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

City of Tampa Florida

Castor's Classroom Companions Build the Foundation for a Lifetime of Learning

The City of Tampa Mayor's Office has partnered with Seniors in Service to ensure students at B.T. Washington Elementary have the literacy foundation to succeed.

Classrooms are finally starting to feel normal after two years of disrupted learning due to COVID-19. Now we begin the recovery process to help students overcome learning loss, and one-on-one tutoring and mentoring are more important than ever. The pandemic widened the divide between students who are succeeding and students who are struggling to keep up. To close that gap, the City of Tampa Mayor's Office is funding six Foster Grandparents to serve in kindergarten through third-grade classrooms at B.T. Washington Elementary School.

Seniors in Service Foster Grandparents are volunteers who serve as tutors and mentors in schools with high needs and limited resources. They spend up to 30 hours per week in the same classroom for the entire school year providing consistent one-on-one and small group tutoring for students who may easily fall behind.

For these volunteers, it's not only about helping students improve their academic skills; they truly are a "Grandparent" in the classroom. Every classroom has children who need extra attention to feel seen and valued. Volunteers are able to listen to their stories, calm their anxiety, defuse their frustrations, and give the love they need.

The Foster Grandparent volunteers at B.T. Washington are part of a larger team of more than 160 Seniors in Service volunteers who successfully serve as tutors and mentors in Pre-K through third-grade classrooms throughout Pinellas and Hillsborough County. Each year they help over 750 children develop their literacy and social-emotional skills to start them on a pathway for a lifetime of learning.

Are you ready to be the hero in the classroom who helps a child succeed? Become a Foster Grandparent by contacting Lorena Mielke at lmielke@seniorsinservice.org or (813) 492-8925.

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A Message From Our CEO

One in five older adults face isolation, and depression rates among college students are 1.5 times higher than they were in 2019. These sound like two separate problems, but the solution to both can be found in intergenerational programming. You know us as Seniors in Service, but the reality is that we engage volunteers of all ages, and we've seen how bringing multiple generations together for social connection can improve the lives of everyone.

As you saw on the cover of this newsletter, we have a history of intergenerational programming through Foster Grandparents. In the past two years, we've found even more ways to bring multiple generations together by adding services like Health Buddies and TelePals.

At the height of the pandemic, Seniors in Service focused on providing social support services to ensure every senior who needed a friend to talk to had somebody. We know the devastating effects isolation can have on seniors' mental and physical well-being, so to increase our capacity to serve, we began engaging college students as Health Buddies and TelePals. It started as a service to support seniors, but it's proven just as beneficial for the younger generation.

Sana Lulu is a college student who serves as a Health Buddy, providing social connection for seniors living with chronic conditions. She shared how this program helped her as much as the seniors she was serving, **"Just as much as the seniors are feeling lonely and isolated, I was feeling lonely and isolated. Sometimes my clients would call ME and it would make ME feel special, because they were thinking of me. It made me feel really warm inside like I'm really doing something good."**

The benefits of intergenerational relationships go beyond the benefits of social connections. These relationships break down stereotypes, build empathy, and provide opportunities to learn from each other. Melannie Laya is also a college student volunteer who is bilingual. She has had the chance to connect with Spanish-speaking volunteers and clients, and this is what she shared, **"I think it's really cool to speak to the older generations who are immigrants because I immigrated to the United States when I was about a year old. I think it's so interesting to hear about their culture and what they did in their country when they were younger."**

Intergenerational programs discourage ageism and create a more cohesive society where people of all ages support each other. As we expand as an organization into more and more intergenerational services we hope you will join us because we know everyone has something to give and something to gain when people of all generations come together to serve.

-Robin Ingles, Ceo

Neonkita Frazier helps Veterans fight homelessness and became Volunteer Florida's Volunteer of the Year!

Neonkita Frazier is on a mission to help Veterans experiencing homelessness access the benefits they deserve. She became a trusted advocate to more than twenty Veterans as she helped them transition from a shelter to a place they could call home. Her commitment and compassion earned her the recognition of Volunteer of the Year by Volunteer Florida.

Neonkita understands from experience what it's like to be homeless and struggle to navigate the services you desperately need. That's why when she met a homeless Veteran trying to earn some money by putting her groceries in her trunk, she decided to help.

"I have always had a big heart for those that served our country, and it breaks my heart to see Veterans struggling for their basic needs. My unfortunate life experiences have given me the perfect skills to guide these heroes into a life of independence and the freedom they deserve," said Frazier.

Frazier is a member of Operation: Veteran Connect, which mobilizes Veterans and military family members to help Tampa Bay Veterans in need. As a volunteer, Frazier sees firsthand the growing number of Veterans struggling to navigate the complex maze of services that are supposed to help them.

Ever since that chance meeting in the grocery store parking lot, Neonkita has put her effort into helping homeless Veterans. She started meeting every week with a group of seven Veterans living at New Beginnings of Tampa, a transitional housing program that provides people with a place to live while helping them stabilize their lives. Within six weeks, all seven Veterans had found an affordable apartment and learned how to utilize rental assistance vouchers designated for homeless Veterans. This success earned Frazier the trust of other Veterans, and now she is guiding fourteen more Veterans through the complicated process to help them transform their lives.

Operation: Veteran Connect member Neonkita Frazier was presented with the Volunteer of the Year Award by Volunteer Florida CEO Corey Simon for her dedication to helping Veterans overcome homelessness.

Rain or shine, Neonkita Fraizer and her fellow Operation: Veteran Connect members deliver food every week to formerly homeless Veterans.

Veterans easily recognize Neonkita as she drives her big red truck named Clifford around the Veteran apartment complex. Her heart is as big as her truck, and Neonkita doesn't stop caring once Veterans move into their apartment. Every week you'll find Neonkita and Clifford driving around town to pick up furniture, clothing, and food donations to deliver to the Veterans. Her goal is to give them a home and a pathway to success. She's gathered an entire community of volunteers, donations, and resources to furnish apartments, provide food, and connect to social services setting each Veteran up for long-term success.

Neonkita is an example to us all of how one dedicated volunteer can change the life of many. If you would like to help Neonkita and Operation: Veteran Connect support Veterans moving into housing, contact Pam Plager at pplager@seniorsinservice.org.

Seniors in Service Salutes Operation: Veteran Connect Member Ernest Walker

On January 18, 2022, Ernest Walker lost his battle with cancer, and we said goodbye to a dedicated volunteer, Veteran, teammate, and friend. Ernest lived a life in service to others, and because of it, he left this world a better place.

Ernest served as an Operation: Veteran Connect member, volunteering his time at Bay Pines Veterans Hospital. He was passionate about sharing Whole Health information to help his fellow Veterans access the resources they needed to improve their mental and physical well-being.

Ernest also gave his time to provide telephone reassurance for isolated seniors during COVID-19, helped distribute food through Feeding Tampa Bay, and wrote letters to active military members who were serving overseas.

Ernest lived a purposeful life in service to many and he will be missed.

Seniors in Service was honored as the University of South Florida School of Aging Studies' Community Partner of the Year!

Students in the School of Aging Studies serve as Seniors in Service Health Buddies to provide companionship as medicine for individuals living with chronic conditions.

This volunteer experience provides valuable insight into the aging process as students help seniors overcome everyday challenges to improve their health. Health Buddies receive weekly training on proper nutrition, community resources, active listening skills, and warning signs that need to be addressed. The knowledge and empathy they gain from this experience will benefit each student in their future career.

Local funders strengthen mentoring and tutoring services to help struggling students

Seniors in Service depends on local funders to help accomplish our mission. We are grateful to each of these organizations for supported training and resources to enable volunteer tutors and mentors to help children improve their literacy skills and develop resiliency for future success.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION TAMPA BAY

Community Foundation Tampa Bay provided a $48,579 grant to train Foster Grandparents to help the children they are tutoring develop emotional intelligence skills. Research shows it's critical for children to develop emotional intelligence to equip them with the skills to overcome challenges for success in academics, relationships, and life.

Our Foster Grandparents serve in schools with high needs where many students face challenging life circumstances outside of the classroom. As volunteers help children improve their literacy skills, they also need the tools to help students build resiliency to truly achieve personal success.

The funding by Community Foundation Tampa Bay will allow Frameworks to provide ongoing, research-based training for our volunteers to learn how to create an environment that intentionally encourages positive youth development so each child can reach their full potential. Through Frameworks training, Foster Grandparents will learn about the building blocks of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and self-management to help children successfully navigate life's challenges.

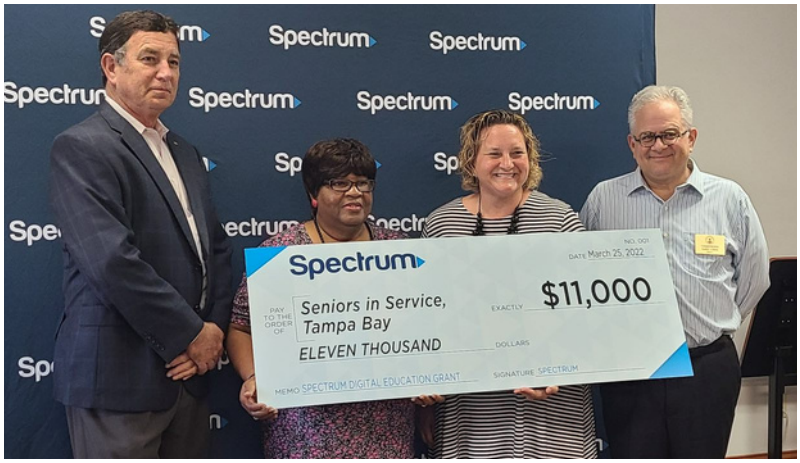
Spectrum provided an $11,000 Digital Education Grant to help 156 tutors and mentors confidently use technology to meet struggling students online.

Two years ago, no one thought virtual tutoring and online training would be possible. Then COVID-19 happened, and we were forced to rethink everything we had done in the past in order to engage volunteers and continue to mentor students who needed us more than ever. Thanks to the digital education grant provided by Spectrum, our volunteers have learned new technology skills that allow them to continue to reach even more students and connect with their fellow volunteers in ways they could not before.

Through this grant, each volunteer received a tablet, and Seniors in Service provided weekly training to help volunteers understand how to confidently use it to access the online platforms it provided, like Zoom and email.

The technology skills our volunteers learned reached into other areas of their life as well. Many learned to order groceries and medication online, visit family and friends through Zoom, and attend online training that enriched their lives.

The return on investment of this grant will continue for years to come as volunteers continue to use the technology skills they have gained to enrich their lives and the lives of those they serve.



Spectrum Communications Director Joe Durkin presented Seniors in Service CEO Robin Ingles with an $11,000 check to support digital education for Foster Grandparents. Volunteer Gladys Everett shared how this grant helped her tutor children online, and Hillsborough County Commissioner Harry Cohen expressed the value of companies like Spectrum investing local nonprofits to support the community

The DeBartolo Family Foundation stepped in with a $2,500 grant to provide the extra funding needed to ensure every student enrolled in Readers in Motion had a backpack full of supplies to encourage their love of learning. A record number of students signed up for Readers in Motion this year and benefited from the literacy support it provides to young students.

Junior League of St. Petersburg provided a $1,000 grant to support Social Emotional Learning (SEL) training for our volunteer tutors and mentors. The picture on the left shows funding in action! The check presentation took place at a Foster Grandparent volunteer in-service where Frameworks of Tampa Bay, Inc was leading this important SEL training. Frameworks provides research-based resources to help educators and youth-serving professionals equip students with social emotional skills. We love this picture because it shows the smiling faces of so many caring adults who are committed to the success of children in St. Petersburg.

Volunteer Florida CEO, Corey Simon inspires service through his leadership

Volunteer Florida CEO Corey Simon is a true leader with a servant's heart, and we were honored when he came to visit Seniors in Service Operation: Veteran Connect members where they serve at Our Lady of Guadalupe Food Pantry. He toured the pantry and saw how the funding provided by Volunteer Florida is engaging volunteers to feed 200 food-insecure families every week.

Volunteer Florida CEO Corey Simon visited our Operation: Veteran Connect members and Seniors in Service staff at Our Lady of Guadalupe Food Pantry to see how they're providing food security for families in need.

Volunteer Florida's mission is to strengthen Florida's communities through national service, fostering volunteerism, and leveraging resources. They fund Operation: Veteran Connect, so our volunteers can support local Veterans, military members, and their families.

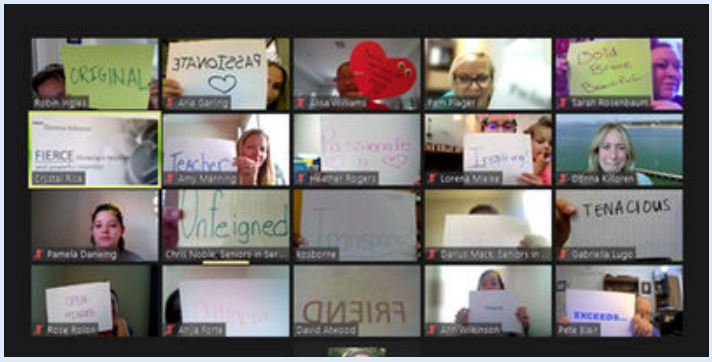
Operation: Veteran Connect members serve every week at Our Lady of Guadalupe Food Pantry, which is operated solely through the support of volunteers. They also pick up boxes of food from the pantry every Saturday and deliver them to Veterans who have recently overcome homelessness. As the pantry director, Tom Bullaro said, "Without the volunteers we would not survive."

During Mr. Simons' visit, each member had the opportunity to share how their volunteer experience has been meaningful to them. Service to others helped them overcome depression, build supportive relationships, and most of all, give back to those who have served our country. For them, volunteering is not just something to do; it is a mission.

Mr. Simons is a former NFL player, and we were thrilled to hear him say that he loves his job as CEO of Volunteer Florida more than being a professional football player. In his new role, "he gets to make other people's dreams come true." The citizens of Florida are in good hands with the leadership of Volunteer Florida and their army of dedicated volunteers.

Congratulations to Donna Killoren on her retirement from Seniors in Service

Passionate, fierce, inspiring, bold, tenacious...these are Donna Killoren's superpowers, and she's used them all to empower volunteers and advocate for seniors, children, and Veterans throughout Tampa Bay.



On our final Zoom call with Donna Killoren, each team member held up one word to describe her talents and enormous contribution to Seniors in Service.

Donna retired from Seniors in Service at the end of March, and we're going to miss her and her talents. As the Community Outreach Director, Donna helped us expand programs, build new partnerships, and experience tremendous growth to meet the needs of Tampa Bay, especially during the pandemic. We're grateful for all she's done for Seniors in Service throughout the years!

Thank you to our funders!

Senior Citizens Services Fund at Pinellas Community Foundation

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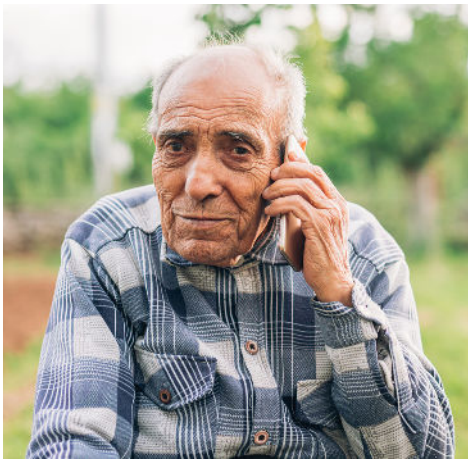
Make a phone call, change a life!

It really is that simple. Become a TelePal!



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Volunteer as a TelePal and help isolated seniors stay connected through friendly phone calls.

Wayne is a senior who was connected with a TelePal, and this is what he shared about his new friend, **"Actually I think he has saved my life, I think I have made a friend for life."** A simple phone call can make all the difference to improve someone's life.

There are seniors waiting to be matched with a TelePal. **If you can help contact Nora Medeiros at (813) 492-8924 or nmedeiros@seniorsinservice.org**