



Senior Living

The Yankee **Xpress**
BLACKSTONE VALLEY **Xpress**

local **town** pages

FREE PRESS



Finding support in your community

Libraries, senior centers, town halls all great resources

By THERESA KNAPP

Your town's senior center, public library, and Town Hall are great resources for seniors looking for support of any kind within their community.

Senior Center

Most towns have a senior center, most senior centers have a newsletter listing their events and services, and most programs have little or no fee. Services vary per

town and the minimum starting age for services varies per town as well.

Typically, most senior centers will offer services related to aging in general, health insurance, exercise, meals on wheels and onsite meals, transportation (errands, medical appointments, etc.), fuel and food assistance, housing assistance, legal and tax assistance, and snow removal. Many senior centers offer additional services.

Senior centers often offer educational programs such as scam prevention, retirement planning, CPR, driver education, buying or leasing a car, self defense, and debt management. They also offer social programs such as painting and writing workshops, technology training, birthday and holiday celebrations, crafting groups, board and card games, field trips, and many other forms of entertainment like concerts, magic shows, etc.

And there are some offerings that are unique to specific towns such as the "Dull Men's Club"

in Northbridge, art history and music appreciation in Auburn, a dedicated senior center craft room in Grafton, and a brand new singing group at the Douglas Adult Social Center (the name of its senior center).

Most senior center staff are eager to help in any way they can; if they do not have the answer to any question, they will try hard to find it for you.

Public Library

Your town's public library is also an excellent place to find support through a variety of programs and events that are offered to people in person and online. These programs are often multi-generational but there are some programs geared toward adults only including book clubs, conversation groups, craft gatherings, and a wide variety of local programs like the Cookbook Club in Ashland, One Book/One Town which is *The World According to Garp* in Holliston this year (many towns run this program with any book of their choice), Fortune Cookie Club in Milford, and the Access to Justice Initiative (free equal access

to the Trial Court system for the public) through Norwood Public Library.

The Millis Public Library offers a "Memory Cafe," a drop-in program for anyone who is affected by cognitive decline/difficulties, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, stroke, mild dementia, forgetfulness, loneliness or just feeling down. The cafes are places for people to find community in an uplifting, caring, and accepting environment.

Note, the Natick Senior Center also offers a Memory Cafe as do some local churches.

Library staff will also help you set up eBooks and eAudiobooks on your electronic device which can make it easier to listen to books. The National Library of Medicine has said audiobooks have a positive impact on the mental health of senior citizens and can help with aggression, depression, anxiety, and other issues. At Bellingham Public Library, like other libraries, you can check out up to five titles at a

RESOURCE LIST

(resources vary per town)

Alzheimer's Helpline

1-800-272-3900

Blackstone Valley Resources (app only)

<https://bvresources.glideapp.io>

Elder Abuse Intake Hotline

1-800-922-2275

Elder Bus 1-800-321-0243

GATRA vans (available in many towns)

1-800-483-2500

Legal Aid 1-508-752-3718

SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone)

1-800-243-4636

SMOC (South Middlesex Opportunity Council) Fuel Assistance

1-800-286-6776

Substance Abuse/Mental Health Helpline 1-800-662-4357

Suicide Prevention Hotline

1-800-273-8255

Tri-Valley Elder Services

1-800-286-6640

WCAC (Worcester Community Action Council) 1-508-754-1176

WRTA (Worcester Regional Transit Authority) 1-508-791-9782

Statewide phone numbers:

Dial 211 - Massachusetts hotline to connect callers to information about critical health and human services programs (staffed by United Way)

Dial 511 - Massachusetts Travel Information (traffic incidents, traffic cameras, road conditions, construction)

Dial 711 - Massachusetts Telecommunications Relay Services for those with a hearing or speech disability

Dial 811 - Utility locator service (aka "Dig Safe")

Dial 911 - Emergency

Dial 988 - Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention

RESOURCES

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Support for Caregivers!

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Supporting Caregivers so Loved Ones can Thrive

By J.D. O'GARA

His mom, Katherine, wasn't doing well in rehab. Watching her decline in health, and sensing she only had a short time left, Joe Scopa, of Medway, Mass., didn't have the heart to put her back into a nursing home setting after his father's funeral. Instead, he decided to care for her himself in his home – and she lived another 16 years.

"Turns out, taking her home to live with me made a hugely positive impact on her quality of life," says Scopa, "Because of this decision, my mom got to witness several major life events for me. She was able to see me marry, have children, and build a new home."

The decision, although positive overall, brought with it some life-altering consequences, no small part of which was a lack of income.

"I had been taking care of my mom for about two years when I discovered Caregiver Homes (now Careforth). At that point, I had exhausted most of my saving and was contemplating my options, as I knew I had to return to work. Finding this organization allowed me to keep my mom home with me where I might have otherwise had to return her to a nursing facility," says Scopa.

In 2023, Caregiver Homes, Seniorlink, and Vela rebranded under a new, unified name: Careforth. Founded in 2000, Careforth is a nationally accredited Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) organization.

"Our mission is to surround family caregivers with connectedness, so they can confidently care for their loved ones at home," says Brooke Mignogna, Director of Sales & Community Partnerships for Careforth. "Caregivers play a crucial role in maintaining the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable populations, so we aim to support the care they provide by offering the coaching, resources, and financial assistance they need most," says Mignogna.

According to an Urban Institute analysis of U.S. Census figures, the number of Americans ages 65 and older will double to 80 million in 2040, while number of adults ages 85+, those who need the most help with basic personal care, will have quadrupled from 2000 to 2040.

Although the median cost of full-time in-home care (\$5,200 a month) is less than nursing home care (\$9,034 a month) according to A Place for Mom's 2023 Cost of Long-Term Care and Senior Liv-

ing report, that cost is difficult to bear for those without long-term care insurance or a lot of assets.

"Currently, Careforth serves Medicaid-eligible individuals and their families in 10 states, including Massachusetts. Eligibility is determined by a variety of factors including the age of the person you care for, type of assistance and care needed, relationship between caregiver and care receiver, etc.," says Mignogna.

Scopa was able to receive a stipend from Careforth while he cared for his mom.

"My experience was great. The support I received helped not only financially, but emotionally ... Having an understanding support

system in place is invaluable as a caregiver," says Scopa.

"Due to the demands of caregiving and the stress that often comes with the associated responsibilities, caregivers experience higher levels of emotional fatigue, burnout, and anxiety," says Mignogna. "Careforth provides each caregiver with a personal plan, expert coaches, and connections to community caregiving resources."

Through Adult Foster Care (AFC), Careforth provides support to thousands of caregivers, including:

- Working to promote state and federal policies that recognize the value caregivers provide to the health care industry.

- Providing access to a Careforth clinical care team who provide expert clinical and emotional education and support.

- Providing ongoing support through a secure collaborative Careforth app.

- Offering access to a curated collection of community resources for caregivers.

- Connecting caregivers with others who care for a loved one to provide emotional support.

- And, providing caregivers with the tools they need to prioritize their own needs while focusing on their family member as a loved one rather than someone who needs care.

For Scopa, the program allowed

him the invaluable opportunity to provide his mom, who had dementia, better overall health, quality of life and happiness in general, he says.

"Looking back, even through the heartbreaks, I wouldn't have changed any of it. In the end, having no regrets brings me peace," says Scopa.

To learn more about the support you may be eligible for within Massachusetts, you can call (866) 797-2333, or visit <https://info.careforth.com/ma>. Additional caregiving resources and expert advice is offered at Careforth.com/Blog.

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Pickleball, the Fastest Growing Sport

Pickleball is a popular and rapidly growing sport, especially among the senior set. Even if you don't play, you may be familiar with the hollow tok-tok sound as the hard plastic wiffle-balls cross the court, flying over the net.

Why has it become so popular with the public that even Tom Brady invested in a professional pickleball team?

Well, it's possible because the sport gives you a good aerobic workout with little stress and strain on joints and muscles. It's also an endorphin boost, fighting depression and raising self-esteem problems not uncommon to senior citizens as well as teens.

And finally, it's face-to-face socializing with a whiff of friendly competition, and both add zest to life. As an additional incentive, pickleball can be played on indoor or outdoor courts for year-round enjoyment.

The game – a kind of cross between tennis, badminton, and ping-pong – can be played as either a singles or doubles game, though doubles seems to win out as most favored. It is a paddle sport, with paddles 8 inches wide and 15 inches long of wood, composites

or graphite. Courts are badminton-sized at 20 feet wide and 40 feet long. The nets are 34 inches in height. For comparison, four pickleball courts fit into a single tennis court.

How to win

Points can only be earned by the side that's serving, and the winner is the first side to get to 11 points and be leading by at least two. What's great? There's no French terminology like "love" aka "L'oeuf" to learn.

How to play

Like tennis, the same court can be used for doubles and singles. It is the size of a badminton court.

The Nitty Gritty of Play (USA Pickleball rules) states the server's arm must be moving in an upward arc when the ball is struck.

Paddle contact with the ball must not be made above the waist level.

The head of the paddle must not be above the highest part of the wrist at contact.

A 'drop serve' is also permitted in which case none of the elements above apply.

At the time the ball is struck, the server's feet may not touch the court or outside the imaginary

extension of the sideline or centerline and at least one foot must be behind the baseline on the playing surface or the ground behind the baseline.

The serve is made diagonally crosscourt and must land within the confines of the opposite diagonal court.

Only one serve attempt is allowed per server.

Serving Sequence

Both players on the serving doubles team have the opportunity to serve and score points until they commit a fault (except for the first service sequence of each new game).

The first serve of each side-out is made from the right/even court.

If a point is scored, the server switches sides and the server initiates the next serve from the left/odd court.

As subsequent points are scored, the server continues switching back and forth until a fault is committed, and the first server loses the serve.

When the first server loses the serve, the partner then serves from their correct side of the court (except for the first service sequence of the game).

The second server continues serving until his team commits a fault and loses the serve to the opposing team.

Once the service goes to the opposition (at side out), the first serve is from the right/even court and both players on that team have the opportunity to serve and score points until their team commits two faults.

In singles, the server serves from the right/even court when his or her score is even and from the left/odd when the score is odd.

Scoring

Points are scored only by the serving team.

Games are normally played to 11 points, win by 2.

Tournament games may be to 15 or 21, win by 2.

When the serving team's score is even (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10) the player who was the first server in the game for that team will be in the right/even court when serving or receiving; when odd (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) that player will be in the left/odd court when serving or receiving.

Two-Bounce Rule (or what makes the game fun)

When the ball is served, the receiving team must let it bounce before returning, and then the serving team must let it bounce before returning, thus two bounces.

After the ball has bounced once in each team's court, both teams may either volley the ball (hit the ball before it bounces) or play it off a bounce (ground stroke).

The two-bounce rule eliminates the serve and volley advantage and extends rallies.

Line Calls

A ball contacting any part of any line, except the non-volley zone line on a serve, is considered "in."

A serve contacting the non-volley zone line is short and a fault.

Non-Volley Zone

The non-volley zone is the court area within 7 feet on both sides of the net.

Volleying is prohibited within the non-volley zone. This rule prevents players from executing smashes from a position within the zone.

It is a fault if, when volleying a ball, the player steps on the non-volley zone, including the line and/or when the player's momentum causes them or anything they are wearing or carrying to touch the non-volley zone including the associated lines.

It is a fault if, after volleying, a player is carried by momentum into or touches the non-volley zone, even if the volleyed ball is declared dead before this happens.

A player may legally be in the non-volley zone any time other than when volleying a ball.

The non-volley zone is commonly referred to as "the kitchen."

Faults

A fault is any action that stops play because of a rule violation.

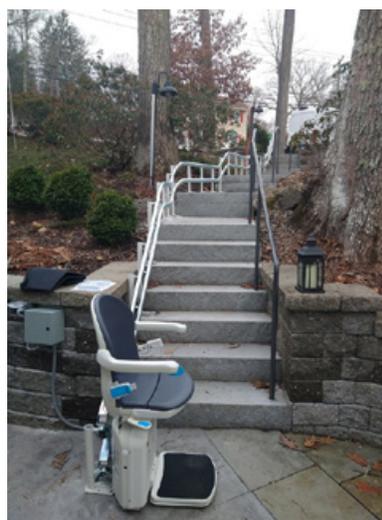
A fault by the receiving team results in a point for the serving team.

A fault by the serving team results in the server's loss of serve or side out.

A simple coin flip can determine the first team to serve.



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Memory Cafés Bring Fun Back to Life for Cognitively Impaired & Their Caregivers

Isolation. It's common among a growing aging population with cognitive impairments, but also for their caregivers, according to a 2022 study published in the *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*.

"When someone is living with a very challenging medical condition, often life becomes about managing that condition, so it becomes about doctor visits and dealing with problems. People can become socially isolated, not only the person living with dementia, but also the person that's supporting them," says Beth Soltzberg, Director of the Jewish Family & Children's Service (JFCS) Alzheimer's/Related Dementias Family Support Program in Waltham.

In 2014, Soltzberg implemented one of the first Memory Cafés in Massachusetts at her Waltham location.

"They're wonderful, free resources that make such a difference for people who come to them," says Soltzberg.

The idea, dating back to 1997, was the brainchild of psychologist Bére Miesen, of Holland, but they weren't introduced in the United States until 2008 in Santa Fe, NM. In 2011, the first Massachusetts Memory Café was created in Marlborough, followed by the Waltham program. Now, the Commonwealth boasts 105 Memory Cafés in various cities and towns, more than any other state except Wisconsin.

Memory Cafés, which can be run by various community orga-

nizations, offer social connection, support, invigorating activity, and information. They're for individuals living with Alzheimer's or a related disorder, but also for those taking care of them, including family members, friends, and professional caregivers.

Soltzberg explains social isolation occurs among these groups, because many activities people with memory impairments and their caregivers used to do may no longer work as well.

"Visiting extended family and friends, even businesses, such as going to a restaurant or coffee shop or other public place, can become harder," she explains. "Others may not understand how to modify activities so that they do work well."

"When people start to experience dementia, they start to withdraw and that clearly is not good for mental, emotional and physical health," says Maggie Gunderson, who created a Memory Café at the Franklin Senior Center a few years ago. "Another thing to note is the whole family will experience some level of isolation – in my observation, the whole family tends to become less social. The couple can't go out with their friends anymore, they can't socialize or have a drink, they're very withdrawn or misspeak, and for that family, their circle of friends and support is going to become narrower and narrower."

Memory Cafés are designed with this population in mind, with a focus on social connection and joy.

"When people come to a Memory Café, in person or virtual, they are going to be welcomed. They're going to have a nice opportunity to visit with other people, and often there will be some kind of facilitated program. It might be something in the creative arts, like dancing or making a poem as a group, or drumming, or as simple as having a chat about the Red Sox, but it's something that's going to be enlivening or fun," says Soltzberg. Most Memory Cafés offer something different at different meetings, so there's something for everyone.

"Whatever we do is interactive, always geared to participation," says Soltzberg. "We have a participant who reads a poem each time, someone who shares photos and stories. We learn what participants are interested in and let that guide us." Always popular in her Memory Café are engaging music and art programs, she says.

The need seems to be growing. A growing number of Ameri-

cans may have mild cognitive impairment due to Alzheimer's disease, says the Alzheimer's Association, and with an aging Boomer population, by 2050, the number of Americans living with Alzheimer's is projected to grow to 13% from about 6.7% now. Unpaid family and friends provide the most caregiving of older adults (83%), a majority of them women, and nearly half of those caregivers (48%) provide help for someone with Alzheimer's or dementia. These caregivers are significantly more likely than the general population to experience depression.

"My own mother had Alzheimer's disease, so I have firsthand experience with the challenges faced not only for the person with memory loss, but also for the entire family including spouses, adult children, and caregivers," says Stephanie Wolos, former coordinator for the Millis Memory Café at Millis Public Library. "Many people become housebound and feel isolated and unsure where to

find a welcome place in their local community."

Since Memory Café activities are designed for a range of participation, "What I see is that family members and friends have fun, too. They also meet other people who are in a similar situation, so I think everyone feels less alone," says Soltzberg, who adds, "Doing something fun and different is nourishing to the relationship between the care partners. As hard and heartbreaking as it can be, you need those moments as fuel for the journey."

JFCS not only offers a directory of Massachusetts Memory Cafés, available at www.jfcsboston.org/memorycafedirectory, but those looking to implement a Memory Café in their Massachusetts community can check out the JF&CS Memory Café Percolator, a resource offering tools and information to make that process easier, at jfcsboston.org/percolator

RESOURCES

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time (and have up to eight holds pending).

Finally, be sure to check out the website for surrounding town libraries as well since you are typically welcome to attend any program at any library.

Town sponsored or townwide

Many towns, like Medway, offer a "Senior Tax Workoff" program for eligible citizens over 60 years of age. Through this program, seniors can have temporary jobs with the town

or school government to earn money toward their property taxes. This year the maximum benefit, allowed by law, is \$1,500 a year. Check with your town clerk or senior center to see if your town offers this program.

Your town could also have additional services. For example, in Dudley there is a group called "HANDS" (Helping Address the Needs of Dudley's Seniors) which is a "nonprofit group comprised of Dudley residents, employees, and business owners, here to help Dudley seniors whose good planning is no longer enough to meet their monthly food, heating and/or utility expenses."



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The loneliness epidemic, why social connection matters, and the importance of friendship

Gallup poll finds New Englanders report highest rates of loneliness

By THERESA KNAPP

In 2023, the United States Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community noted that the U.S. is in the midst of an "epidemic of loneliness and isolation" and it is affecting our health and longevity.

"Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health," said U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy at the top of the report.

Among the many findings in the 82-page report is, "The lack of social connection poses a significant risk for individual health and longevity. Loneliness and social isolation increase the risk for premature death by 26% and 29% respectively. More broadly, lacking social connection can increase the risk for premature

death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. In addition, poor or insufficient social connection is associated with increased risk of disease, including a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke. Furthermore, it is associated with increased risk for anxiety, depression, and dementia. Additionally, the lack of social connection may increase susceptibility to viruses and respiratory illness."

In the U.S., a 2023 Gallup poll found that rates of loneliness vary by region, and are "inversely related to the density of the population in the area where one lives," meaning the higher the population, the higher the chance someone will report feeling lonely. The highest rate of loneliness across the entire country, according to that 2023 poll, is in New England.

Worldwide, a separate 2023 Gallup poll found that 24% of adults report feeling "very/fairly lonely" and 27% report feeling "a little lonely," meaning that more than half of the adults worldwide feel some degree of loneliness. In yet another poll last year, Gallup found that, in the U.S. alone, 17% of Americans feel lonely, a number that was higher during the COVID-19 pandemic. "So that's the good news," Gallup's Research Director on Wellbeing Dan Witters said on a Gallup podcast last year. "The bad news is that 17% is still about 44 million American adults."

What to do if you're feeling lonely or isolated

Dr. Murthy said, "Each of us can start now, in our own lives, by strengthening our connections and relationships. Our individual relationships are an untapped resource—a source

Are you seeking more social connection?

- Understand the power of social connection and the consequences of social disconnection
- Invest time in nurturing your current relationships
- Minimize distraction during conversation
- Seek out opportunities to serve and support others
- Be responsive, supportive, and practice gratitude
- Actively engage with people of different backgrounds and experiences
- Participate in social and community groups
- Reduce practices that lead to feelings of disconnection from others
- Beware of excessive social media use
- Seek help during times of struggle
- Be open with your healthcare provider
- Make time for civic engagement
- Reflect the core values of connection by asking:
 - How might kindness change this situation?
 - What would it look like to treat others with respect?
 - How can I be of service?
 - How can I reflect my concern for and commitment to others?

Source: U.S. Surgeon General, bit.ly/LonelinessEpidemic2023

of healing hiding in plain sight. They can help us live healthier, more productive, and more fulfilled lives. Answer that phone call from a friend. Make time to share a meal. Listen without the distraction of your phone. Perform an act of service. Express yourself authentically. The keys to human connection are simple, but extraordinarily powerful."

One of the easiest ways to increase social connection is to consider joining clubs and organizations in your community [look for various suggestions elsewhere in this Senior Living publication], but also to elevate the friends and acquaintances you already have.

Experts say most Americans have between one and four close friends, and the focus of your friendship circle should be on quality over quantity.

When considering your friendship network, you can look at the friends you currently have and ask yourself these questions: Does this friendship make me feel valued? Do I feel encouraged by my friend? Do I feel happy when I'm with my friend? The answer should be yes, friends should leave you with a positive feeling.

And if you would like to expand your friendship circle, you can look toward your acquaintances

to see if there is someone you can elevate. Is there someone you know who you would like to know better? If it is awkward to nurture that friendship, Psychology Today suggests these simple actions to help you get closer:

- Ask a question you've been putting off because you thought you didn't have time to talk about it
- Think of a memory you shared with that acquaintance and send them a text or note about it
- Acknowledge their birthday or a difficult milestone in their life
- Write a thank you note to your friend for something they've done that means a lot to you (maybe acknowledge something they did for the community or someone else)

And be aware that making brand new friends can take work. American memoirist and poet Maya Angelou (1928-2014) said in a 2011 interview in *Essence* magazine, "Friendship takes work... Many people complain especially about how much work a new friendship is. It takes more time because you haven't established firm footing yet. You might even be the one to call repeatedly in the beginning and feel like you're not getting back the effort you're putting in. But you will. It takes time."



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YMCA OF CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS

When is the Right Time to Move?

By MICHELE TARANTO

It's now the golden years. Up until now, there has been a plan, a schedule for life's journey. At this senior stage, however, the choices can appear confusing, complicated, maybe not as straightforward. The good news is, seniors today have even more options than ever when it comes to choosing this next chapter in their lives.

The term often used today is 'Aging in Place.' The time has come to review comfort, safety, and finances. A lifestyle may be fine today, but as with anything, change is the only constant. But fear not; there are stages for consideration and many resources to acclimate to aging lifestyles.

- Home Adaptations
- Bring in Extra Help
- Move to a Safer/Healthier Alternative

Home adaptations can be simple suggestions and actions, such as removing throw rugs to avoid slips, installing handrails, placing items on lower shelves, installing a chair lift, or purchasing a medical alert system. There are many organizations that offer in-home assistance when necessary. Their services can range from preparing meals, performing simple household chores, transportation, medication disbursements, or even companionship. Lastly is a move. This major step can include many diverse options, from downsizing, to one-level living, an over 55 community, independent living, subsidized housing, or assisted living.

The decision to move is not always easy. Many seniors prefer to remain in their family home; this haven is the symbol of their life, where all the memories were made; but there may come a time to address some concerns. There are some financial opportunities to remaining in the home, but as with any major life decision, professionals should be brought in to assist.

- Reverse Mortgage Experts
- Seniors Real Estate Specialist Realtor
- Financial Planner
- Estate Attorney
- Real Estate Attorney
- Home Health Organization
- Medical Specialist

Many of these professionals can be found through referrals of

loved ones and friends, the local senior center, library seminars, AARP, or a personal business relationship.

For some, spotting and admitting the signals it's time to make a move can be difficult. Some are obvious, others more subtle.

- Eliminate burden of home maintenance
- Major life event
- Too far from family
- Change in health/mobility
- Unused rooms
- Financial concerns
- Need support services
- Looking for companionship
- Home increased in value
- Social interaction

But where to begin? To start, try answering these questions:

- Do you find it difficult or tiring to clean and care for your home?
- Do you often worry about what might happen if you fall when you're home alone?
- Are you facing a chronic medical condition?
- Is your medication regime difficult or sometimes confusing?
- Would you like more opportunities for social activities within a community?
- Do you feel like you would benefit from more general assistance on a day-to-day basis, such as cooking your own meals?
- Would you find it interesting working alongside others to create a healthier, vibrant life?
- Would you enjoy taking part in activities, such as game nights, social hours, snack times, movie nights, craft classes, cooking classes, or exercise programs?
- Is your home too big for your needs?
- Are you interested in comfortable living with amenities, such as common community spaces, gardens, and house-keeping?

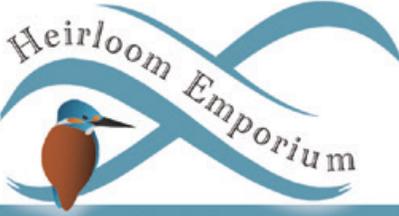
There are no right or wrong answers. These questions can be a guide now, or five years from now, on the status of a senior's living situation. For 0-5 'yes' answers, maybe a little help in the home is good for now. For 6-10, a move may be beneficial in the near future; maybe start exploring options. For 11-14, it's time to make a change.

Soliciting family members or friends is a good start in the process. Maybe contacting one of the professionals listed in this article can get the ball rolling. The change can be difficult and

moving at the right pace for each individual is important. The emotional attachment to a family home can be overwhelming. One step at a time is key, and starting early and hav-

ing a plan is essential.

Michele Taranto is a SRES Specialist and can be contacted for guidance at mtarantorealty@gmail.com, or 781-799-7068.



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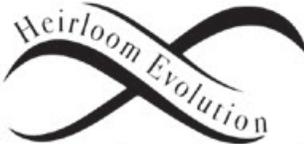
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10 Ways To Volunteer As A Senior

Most people spend the majority of their adult lives working.

Whether they put in long hours at the office, travel for work, or work from home, there's no denying that for most people, the majority of your time as an adult is spent working.

By the time the golden years come around, people are dreaming about what retirement will look like. Will I travel? Will I get a part-time job? Will we become snowbirds and hang out with friends and family?

The good news is you have options. If you're not one to take group tours through your local senior center, or buy a condo in Florida to hang out around the putting greens with your new friends, why not try giving back to the community?

Find a place to volunteer.

Research shows that not only does volunteering help those reaping the benefits of your time, but also your mental health.

According to Forbes, just two hours of volunteering a week can improve satisfaction in your life,

as well as reduced risk of mortality; reduced risk of physical limitations; increased physical activity; and better psychosocial outcomes, such as a stronger sense of purpose, and increased optimism.

"A 2019 Latin American study found volunteerism among older adults can help prevent social isolation—a major risk factor for mortality among the aging population—as well as maintain and even improve mental health," according to Forbes.

So get going! Here are a few options to consider when trying to find the right volunteer opportunity for you.

Pawsitively playful — If you love animals, find your local rescue organization or shelter and volunteer. Volunteering at a shelter doesn't mean just hanging out with the animals. It could mean organizing drives to get items the shelter needs. It could mean being a foster home. It could mean going and taking animals for a walk.

Like-minded folks — Maybe after you retire, you realize that you're short on friends your own age. By volunteering at your local senior center, you could make new friends while helping out the community at the same time

A page turner — For those seniors who enjoy less of a crowd, the library might be the place to go. Help re-stock the books, help the Friends of the Library book sales, or just do odd jobs around the library. It could become your quiet sanctuary, while you still get out of the house and feel productive.

Food for thought — If your mobility allows, look into delivering meals on wheels in your community. You would be helping other seniors who are less mobile, while still getting out of the house.

Become a townie — In many towns, volunteering at Town Hall earns you a discount

on your tax bill. Save money while helping your community.

Greetings — Do you enjoy people watching? Find out what schools in the area use senior volunteers as greeters at the high schools. You'd get to see what the next generation is up to every day!

For the love of God — If you are a religious person, look into the houses of worship in your area. Almost all of them require volunteers. There are those who are responsible for flowers in the worship areas. Others are needed for religious education. And still others answer the phones.

Patriotic duty — Help increase the number of voters during elections. Volunteer to be an election worker. You could check people in as they come in to vote. You could make calls for organizations getting people to register to vote. You could even be an elec-

tion day driver, helping those who have no other way to get to the polls by driving them.

Rock-a-bye baby — Do you have a local hospital nearby? Many of them rely on volunteers to sit with and rock newborn babies who are in the NICU. Parents can't be with them at all times, but the contact with humans helps them grow stronger.

Green thumbs — If communing with nature is your passion, find a farm in the area and volunteer. There are many community farming plots, or local farms with community shares, and they're always looking for volunteers to help maintain the gardens, or work in the shops.

So whether you are an animal person, love working with kids or enjoy doing projects on your own, there are plenty of volunteer opportunities out there. Go have fun while helping others in your golden years.

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