



City of St. Pete Helps Students Reach Their Full Potential!

Our youth are critical to our future. Helping young people succeed helps our entire community thrive. Thanks to a \$21,278 Youth Development Grant from the City of St. Petersburg's My Brother's and Sister's Keeper initiative, children in South St. Pete are getting the support they need to succeed through our Foster Grandparent Program. In direct alignment with St. Pete's My Brother's and Sister's Keeper initiative, our Foster Grandparent Program addresses persistent opportunity gaps faced by young people of color and ensures that all young people can reach their full potential.

Our Classroom Grandparents are senior-aged volunteers who support struggling students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade with one-on-one tutoring and mentoring, helping them build literacy and emotional intelligence skills needed for academic and lifelong success. Classroom Grandparents serve children in their classroom for the entire school year, offering consistency, trust, and stability that helps students develop a love for learning.



Classroom Grandparent Barbara Burnett, or "Grandma B" as her students lovingly call her, has served as a Seniors in Service classroom volunteer for over six years. Recently inducted into St. Petersburg's Senior Hall of Fame, Grandma B shared, "I love to help nurture the children and see how happy they get when they learn to read on their own, and it finally clicks."

During this school year, our Pinellas Classroom Grandparents served at 14 schools in 65 classrooms, providing more than 320 students with intensive, ongoing one-one-tutoring and mentoring. Thanks to the City of St. Petersburg's Youth Development Grant, we are training and mobilizing more volunteers to reach even more students, creating a brighter future for our community where all can succeed.



Learn more about becoming a Classroom Grandparent by scanning the QR code above.

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Every day I am inspired by the accomplishments of our volunteers and the difference they make in the community. As you'll read in this newsletter, we took time to celebrate the end of a successful 2022-2023 school year at our May Volunteer Appreciation Event! Our 237 Classroom Grandparents provided over 146,266 hours of tutoring last year to help 1,354 children improve their literacy skills.

Instead of taking a vacation for the summer, 80 of our Classroom Grandparents chose to continue tutoring for summer sessions, because they understand the value of their presence in the classroom. According to Champions for Children, less than 50% of babies born in Hillsborough County enter kindergarten ready to learn. AND only 50% of Tampa Bay 3rd graders read on grade level. That's where our volunteers' step in and help students feel confident, supported, and prepared in the classroom.

Each day our volunteers create positive childhood experiences that make a child more likely to succeed in the classroom. Because it really is that social emotional connection with the individual and the talking and reading that promotes a positive attachment to early learning and literacy.

Throughout the summer we've been recruiting even more volunteers to serve in the classroom. We have nearly 250 volunteers in the schools, yet there are over 1300 Title 1 Kindergarten through 3rd grade classrooms in Hillsborough and Pinellas County. With your help we can close that gap and support struggling students who desperately need the one-on-one support that Classroom Grandparents provide. Become a Classroom Grandparent, change the lives of Pre-K through 3rd grade students, and make a lasting impact on future generations.

-Robin Ingles, CEO

United Way Suncoast Supporting Children in Our Community

United Way Suncoast is once again committed to helping children succeed. Through a generous 3-year grant provided by United Way Suncoast, our Readers in Motion program is helping students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade love to learn! As we begin the second school year of this initiative, students will benefit from one-on-one classroom tutoring, monthly reading challenges that encourage reading at home, and engaging STEM events that involve the whole family in hands-on learning experiences.



Seniors in Service Earns Prestigious Distinction as a Service Enterprise!

Seniors in Service has achieved distinction as a Service Enterprise, joining the top 11 percent of nonprofits nationwide in volunteer management and organizational performance.

For the past year, we've actively participated in the Service Enterprise Program, a change management program led by the Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement (ALIVE) and Points of Light to help nonprofits selected from across the country enhance and sustain the spirit of volunteering. Research shows that nonprofits operating as Service Enterprises gain a greater return on volunteer investment and are significantly more adaptable, sustainable, and scalable.

When reviewing recommendations for our certification, the Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement reviewer Traci Lato Smith noted:

"It was a pleasure to review [Seniors in Service of Tampa Bay's] application which highlighted their newly developed Ambassador Volunteer Certification program, brilliantly designed to help them both grow capacity and deepen relationships with their volunteers. I was impressed that volunteer information on their website is comprehensive, well organized, and very prominently featured, including a statement on their "Management" page highlighting the involvement of volunteers in their success and impact.... All of this and so much more demonstrates that Seniors in Service of Tampa Bay is truly operating as a Service Enterprise, and ALIVE is proud to officially certify this remarkable organization for the next three years, through the end of 2026. I also want to share that I have marked their application as "exceptional" for potential use as an example for Hub training or for future case studies."

Our participation in the Service Enterprise certification process has provided clarity on our strengths and opportunities for improvement. Our focus on new initiatives like our Ambassador Program increases our resources and bandwidth to spread our mission and increase impact. We are now better equipped to reach more people, inspiring them to make a difference through volunteering. We're looking forward to continuing to grow our impact over the next three years with support from Service Enterprise's peer network, research, and resources, engaging volunteers to make our community stronger. Join our growing army of caring volunteers!



Scan the QR code to learn about community service opportunities in your neighborhood.



Low Vision Support Group Embraces Life-Changing Resources with a Little Help From Their Friends

Our Sun City Center Low Vision Support Group offers companionship to seniors who are either blind or have low vision due to age-related conditions like macular degeneration. Members meet monthly, benefiting from social connections, friendly conversation, and discussions following educational presentations from community experts. Still, most have been unable to access training and assistive technology that could improve their ability to perform daily activities and reduce loneliness. Many people who are low vision face issues with reading their mail, choosing appropriate clothing to wear in public, or even relying on a cashier's honesty to give them the correct change.



Tampa's Lighthouse for the Blind and Low Vision offers deep knowledge of assistive devices and recommendations customized to help them all, like electronic magnifiers for reading mail or paying bills; Braille labelers for marking household items or currency; and clothing identification apps. Yet individuals must be on site to truly benefit, requiring reliable transportation to get there. And since these seniors don't feel confident in their ability to adopt new adaptive technologies, they need moral support from their peers.

But NOW, thanks to new funding from the Senior Connection Center and DeBartolo Family Foundation, we are removing the barriers of accessibility and peer support by offering group transportation for 40 members of the Low Vision Support Group to go to Tampa's Lighthouse for the Blind over the coming year, where they will access the expertise and proven technologies that can change their lives. We are partnering with Sun Towers Retirement Community to use their handicapped-accessible van to transport members at no charge to them. Riding with peers makes the experience more fun and less intimidating. With the support of their peers, clients are more likely to embrace their new-found life-changing resources together.

During our first trip, Lighthouse for the Blind CEO and President Sheryl Brown welcomed our Low Vision Support Group members with a presentation about their services. Lighthouse staff worked with our members to listen, problem solve, and help find the right adaptive resources for each individual. Shirley, who is totally blind, came with her seeing eye dog and was thrilled to purchase an Uno Braille card deck, set up exactly like a traditional Uno game, but featuring braille on the corner of each card to indicate its color, number, or action. She used to love playing UNO with friends, and now she can once again enjoy playing with both blind and even sighted friends. This successful trip inspired four Low-Vision Support Group members to sign up for future services at Lighthouse for the Blind to learn about new technology and resources to help with cooking and other essential household tasks.



Thank you, Senior Connection Center and Debartolo Family Foundation, for your generous support, enabling low-vision or blind seniors to embrace life-changing adaptive resources - with a little help from their friends!

For more information about the Sun City Center Low Vision Support Group, contact Michelle at 813-492-8920 or mmason@seniorsinservice.org.



Pictured left to right: Barbara Phillips, learning about an assistive device that could help make her life easier. Sheryl Brown, President and CEO of Lighthouse for the Blind giving a presentation about services available to seniors who are either blind or low vision. Shirley Tracy, shown here with her service dog, Jack, and Michelle Mason, of Seniors in Service.

Surprise Visit from St. Pete Mayor Blooms into Joyful Volunteer Celebration

At Seniors in Service, we love to show our volunteers how much they're appreciated. Each year we express our gratitude with celebrations of their remarkable achievements. At our recent appreciation event in St. Petersburg, Mayor Ken Welch surprised our volunteers to personally thank them for all they do. His surprise visit was the highlight of the day!

The mayor's visit was a hard act to follow, yet we continued with our theme: "Bloom Where You're Planted." Volunteers created a "Seniors in Service Flower Garden" reflecting upon how the different components of a flower symbolize various aspects of service. The flowerpot represented the place where each volunteer is rooted to actively serve the community. The stem symbolized the origins of their passion for service. The leaves nourish the plant, so volunteers revealed things that bring them joy and fulfillment, nurturing their spirits so they can effectively serve others. Finally, we observed how the flower itself brings beauty to the community. Volunteers eagerly shared their experiences of creating beauty in the lives of others through their acts of service.

Each volunteer decorated a flower in their unique style, and these beautifully adorned flowers were then proudly displayed on the wall, collectively forming our "Seniors in Service Flower Garden." We then took time to reflect on the seeds our volunteers are planting throughout their communities.



To all our volunteers, we echo Mayor Welch's appreciation with our own heartfelt thank you for all that you do.

"Operation: Veteran Connect" Earns Praise from Volunteer Florida



volunteerflorida

Operation: Veteran Connect helps Tampa Bay's struggling Veterans by engaging individuals who feel a special calling to help others who have served our nation. With primary support from Volunteer Florida through AmeriCorps, volunteers who serve as AmeriCorps members are trained to help at-risk Veterans navigate the complex maze of VA benefits, healthcare, and community resources needed to meet their individual needs. With skyrocketing rent and inflation now creating new urgent needs, we also help place Veterans in permanent affordable housing and provide essential household items - like donated beds, towels, and kitchen gadgets - to make their empty apartment a suitable, safe place to call home.

After a recent site visit to Seniors in Service, Volunteer Florida's Program Manager shared this praise for Operation: Veteran Connect, noting:

"The diligent work you do for our Veterans and seniors within the Tampa Bay area has been incredibly inspiring and meaningful.... Your heartening photos, stories, and emails have not only provided a fresh perspective but also served as a powerful reminder of why I serve in this role."



Thank you to Volunteer Florida for supporting Seniors in Service in our efforts to help Tampa Bay's Veterans live life to the fullest.

To learn how you can participate in helping Veterans in your community scan the QR code here!

Come Hear USF Distinguished Professor Dr. William E. Haley Speak at Our Bridging Generations Breakfast!

"Evidence regarding the beneficial impact of volunteering for health in later life is strong, increasing, and compelling." -Dr. William Haley

Save the Date! Friday, September 15, 2023 at the Palma Ceia Country Club from 7:30 am – 9 am.

Did you know acts of kindness toward others can change your life for the better? Dr. Haley has the research to prove it. Join us to discover the significance of volunteering for maintaining good health, happiness, and a sense of purpose. But that's not all! You'll learn how our volunteers connect generations, break down barriers, and improve the lives of thousands throughout Tampa Bay. Don't miss this opportunity to be inspired to create a better future for yourself, as well as generations to come.

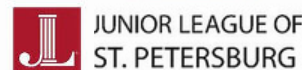
Dr. Haley has decades of experience and research focused on stress, coping, and adaptation in older adults and their family members. He teaches courses on Psychology of Aging, Assessment of Older Adults, Gerontological Counseling, and Family Caregiving in Aging and Chronic Illness.



Scan the QR code above to register for this special event you won't want to miss and a speaker you won't forget!

www.SeniorsInService.org

Thank you to our funders!





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Health Buddies Gets a Helping Hand from Pinellas County EMS and Sheriff's Office

We're excited to announce that Pinellas County Emergency Management Services (EMS), Fire and Rescue, and the Sheriff Department are now partnering with Seniors in Service through our Health Buddies initiative. First responders who frequently receive non-emergency calls from lonely seniors living with chronic conditions are receiving training to refer them for a Health Buddy. Health Buddies are compassionate, trained volunteers who provide companionship, encouragement, and support through regularly-scheduled friendly phone calls.



The Sheriff Department reports that many seniors who are isolated frequently call 911 just because they're lonely. But it's not "all in their head". Loneliness causes stress and anxiety that can cause chronic physical symptoms and mental wellbeing to worsen. In addition, the increased burden on first responders cost taxpayers well over \$300K/year.

Health Buddies offer "companionship as medicine", empowering isolated seniors with chronic conditions to improve social connection and self-manage their health so they can live independently.

Do you know someone who could use a Health Buddy? Refer a client or sign up to be a Health Buddy by scanning the QR code here!

