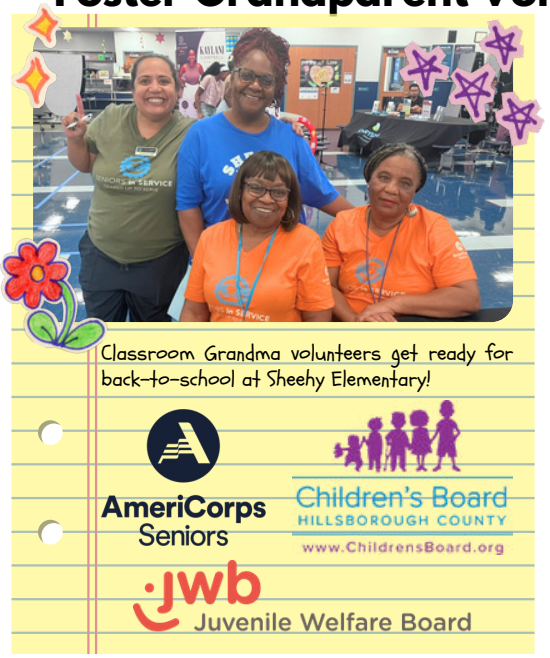
SENIORS in SERVICE
GEARED UP TO SERVE

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

Foster Grandparent Volunteers Are Helping Students Reach New Heights



We're celebrating right alongside Hillsborough and Pinellas County Schools! This year, both districts earned an A rating from the Florida Department of Education, a reflection of the dedication of school leaders, teachers, families, and the Foster Grandparent volunteers who show up every day to support students who are at-risk of falling behind.

Across Tampa Bay, more than 240 AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent volunteers serve in Kindergarten through 3rd grade classrooms throughout the entire school year. Day after day, they sit side by side with students who need extra support learning their letters and sounds, spelling words, writing sentences, and gaining confidence. They also celebrate big milestones, including the moment a child reads a book independently for the first time.

At B.T. Washington Elementary, where nine Foster Grandparent volunteers serve each year, the school improved from a D to a B rating, the largest elementary school improvement in Hillsborough County.

Across the bay, 92% of Pinellas County schools are now rated A or B. The district also reached a historic milestone, with 70% of third graders reading proficiently, surpassing the state average for the first time.

Just over a decade ago, five Pinellas elementary schools were among Florida's lowest-performing schools, all earning F ratings. This year, four earned A ratings and one earned a B. Today, 25 Foster Grandparents serve in these schools, working side-by-side with teachers to ensure students who need extra support don't fall behind in the early grades, where reading skills form the foundation for future learning.

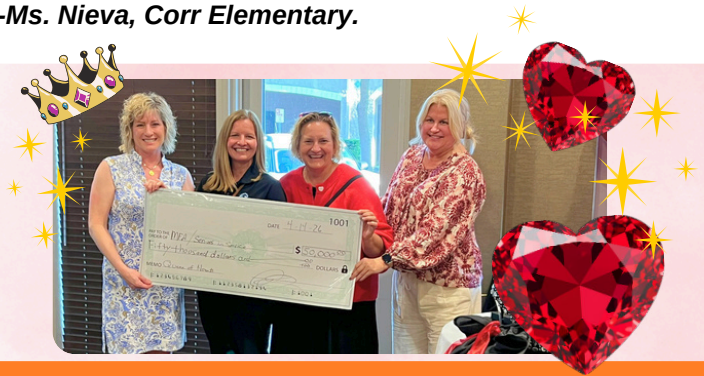
While many factors contribute to student success, teachers consistently point to Foster Grandparents as an invaluable part of their classroom support system.

"Grandma Butler's daily assistance allows me to be fully present for my students while she works one-on-one or in small groups, reteaching concepts students may be struggling with, Her dedication is unmatched; she never misses a day. Students who have moved on to first, second, and third grade still stop by every morning for a hug."
-Ms. Dufault, Colson Elementary.

"Her patience and encouragement have made a meaningful difference in helping students build confidence and foundational reading skills. I genuinely could not do what I do each day without her support. The students adore her, and her impact is obvious in their academic growth."
–Ms. Campbell, James Elementary

"I absolutely appreciate and will always have a home for my "Grandma" in my classroom,"
-Ms. Nieva, Corr Elementary.

Across Tampa Bay, Foster Grandparents are helping more students build the skills, confidence, and support they need to succeed, one classroom at a time. These valuable services are made possible through AmeriCorps Seniors and local funding from the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County and the Children's Board of Hillsborough County.



Queen of Hearts Helps Children Thrive

Thanks to the hard work of the Queen's Court and the generosity of guests at this year's Queen of Hearts Ball, more children in St. Petersburg classrooms will receive the one-on-one support they need to become confident readers. The event raised enough funds to award $50,000 in donations to two local nonprofits: Seniors in Service and the St. Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.

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CEO Corner



AmeriCorps Seniors Hillsborough Spanish Senior Companion volunteer team gathering for a summer meeting at the park!

There's a trail near my house with a bench along the path. Nearly every evening, an older couple walks there with their dog, Charlie, and settles in. As cyclists, dog walkers, and neighbors pass by, the husband greets nearly every dog by name. The ones he doesn't know get a cheerful, "Hello, puppy!" as he invites them over to meet Charlie. People stop to chat. Neighbors become friends. Without realizing it, they've created a third space, a place outside of home where they feel comfortable, connected, and known.

For many of us, third spaces used to happen naturally. They were playgroups, coaching Little League, gym buddies, church groups, or neighborhood gatherings. But life changes. We retire. We move. Children grow up. The people and places that once filled our calendars aren't part of our daily routines anymore. Finding connection takes more intention.

The good news? Creating a third space can be as simple as sitting on the same bench evening after evening. Visit the same coffee shop, walking trail, library, or community center regularly. Say hello. Learn a few names. Over time, familiar faces become friends and a place that once felt unfamiliar begins to feel like it belongs to you.

Volunteering creates one of the best third spaces because it combines a place of belonging with purpose. Our volunteers experience it every week. On Tuesdays, George enjoys the laughter and banter with friends he's found stocking shelves at the food pantry. Nadine is greeted with smiles and hugs each morning she walks into her classroom as a Classroom Grandparent. Carmen welcomes every senior by name as they arrive for weekly BINGO. They found a place to belong while making a difference.

If you're looking for a third space of your own, keep reading; you'll find plenty of opportunities in this newsletter.

-Robin Ingles, CEO

Armoring Seniors With the Perfect Defense



More than 190 older adults across Pinellas, Pasco, and Hillsborough counties are better prepared in time for hurricane season thanks to Senior Disaster Support. Each one received a disaster preparedness starter kit and, through fun games and discussion, learned what items they needed before a storm arrives.

But preparedness is more than flashlights and batteries. You need a support system of people. Being connected with your neighbors means having a first responder ready to lend a hand right away. Through monthly community events, Senior Disaster Support is helping neighbors meet neighbors, because when disaster strikes, one of the most important parts of any emergency plan is knowing someone is looking out for you.

Make sure seniors have the information, confidence, and community connections they need before disasters arrive. Email SDS@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get involved.

It Takes a Community to Support Those Who Served

For members of our military, the transition to civilian life can be one of the toughest battles a veteran faces. In June, we brought local, state, and national leaders together at Hillsborough County's Veterans Memorial Park to hear the real stories behind veterans' struggles to navigate benefits, overcome trauma, secure stable housing, and rebuild their lives after military service.

As keynote speaker, Deputy Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, Colonel DJ Reyes understands the value of programs like Operation: Veteran Connect (OVC) that engage volunteers who are veterans to support their fellow struggling veterans. He shared, "Volunteering helps bridge the gap between civilian life and military service, providing critical support for mental health, reintegration, and emotional healing."

Operation: Veteran Connect Community volunteers Bernie and Dan courageously shared their personal stories, bringing Colonel Reyes' words to life.

Fifteen years after leaving the Air Force, Bernie still struggled to find her place in civilian life. "Even after building a family and strong community, I didn't have connection to them. I didn't know how to reach out," she told attendees. Operation: Veteran Connect helped her take that first step, providing the purpose and confidence she needed to move forward. Inspired by that experience, Bernie launched Be in Joy, where she now helps fellow women veterans heal and connect through mindful art.

Dan was a Special Forces Airborne Ranger whose military career ended after he was wounded and blinded in combat. Struggling with the loss of his identity, purpose, family relationships, and support system, he eventually spent more than 15 years experiencing homelessness. Dan shared that he came to see himself as "a blind, disabled, worthless bum," but today his story is very different. Through the love, support, and community he found through Operation: Veteran Connect, Dan rebuilt his sense of purpose and belonging. He is now a professor at the University of South Florida, a doctoral candidate in Applied Medical Anthropology, and proudly serves fellow veterans as an Operation: Veteran Connect volunteer.

Thank you to the community partners, elected officials, board members, and supporters who joined us, including representatives from Womenade of Tampa, Achieva Credit Union, Senator Ashley Moody's Office, Suncoast Credit Union, TD Bank; board members Dr. Fred Hicks, Dr. Daphne Fudge, Deann Marasco, and Richard Beynon; and Hillsborough County Commissioners Donna Cameron Cepeda and Gwen Myers. The afternoon was a reminder that supporting veterans isn't one organization's job. It takes all of us.







Interested in strengthening support systems for those who served? Stay connected with Operation: Veteran Connect! Email OVC@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

Seeing What's Possible



Thanks to the generosity of the Interfaith Social Action Council and the Women's Club of Sun City Center, 15 low-income seniors who are blind or living with low vision will receive Meta Smart Glasses they otherwise could not afford. These innovative devices can help individuals with vision loss read labels, identify items, navigate unfamiliar spaces, and complete everyday tasks that many of us take for granted.

For older adults experiencing vision loss, Meta Glasses are more than technology. They are a tool for independence. This donation is empowering older adults with low vision to live with greater confidence, dignity, and self-reliance.

GFWC est. 1890 GENERAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS FLORIDA

Interfaith Social Action Council

Looking to get involved in South Shore? There are plenty of ways to stay connected and volunteer. Scan the QR code or email RSVP@SeniorsInService.org to get started.

Grandma Powell Named a 2026 KidsFirst Award Winner



When Christine "Grandma" Powell arrived for what she thought was a routine volunteer meeting, she had no idea she was about to become the guest of honor. Surrounded by 20 fellow Foster Grandparents, she was stunned when the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County arrived with cameras, Interim CEO Karen Boggess, and news that she had been selected as a 2026 KidsFirst Cooperman-Bogue Award recipient. The surprise was complete when Mrs. Nordstrom, the kindergarten teacher she serves alongside at Maximo Elementary, walked in to celebrate with her.

For the kids in Ms. Nordstrom's kindergarten classroom at Maximo Elementary School, Christine "Grandma" Powell is not only a dedicated volunteer but the loudest cheerleader. She's the person sitting beside them, helping them sound out a word, praising them when they get it right, and reminding them they can do hard things.

Grandma Powell has spent seven years volunteering as an AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent. For the past three years, she has been the "heart and soul" of Mrs. Nordstrom's kindergarten classroom. Last school year, every kindergartner in the classroom she supported mastered their letters and sounds, with most reading at a first-grade level by the end of the year.

But Grandma Powell's impact doesn't stop at literacy. She serves on Maximo Elementary's Advisory Council, bringing her experience and perspective to school-wide initiatives. Her dedication was also recognized as a 2024–2025 Outstanding School Volunteer Nominee by Pinellas County Schools. To her students, she's simply Grandma Powell. To us, she's proof of what can happen when one caring adult keeps showing up. Congratulations, Grandma Powell, on this well-deserved recognition!



Taking Tampa Bay's Work to the National Stage

Community Engagement Manager Sarah Rosenbaum recently presented at the USAging National Conference in San Diego, showcasing Seniors in Service's innovative Senior Disaster Support model. Her poster session highlighted how helping neighbors connect before a disaster strikes creates the trusted support networks older adults rely on during all of life's unexpected challenges.

Our Education Programs team traveled to Washington, D.C., for the 2026 Points of Light Conference. From innovative volunteer engagement strategies to conversations about the future of service, we returned with plenty of ideas to enhance our services. Seniors in Service also renewed our Service Enterprise accreditation through AL!VE in partnership with Points of Light. Service Enterprise is a nationally recognized framework that helps organizations build the systems, practices, and culture needed to effectively engage volunteers as a core part of their work.

CEO Robin Ingles joined leaders from the Humana Foundation, AARP Florida, Senior Planet, and Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) at the Florida Council on Aging's Annual Conference as part of an expert panel to share their insights on senior emotional health, emerging trends, and proven strategies that help older adults stay connected and engaged.

National COMMUNITY CARE CORPS

POINTS OF LIGHT

alive

Stay up to date with us and see what our team is up to! Scan the QR code or follow us on LinkedIn @ Seniors in Service of Tampa Bay, Inc.

Guess Who Visited?

This summer, national AmeriCorps and state Volunteer Florida leaders had the opportunity to meet the volunteers behind the numbers and hear the stories that statistics alone can't tell.

Mark Lloyd, Chief of Staff for AmeriCorps; Darrell Robinson, AmeriCorps Public Engagement Specialist; Josie Tamayo, CEO of Volunteer Florida; Cat Keen, National Services Program Director for Volunteer Florida; and Cora Santana from Senator Moody's office visited Seniors in Service to see firsthand how volunteers are strengthening Tampa Bay. Through the partnership of AmeriCorps, Volunteer Florida, and local organizations like Seniors in Service, thousands of volunteer hours are transformed into life-changing support for children, veterans, seniors, and families.

They heard from Kelli, who arrives at the food pantry where she serves at 3:00 a.m. to open the gates because families are already lining up for food, and she worries about them sitting on a dark, busy highway before sunrise. They met Grandpa Sessions, who beams with pride when a student's face lights up after writing their name for the first time. Ed shared how mentoring middle school students gives him purpose while allowing him to pass along wisdom built through a lifetime of lived experience. There were tears in the room when Alia shared how she stood beside a veteran with terminal cancer, ensuring he didn't have to face his final days alone.



These were just a few of the stories shared during their visit, which highlighted how the partnership between AmeriCorps, Volunteer Florida, and Seniors mobilizes compassionate, talented volunteers to transform lives one relationship at a time.



Preparing Seniors for the Emergencies We Hope Never Happen

Did you know Opioid overdoses in Florida have declined overall? But among older adults, overdose deaths have not followed the same trend. Tampa Bay's overdose death rate is 50.5% higher than the national average, while older adults are recovering more slowly than any other age group. The need for education and prevention is clear.

Seniors in Service is getting in the fight to help save lives through education.

We've partnered with Live Tampa Bay to bring practical overdose prevention and emergency response training to older adults and the people who support them. Our Volunteer Ambassadors and staff trained 720+ seniors across Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, and Polk counties on practical tips for medication management, what to do during a medical emergency, and how to recognize and respond to an opioid overdose, including hands-on Narcan education. Knowledge is powerful, and in this case, it can be lifesaving.

Want to help older adults feel safer, more prepared, and less alone? Volunteer with us and make a difference in your community. Scan the QR code or email RSVP@SeniorsInService.org to get started.

LIVE TAMPA BAY
PRESENTED BY THE TAMPA BAY PARTNERSHIP

Welcome to the Alumni Club!



More than 40 AmeriCorps Operation: Veteran Connect volunteers gathered in July to celebrate another successful year of service supporting Tampa Bay veterans. Anyone in the room could see how 12-months of volunteering together had bonded this group for life. There was laughter over shared memories, pride in stories of veterans whose lives had changed for the better, and a few tears for the veterans who had faced insurmountable challenges. Together, these volunteers contributed more than 25,000 hours of service to help hundreds of veterans, many of whom they know by name.

The occasion was especially meaningful for Kitty Anderson, Rhonda Byrd, Fatma Hedeia, and Alice White, who graduated from the program after completing the maximum four years of AmeriCorps service.

Over the past four years, these volunteers sat beside older veterans struggling to access VA benefits online. They helped veterans and their families put food on the table. They delivered furniture to help veterans turn an empty apartment into a home. And they spent time with veterans rebuilding their lives after homelessness, helping them gain confidence, independence, and a circle of support in their new community.

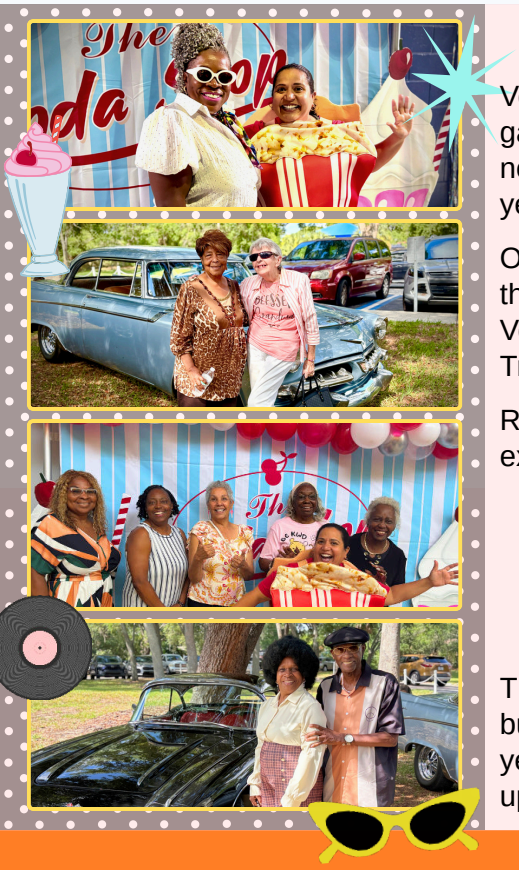
Kitty shared, “As I reflect on this program year, I am grateful for the opportunity to serve, learn, and grow from this life altering experience. Being able to make a positive difference in the lives of those who have served our country has been both humbling and deeply rewarding."

Thank you to Kitty, Rhonda, Fatma, Alice, and every Operation: Veteran Connect volunteer who served this year. Your time, compassion, and commitment have made a lasting difference in the lives of Tampa Bay veterans.

Volunteer with Operation: Veteran Connect and support local veterans! Email OVC@SeniorsInService.org or scan the QR code to get started.

volunteerflorida

AmeriCorps



Celebrating our Timeless Classics

Volunteer Appreciation never goes out of style! In May, we traded our usual volunteer gatherings for jukeboxes, drive-in movie vibes, soda shop treats, and a little nostalgia as we celebrated the volunteers who keep Tampa Bay rockin’ and rollin’ all year long.

Our Volunteer Appreciation Events brought together hundreds of volunteers for a throwback to the fabulous 50s, complete with games, music, prizes, and food. Volunteers faced off in Musical Bingo, tested their knowledge with Drive-In Movie Trivia, and compared life in the 50s to today.

Reflecting on the past year, volunteers shared their why, the people, moments, and experiences that made their time meaningful and inspire them to keep going:

- **“The value of making veterans feel safe when they share their story.” -Joan**
- **“Being with the students filled the void of losing my only son and not being able to see his kids.” -Anna**
- **“The feeling that I’ve helped someone have a better day.” -George**

The day was about celebrating who our volunteers are: the people who show up, build relationships, solve problems, encourage others, and keep serving year after year. Thank you, volunteers; our community is stronger because you keep showing up.

Thank you to our funders!

















































































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550 Backpacks, Ready for a New School Year

Before students walked through the doors for a new school year, our Readers in Motion team was already hard at work. Our team assembled 550 backpacks, each packed with 28 resources and tools for students registered with Readers in Motion.

Each backpack is filled with pencils, markers, and notebooks, as well as social-emotional learning tools and sensory items designed to support students both academically and emotionally in the classroom.

The Readers in Motion team delivered 81 student backpacks to three Hillsborough County elementary schools in one day, loading the Seniors in Service van with backpacks and teacher supply totes. Every student received a backpack, and every teacher received a tote filled with classroom supplies. Classroom Grandparent volunteers told us students couldn't wait to open their backpacks and go through everything inside, while teachers were surprised to learn that the totes and supplies were theirs to keep and use in their classrooms.

Readers in Motion partners with four Hillsborough County public schools to provide tutoring, mentoring, and enrichment for students who need additional support. The backpacks are one small piece of a much larger effort: making sure students have the tools, resources, and people they need to walk into the classroom ready to learn.

A special thank you to our funder, the Children's Board of Hillsborough County, for helping make this possible.

If you're looking for a way to make a difference this school year, we're looking for volunteers to help children build the reading skills and confidence they'll carry with them for years to come. Email FGP@seniorsinservice.org or scan the QR code to get started.

Children's Board
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY
www.ChildrensBoard.org