

Volunteer Information

A special opportunity to make an important difference in someone's life



Why you are needed

The declining years of life often bring despair and loneliness. With *Senior Connections*, the isolated elderly discover a lifeline to hope, joy and personal fulfillment. Two groups of people benefit from this life-giving experience – *residents of nursing homes* who often receive no visitors and *relational volunteers* who provide companionship and a connection to the outside world.

Our volunteers come from all walks of life, but they all have some qualities in common. Typically, they are “younger seniors” who are beginning to face the challenges of aging themselves, but who are still independent and able to serve. They also share a desire to make a difference in someone's life. In the process, they improve their own lives through relationships with residents, staff and other relational volunteers in the *Senior Connections* program.

What you would do

As in most relationships, our relational volunteers and their resident companions engage in conversation and social activities that suit their interests and abilities. Here are some of the things that you might enjoy doing together:

- ♥ Talk about their past, their memories and their family history
- ♥ Sing songs of their generation
- ♥ Play a musical instrument
- ♥ Play board games and work on puzzles
- ♥ Read together
- ♥ Watch a movie or television program
- ♥ Bring a pet to play with
- ♥ Show pictures of families and special occasions
- ♥ Bring a child to visit
- ♥ Tell jokes
- ♥ Write notes to friends and relatives
- ♥ Take walks around the building or grounds

Mutual benefits

Everyone involved in the *Senior Connections* program benefits from the experience in many gratifying ways:

Benefits for **RESIDENTS**:

- ♥ Reduces loneliness and isolation
- ♥ Reassures seniors that they will be cared for
- ♥ Fosters hope and meaning in life
- ♥ Increases sense of being valued
- ♥ Stimulates mental alertness
- ♥ Promotes physical well-being
- ♥ Reinforces spirituality
- ♥ Increases positive engagement with others
- ♥ Restores a sense of personal dignity

Benefits for **VOLUNTEERS**:

- ♥ Provides a rewarding and fulfilling experience
- ♥ Enhances the sense of purpose and meaning in life
- ♥ Promotes a feeling of contribution and heightened self-esteem
- ♥ Contributes to personal growth and learning
- ♥ Fosters greater physical health and well-being
- ♥ Increases sense of control over one's life
- ♥ Improves ability to cope with crisis
- ♥ Fosters feelings of joy and happiness
- ♥ Enhances compassion and empathy for others
- ♥ Promotes greater spiritual strength and peace of mind

How you will be trained and prepared

The initial volunteer training for *Senior Connections*, called *The Good Neighbor Course*, was developed by program staff in collaboration with the St. Louis University Department of Geriatric Psychiatry.

The course's main areas of learning include:

- ♥ Basics of how the program works
- ♥ Communication and listening skills
- ♥ Building purposeful relationships
- ♥ Delaying of gratification
- ♥ Profiles of the client population
- ♥ Dynamics of institutionalization
- ♥ Nursing home structure and relationship to nursing home staff
- ♥ Confidentiality and privacy issues
- ♥ Recognizing and managing emotional reactions
- ♥ The grieving process
- ♥ Dealing with depression

We ask volunteers to make a commitment to a resident companion of at least one hour per week for a minimum of one year. Then we work with nursing home staff to make a suitable match with residents who have the greatest need for volunteer companionship.

After our volunteers have begun to form relationships with residents, we lead support groups to share their experiences with one another and to ensure that they and their companions are enjoying an enriching relationship.

Beyond that, volunteers are free to contribute and participate in the program however they choose. Other options for volunteer support could include:

- ♥ Enlist other volunteers through your personal contacts
- ♥ Make a donation
- ♥ Provide transportation for relational volunteers who do not drive
- ♥ Join the Senior Connections board
- ♥ Serve on a special task force
- ♥ Provide volunteer training
- ♥ Speak about the program in your personal and professional circles

Senior Connections offers a rewarding opportunity to support people who have given some much to so many throughout their long lives—and who still have much to share with people who care. What's more, our relational volunteers also promote the larger mission of *Senior Connections* to improve the lives of the aging throughout our society.

Contact

If you would like more information about becoming a Relational Volunteer please contact 314-727-9202.