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# Volunteers at Full Life Care Bring Companionship and Hope to Isolated Elders

Lindsey Nakata, Sierra Noble, and Maria Pinero

As the United States has been struck with the deadly and all-consuming COVID-19 virus, many of our susceptible elders report feeling isolated and neglected by society. According to a University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging, the percentage of older adults reporting social isolation doubled to 56% in 2020. However, with the helping hands of our neighbors and organizations who care deeply for their clients, there is hope on the horizon and endless opportunities to make a difference.

For over 40 years, a local organization called Full Life Care has been dedicated to guaranteeing elders and adults with chronic or terminal illnesses and disabilities can be compassionately supported in their communities. Without Full Life, they would be living in isolation or placed in institutional care.

Full Life Care's services are numerous, ranging from adult day health to housing support services. While some Full Life staff and services have shifted to remote operations, home care aides continue to travel to homes across King County every day to ensure their clients can continue to live independently. In whole, Full Life's network of health and social services has supported thousands of clients and families during the pandemic, thanks to the help of many dedicated individuals.

"A silver lining through this whole thing is working with people who, in the middle of the pandemic, are doing what they can to help," Scott Slater, the Vice President of Operations at Full Life Care, said. "The perseverance of the leaders and staff in these organizations is truly incredible. I really think we're going to be looking back at this time 20 or 30 years from now in amazement of what we were able to do to try to keep everyone as safe as possible."

With so many critical programs, Full Life Care is constantly on the lookout for volunteers to join their commitment to support those who are especially vulnerable during this time.

During COVID-19, volunteers are essential to uphold Full Life's ElderFriends program. ElderFriends helps relieve the loneliness and isolation of older adults who lack social support by custom matching volunteers to elders in Seattle and King County.

These intergenerational pairings result in increased companionship, outreach and advocacy for elder participants.

During this time, ElderFriends volunteers have maintained virtual contact with elders through creative means, such as sending personalized letters, video chatting and talking on the phone.

Becky Leary was inspired to begin volunteering at ElderFriends because of the close-knit relationship she had with her grandmother.



“I have always had a strong relationship with my grandmother, who lived in California before she passed away in 2019,” Leary said. “We would speak on the phone every week or so to just catch up and share stories...I’ve always cherished the relationship I built with her and miss our phone conversations.”

Leary also stressed the importance of these relationships during an era of solitude brought about by the pandemic.

“It’s so nice to have another friend in my elder buddy to chat with while being isolated,” Leary said. “[My elder buddy] used to regularly go over to the senior center across the street from his apartment, but because of COVID-19, he is no longer able to do that...I imagine it is nice for him to have another outlet for conversation outside of his limited in-person relationships.”

Taylor Hardie, another ElderFriends volunteer and a Shoreline Community College student, shared a similar sentiment.

“My buddy does not get to see his friends anymore, as they are such a high-risk group that no one can interact,” Hardie said. “He didn’t get to spend the holidays with his family either (they had to wave at him from his balcony)—I can tell that this affects him and how isolated he feels.”

During this lonely time, a simple phone call can make all the difference for ElderFriends volunteers and elder participants. “I think it is important to give anyone feeling lonely an outlet or something to look forward to,” Hardie said. “And this is what the program has done, not only for my buddy but for me as well.”

While months of a pandemic have been difficult for many, with a monumentally challenging time comes daily opportunities for small miracles. When volunteers give back, they not only brighten the lives of those they serve but fulfill themselves as well.

The Full Life Care team recognizes the compassion and diligence of all of their volunteers and staff. Their acts of service continue to uplift their communities, benefiting those who need it most.

“Our teams...do what is right and care for our clients,” Slater said. “It’s hard enough to live through a pandemic, but caring for the most vulnerable through a pandemic is truly heroic.”

Find out more about Full Life Care’s volunteer opportunities by visiting [fulllifecare.org/ways-to-give/volunteer/](https://fulllifecare.org/ways-to-give/volunteer/) or contacting Jessica Chin (Full Life’s Volunteer Program Supervisor) at [jessicac@fulllifecare.org](mailto:jessicac@fulllifecare.org).

To keep up to date with Full Life Care’s latest community efforts, follow the organization on Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.