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College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture_GRN 501 Week 9 Module Activity-Reaching out to Senior Companions

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GRN 501 Week 9 Module

Sending Messages of Encouragement and Positivity to Homebound and At-Risk Older Adults

Background Information

The coronavirus is impacting lives across the U.S. and internationally as people remain at home in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus. This pandemic is currently putting pressure on healthcare systems around the globe as we now know that those with pre-existing conditions and older adults represent populations at heightened risk for experiencing virus-related adverse effects including hospitalization and even death. One of the best defenses we have is the practice of physical distancing (also referred to as social distancing). Social isolation, a very real risk for many older adults, can be further amplified by the practice of physical distancing. As a result of the current pandemic, there are many older adults self-isolating in our communities who may be alone and afraid.

The Pandemic and the Paradox

This pandemic has presented a paradox for older adults whereby physical distance, one of our best defenses, increases risk for social isolation. Social isolation and loneliness have been found to contribute to a myriad of poor health outcomes including heart disease, depression, diabetes, memory loss, and weakened immunity. Strategies for maintaining social connection while maintaining physical distance are extremely important during this time.

Senior Companion Program

The Senior Companion Program at the University of Maine Center on Aging currently engages 55 older adult volunteers who provide weekly companionship visits to 325 older adults who are homebound and many of whom have multiple chronic conditions. At the same time, many SCP volunteers themselves are vulnerable older adults who are struggling with financial insecurity and health challenges. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all SCP home visits are currently on hold. Companions are still able to connect with clients by phone. However, staff have recently been in touch with volunteers and have heard first hand about the sadness and fear that older adults are currently grappling with during this pandemic. Senior companions are also a vital lifeline for caregivers as they provide some much needed respite and relief time so that caregivers can run errands or attend to personal needs. As a result, caregivers of clients may also be experiencing additional stress during the pandemic.

Part I: Readings and Video Content

Review the following articles to become familiar with the impact of the pandemic on older adults:

- How Coronavirus Affects Older Adults:
<https://health.usnews.com/conditions/articles/how-coronavirus-affects-older-adults>
- “I’m Really Isolated Now”: When Elders Have to Fight Coronavirus Alone:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/nyregion/coronavirus-elderly-nyc.html>
- Volunteering and Coronavirus: When Helping People Could Mean Putting Them at Risk:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/volunteering-and-coronavirus-when-helping-people-could-mean-putting-them-at-risk/2020/03/17/37755f04-6864-11ea-b313-df458622c2cc_story.html

Review the following links to become familiar with the SCP program and its work:

- Senior Companion Program Brochure:
https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/S_Companion_1024.pdf
- Senior Companion Stories:
<https://mainecenteronaging.umaine.edu/service/senior-companion-program/senior-companion-stories/>
- Senior Companion PSA
https://video.maine.edu/media/Senior+Companion+Program+PSA/1_60at2lpk

every day may not be good,



but there's something good
in every day.

Part II: Sending Messages of Encouragement and Positivity

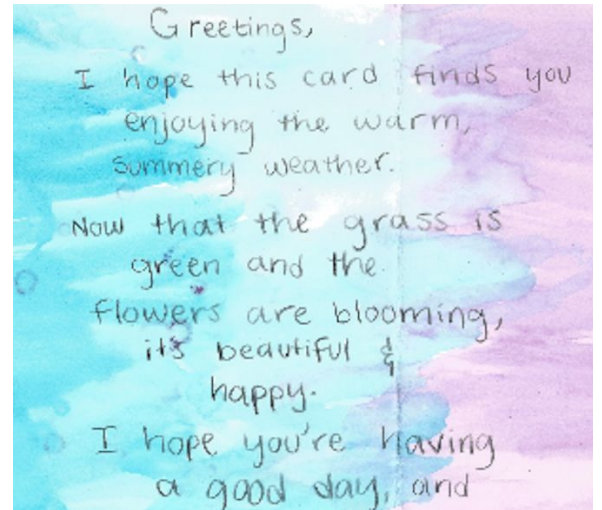
During this time of need, both SCP volunteers and their clients are at elevated risk of isolation and loneliness. They are also missing the significant contact and connection with their companions and clients and a note of encouragement and positivity would go a long way in supporting our rural and homebound older adults.

For this alternative assignment, please prepare and submit two notes of hope, encouragement and positivity that will be mailed

out to our SCP volunteers and clients. Your notes need not be overly complicated or intricate but rather convey that others are thinking of them during this otherwise isolating time. You can choose to do one for a volunteer and one for a client if you'd like or two for two clients, etc.

Some ideas:

- Include a favorite upbeat poem or quote
- A hand drawn picture with a positive tone, for example a spring theme
- A brief note of encouragement is always welcome:
 - "Sending cheerful thoughts to brighten your day!"
 - "May your day be filled with all kinds of bright sunny things"
- Additional ideas here:
<https://lovefortheelderly.org/letters>
- You are welcome to share any ideas you have for activities they can do to pass the time such as bird watching, letter writing, try a new recipe, etc.



Additional Guidelines:

- Due to health considerations and for efficiency, all notes should be submitted electronically to: jennifer.crittenden@maine.edu by April 1st. Use the subject line "SCP Notes."
- Keep any print large (14 point font if typed) and avoid cursive writing if you are handwriting a note.
- Do not sign the note with your full name or provide other identifying details, this may be confusing for clients
- Think of kind, sincere, and joyful messages and images
- Do not use any language that pertains to a particular religion or faith

Submission Guidelines:

- All notes should be formatted no larger than a single standard sheet of paper
- If you plan to construct a hand drawn note/drawing or handwritten message, please take a picture of the note and send it by e-mail. We will make an effort to print all hand drawn notes in color for full effect.
- All notes will be distributed to our SCP volunteers and clients. Recipients will also be given the option to write a note back to the class if they would like.

Part III: Participate in the Online Discussion

An alternative discussion prompt has been posted to the GRN discussion groups this week. Please post a response to the following discussion questions:

- For students in a graduate program or a professional role right now: What role does your profession play (or could your profession play) in supporting older adults during the coronavirus pandemic?
- Or If you are not currently in a specific graduate program or professional role, what ideas do you have for how community members can best support older adults during the outbreak?