

Enhancing Senior Lives

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Since its founding in 1972, Senior Neighbors Inc. has promoted the health and wellbeing of Kent County's older adults. Senior Neighbors is dedicated to helping approximately 4,000 seniors annually remain healthy and independent into their later years.

The mission of Senior Neighbors is *Enhancing Senior Lives*. The agency promotes the well-being of older adults by providing services which support appropriate individual self – sufficiency, particularly to those with the greatest physical, social and economic needs.

The isolation of seniors is a focal point for the staff of Senior Neighbors. The organization is continuing to combat the isolation that seniors feel through some of their key programing.

1. Senior Centers:

Senior Neighbors operates five Senior Neighbors centers in Kent County with locations in downtown Grand Rapids, Grandville, Lowell, Sparta, and Walker. The senior centers are considered by Senior Neighbors to be wellness centers, where people socialize laugh and rebuild healthy lifestyles. Centers not only provide a host of healthy activities for seniors including low-cost meals, exercise programs, nutrition education, health screening, classes, travel opportunities and other activities.

2. Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)

RSVP provides meaningful and satisfying volunteer opportunities to those who are age 55 and beyond. RSVP partners with non-profit agencies within Kent County whose mission is to address the key critical need areas as defined by our funders and the community. Utilizing their skills, talents, experience, and interests of volunteers, RSVP places volunteers in opportunities within these partner agencies to strengthen and increase their impact in key focus areas of education, community policing, increased access to nutrition, and seniors successfully aging in place. There are no income requirements and no fees charged for these opportunities.

RSVP volunteers can be placed within private residences or independent living facilities in opportunities that serve older adults; as well as home-bound or disabled individuals, that may benefit from receiving assistance to remain living independently. Requesting volunteers who serve as friendly visitors, phone buddies, light home maintenance, yard chore helpers, and drivers for medical and other necessary appointments can provide caregivers a much needed break. RSVP matches volunteers by geographic area, gender, special interests, and availability, whenever possible. Visits and phone calls typically occur once or twice per week for a minimum of one hour per contact or as mutually defined by the client and volunteer. A minimum prior notice of seven business days is needed when requesting transportation or home/yard help.

3. Senior Companion Program (SCP)

Volunteers help caregivers provide companionship for your loved one so you can step away while a volunteer engages your loved one in activities, help with meals, friendship and give you a much needed break.

Providing care for a loved one can be exhausting and overwhelming. Our Senior Neighbor Senior Companion volunteers are 55 years old and older trained to provide a short break to caregivers by spending time with your older adult loved one in his or her home. The benefit of a Senior Companion is to offer you time for yourself for no cost.

Our volunteers that are older adults help seniors who are frail, homebound and/or lonely. This eases the depression seniors may face living at home alone. Caregivers or anyone taking care of a loved one, get time away for themselves. This gives caregivers the break without the stress or guilt of leaving a loved one alone. They can rejuvenate themselves and return to the demands of care giving more refreshed and energized.

While care-giving can be an isolating and lonely role, the services of Senior Neighbors and its Older Adult Volunteer Programs are designed to ensure caregivers feel they are no longer alone.

The next Family Caregiver University Class on Friday- March 18, 2016, will focus on *Options to Preventing Isolation in Seniors*. The class will spend time focusing more on these resources through Senior Neighbors, but also other resources in our community including Stepping Stones, and Senior Meals. For a full list of Family Caregiver University classes provided by the Caregiver Resource Network, please call 1-888-456-5664 or see the website at www.caregiverresource.net.

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds.