



## Volunteers show love to others, while doing what they love!

Seniors in Service has 747 RSVP (Retired & Senior Volunteer Program) volunteers spread throughout Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas County helping Tampa Bay's nonprofits serve children, seniors, Veterans, and hungry families. Last year this group dedicated 79,801 hours of their time to improve the lives of others.



Jim Archer retired from his career last December and within a month he was struggling to find his new purpose in life. That's when he heard about Seniors in Service and found the community he needed. Jim enjoys working with kids, and there was a need for a volunteer hall monitor at the middle school near his house. He was eager to help and spent the rest of the school year encouraging students as they walked through the halls. Jim has the mindset that you never know the impact you will have on a child, so he shows up each day ready to be the caring adult every student needs. The students and teachers at Ben Hill Middle School surprised him with this banner to show their appreciation. You can see for yourself from the smile on Jim's face and the banner of appreciation next to him that volunteering benefits seniors as much as their service benefits the community.



Maurice Lanoutte knows what it means to live a life of service. He served our country in World War II and Korea, and now at 99 years old he's serving hungry families as he helps his fellow volunteers distribute food at Beth-El Farmworkers Food Pantry in Wimauma.



These volunteers are real life elves who spend their entire year restoring donated toys to like new condition at The Christmas Toy Shop to ensure "no child will be without a Christmas."

Imagine the relief a parent who can't afford toys feels when The Christmas Toy Shop helps provides joy on Christmas morning.



Inflation has caused more and more families to struggle on a daily basis to make ends meet, which is why food pantries are so important. Angie and Frieda's volunteer service helps Florida Food Force provide nutritious food, so no family has to worry about their next meal.

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## A Message From Our CEO



What's a basic human need as vital as oxygen or food or water? Connection! Because humans are wired to connect. Technology has given us more opportunities than ever before to connect with people, yet the number of us who feel isolated or lonely continues to grow. Volunteering promotes the meaningful social connection that all of us need to survive.

Loneliness doesn't discriminate. It can affect people of every age, gender, and ethnicity, but seniors tend to be most vulnerable. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are socially isolated, which is a direct pathway to loneliness.

Loneliness has physical consequences that can be devastating, especially for seniors. Studies show loneliness eclipses obesity and even smoking for premature decline and even death. COVID-19 helped shine a light on social isolation for seniors, but the truth is loneliness was a risk factor for older adults long before the pandemic. The reasons can be summed up in one word: loss. As years pass, seniors face loss of life partners and social networks, loss of sight and hearing, loss of employment or travel opportunities, and loss of a sense of purpose.

Experts tell us there are many ways to cope with loneliness, such as expressing gratitude, spending time in nature, and scheduling phone calls with friends and family. It will be no surprise that our favorite way to overcome loneliness is through acts of kindness, also known as volunteering.

For many who are entering a new stage in life, rebuilding social circles and connecting with past hobbies can feel overwhelming. Volunteering can be a lifeline, providing an easy way for people to join a social circle of like-minded people, step out of their comfort zone, and connect to a hobby or purpose they love. Experts agree that people who volunteer are less likely to feel isolated or lonely. Studies show volunteering may reduce stress, enhance cognitive function, increase levels of the "feel good" hormone dopamine, and promote longevity. Surveys show people who volunteer feel valued and have a greater sense of satisfaction with their lives.

Seniors in Service connects people to the volunteer service opportunity of their dreams. As you'll read in this newsletter there is a volunteer opportunity for everyone, at any age! Our volunteers are serving at food pantries, using their love of painting to restore toys for children, tutoring and mentoring struggling students, writing cards of gratitude to Veterans who served our nation, and making simple phone calls that tell someone they care.

If you or someone you know wants to feel more connected, we can help! Got an hour? Give an hour! We'd love to help you use your skills and passions to make a difference in your life while also improving life for those we serve.

*-Robin Ingles, CEO*

## Ms. McDowell finds a friend she didn't know she needed.

Every Wednesday at 3 p.m. Ms. McDowell looks forward to a phone call from her Senior Companion Asleen Griffin. "I am mightily blessed to have Ms. Asleen in my life. She gives me positive advice and encouragement. If there is anything I need, and Ms. Asleen can help. She'll do it."

At first, Ms. McDowell was hesitant about receiving phone calls from someone she had never met. She had just spent three weeks in the hospital with COVID-19, and when she came home, she was bedbound. Ms. McDowell was "feeling down in the dumps," physically and mentally. When she learned about Senior Companions, she wasn't prepared to start talking to a stranger, but her in-home nurse told her, "you never know, it might do a lot of good," and she was right.

Asleen became Ms. McDowell's Senior Companion and called for the first time to check on her and see if there was anything she needed. Ms. McDowell enjoyed the conversation, so she agreed to a second phone call. After the second phone call, Ms. McDowell was hooked! She shared, "I love being able to call Asleen when I'm having a difficult day. I tell her about it. We talk it through, and she encourages me."

One day Asleen told Ms. McDowell, "Do you know you're such a blessing to me!" That surprised Ms. McDowell because she is bedbound and felt like she couldn't really do anything for anybody. Asleen told her in spite of being bedbound, she continues to speak love, compassion, and encouragement to others. With this newfound perspective, Ms. McDowell calls friends and family on a regular basis to encourage them the way Asleen encourages her.

After a year of having a Senior Companion, Ms. McDowell is no longer hesitant about this relationship. She shared, "The Senior Companion Program has been and continues to be an absolute blessing for me. Seniors in Service is loving on seniors and doing a great work." If you know a senior who could benefit from a Senior Companion, contact Gabby Lugo at [glugo@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:glugo@seniorsinservice.org) or (813) 358-2699.

## 3,300 Handwritten Cards Lead to 3,300 Smiles

Have you ever received a handwritten note of encouragement or a thank you card of appreciation? It probably made you smile. That's what Letters with Love does! Volunteers throughout Tampa Bay are writing handwritten notes to tell a senior who may be feeling alone that there is someone who cares. Special cards are also created for Veterans by individuals with disabilities at Service Source. Then our volunteers add messages of gratitude for those who have given so much to serve our country. With the help of volunteers of all ages, including employees from Aetna/CVS, CareerSource, Seminole Spine, United Way Suncoast, and Suncoast Credit Union, we hand-delivered cards to over 1,800 seniors and 1,500 Veterans this year. One special volunteer who wants her service to be anonymous wrote over 600 cards!



Sophie learned about "Letters with Love," and wanted to use her artistic talents to create beautiful cards to bring joy to seniors in Tampa Bay.



This group of employees at Aetna's Woodland Corporate Park office in Tampa show off the cards of gratitude they wrote for Veterans.



Veterans at Sun Towers receive handmade cards on Memorial Day to thank them for their service.



## Resource Advocates help others find their path to success

Seniors in Service welcomes our newest group of volunteers as Resource Advocates at the Resource Empowerment Centre in Tampa. These compassionate volunteers are entrenched in the community, meeting with people of all ages who need support to get back on their feet. They listen to each individual's story, identify resources that could help, walk them through the process of applying for services, and most importantly, follow up to ensure help was received.

When a person's life has been turned upside down by homelessness, unemployment, a medical condition, or burdensome expenses, the paperwork and systems designed to help can add to the overwhelming stress. Resource Advocates become the voice for people who are unable to speak for themselves, and their goal is to teach each person how to access the services that will empower them for future success. This "buddy system" helps discouraged individuals feel confident to advocate for themselves and equipped to improve their situation and use their knowledge to help others.

Life can change for anyone at a moment's notice, especially with rising inflation and housing costs, leaving individuals of all ages homeless or without the basic necessities of life. Now more than ever, Resource Advocates are a necessary support system to help people already overwhelmed by their circumstances navigate the complicated system to access the help they need.

There's something comforting about receiving help from someone who has been where you are, experienced some of life's most difficult trials, and triumphed on the other side. They understand the feelings of anxiety, frustration, and uncertainty when your life is turned upside down. That's what makes this group of volunteers extra special. Many of these volunteers have faced life-altering challenges, and someone has walked alongside them with resources for a brighter future. Now they're ready to do the same for their neighbors.

If you need support or would like to volunteer as a Resource Advocate, contact Carolina Montoya at (813) 492-8929 or [cmontoya@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:cmontoya@seniorsinservice.org).

**Scan here for  
help navigating  
resources.**



**December Clark** has walked in the shoes of many of the clients who come to the Resource Empowerment Center, which gives her the unique ability to empathize with their situation and provide the words of encouragement they need to hear. December experienced homelessness and understands why it's so important to have someone who has been where you are come alongside to help you through a difficult time.

December shared that when a client first comes to the Resource Empowerment Center, you can see they are overwhelmed and unable to find the words they need to express their needs. She works to replace their crisis mindset with one of possibilities for success. Once clients realize Resource Advocates will provide real support, not just a phone number for another agency, their demeanor changes. They become more confident and less stressed. December has always been passionate about helping others, and being a Resource Advocate allows her to use her life experiences to empower others to succeed.

**Tina Clark** experienced the joy and relief of having a caring person help when she needed it most and wants to give that feeling to others as a Resource Advocate.

In 2018 Tina had a declining health condition that forced her to leave her job, and as a result, she became homeless in a motel. One day she attended a class about growing vegetables, and at the end of the class, she was the only one left in the park. Katrina Osborne from Pearlana's Adult Activity Center approached her to see how she was getting home. She shared some of her story, and Katrina told her if she ever needed help to come visit her at Pearlana's. Tina was overwhelmed that a stranger would offer such kindness and eventually went to visit her. Katrina helped Tina find an affordable place to live and connected her to services for long-term success. Four years later Tina is thriving in the same house Katrina helped her move into.

Now Tina wants to pay that kindness forward as a Resource Advocate. She has her own experience overcoming homelessness as well as in-depth knowledge of the system of services which she gained from a career working for the Florida Department of Children and Families. Tina says it is a pleasure to use her past experience to put people on the path for success and walk alongside them until they're able to walk alone.



December Clark (middle) is Geared Up to be a Resource Advocate and use her own life experiences to empower others toward a brighter future. Program Coordinators Carolina Montoya (Left) and Katrina Osborne (Right) are excited to welcome all the new Resource Advocates to the team!



Tina Clark (middle) knows what it's like to experience homelessness and the feeling of relief when you receive meaningful support. Now she's ready to pay that kindness forward as a Resource Advocate.



## Florida Blue Foundation Supports Positive Mental Health for Seniors

A person's mental health is impacted by many aspects of their life, including safe housing, food security, access to health care, a sense of belonging, and social connection. When these environmental factors are unreliable or non-existent in a person's life, their mental health can be negatively affected. Seniors on a fixed income, managing chronic conditions, or lacking a social support system are particularly vulnerable.

We're proud to announce that the Florida Blue Foundation has provided a three-year grant of \$325,291 to help Seniors in Service address these social determinants of mental health through Resource Advocates, TelePals, and Senior Companions. Together these services create a network of care seniors can rely on, with the level of support that's right for them. It could be a weekly phone call from a TelePal, in-home visits from a Senior Companion, or access to in-depth services from a Resource Advocate.

# Foster Grandparents are Geared Up for Another Successful School Year!

As another school year begins, our volunteers can't wait to get back in the classroom. Check out these stories and testimonials as a reminder of why their presence in the classroom is invaluable.

Last year **202 volunteers** dedicated **83,000 hours** to help **1,270 struggling** students improve their reading skills and build a foundation for a lifetime of learning. Now that another school year is here, they're **GEARED UP** to do it again!



Keith received literacy-focused tutoring on a weekly basis at the North Tampa Children's Board Family Resource Center. Mr. Jackson was known for creating games out of the curriculum provided, such as rhyming games, word association, spell-out-loud, and more. This helped Keith stay engaged and learn in a fun way. **After 4 months of weekly tutoring, Keith jumped from a reading level of DRA 20 to 30 – a jump normally made in approximately 9 months.** At the beginning of the 21/22 school year, Keith was learning sight words, and in six months he was reading and enjoying fiction chapter books. Mr. Jackson made learning fun, which is exactly what Keith needed to succeed!

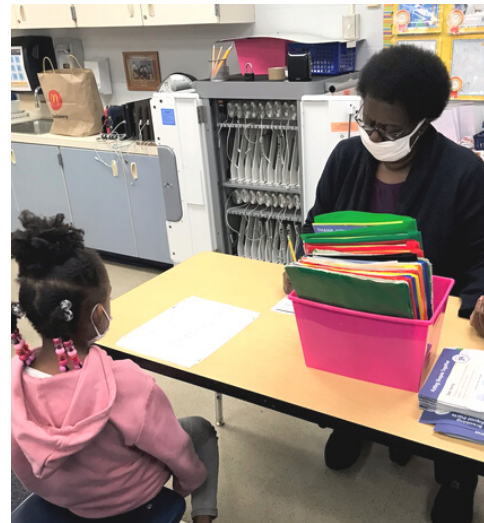


"I am a mother concerned about my son's education and not being able to help him due to language barriers made me very frustrated. This program has been a blessing for us. Keep up the great work for the community. To all the volunteers, thank you very much for your noble work, you are the guiding light of tomorrow's professionals. I would like to especially thank Grandma Sandra Jackson since she has been very helpful so that my son Christopher can improve his reading and increase his vocabulary. He was even recognized as a terrific kid of the month"

"Grandma Kathe is absolutely AMAZING! I can always depend on her for reminders and she helps keep me organized. Grandma Kathe makes my job a whole lot easier. I couldn't do it without her. She's an A+ granma for sure!"  
**-Ms. Griffin, Perkins Elementary**

Our Grandmother Volunteer, Mrs. Eunice Bembrey, known to us as Mrs. B, has been a true treasure to our Head Start classroom. Mrs. B helps support our children in so many ways. She takes time out to go to the public library and check out books for the children. Mrs. B always asks about the curriculum and does research on what the children are learning, then shares her thoughts, feelings, and experiences on the subject. She has been a big help to me by helping the children who are moving to Kindergarten learn the alphabet letters and sounds. I can't wait for Mrs. B to join us again. She is a part of our family.

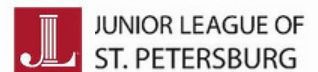
**-Tymaine Leon, Wimauma Head Start**



**Thank you to our major funders who make this program possible.**



# Thank you to our funders!





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## Never underestimate the value of a phone call!

A weekly phone call to an isolated senior is a simple act of kindness that improves the lives of seniors AND volunteers.

Rebecca Serbin was a Suncoast Credit Union employee who served as a TelePal. Earlier this year, she shared this testimonial about her experience. We were saddened to learn that Rebecca recently passed away, and we want to honor her kindness and service by sharing her story.

### Become a TelePal today!

Phone: (813) 819-0725

Email: [TelePals@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:TelePals@seniorsinservice.org)

### Thank you to our TelePals sponsor:



My Telepal and I were great friends! We usually talked several times a week, during my lunch break, and on the weekend as time permitted. We had a lot in common including family history, children, love of animals, and good food. I learned so much from my Telepal. She had a wonderful sense of humor, great ideas, insights, and home remedies that she shared. We used to laugh and carry on like we'd known each other for years because we really cared about each other.

I had the pleasure of seeing my Telepal a couple of times in person, when I took her a kitten (which she wanted and loved) and when we shared a meal from Maggiano's.

Sadly my Telepal passed unexpectedly but peacefully in July 2021. I talked to her the day before, and she texted only hours before passing asking if I was off work yet so we could talk.

I cherish the time I had with my Telepal. Her daughter told me how much she enjoyed our calls and sent a picture of her, which always makes me smile.

- Rebecca Serbin, TelePal

