**  
**Friday, December 10**  
**11:30 a.m.- 2 p.m.**

**Sponsored by:**



All volunteers are invited to this exclusive event to honor the ongoing contributions of our GEARED UP volunteers. Join us for a mouthwatering meal, raffle prizes, gift bags, music, and dancing. Fun! Free! Attendance is limited to Seniors in Service Volunteers. Watch for your invitation in the mail! Not yet a Seniors in Service volunteer? Call 813-932-5228 to find the service opportunity of your dreams!