

*Friends Across the Ages*  
**Starter Manual:**  
**How to Start a One-to-One Nursing Home  
Volunteer Program in Your Community**

By Steve and Allison Blay,  
Directors of *Friends Across the Ages*  
Nursing Home Outreach,  
Gainesville, Florida  
and approved by  
the *Friends Across the Ages*  
Board of Directors

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b><u>INTRODUCTION .....</u></b>	<b>2</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND .....</u></b>	<b>4</b>
MILLER .....	4
FRIENDS ACROSS THE AGES .....	5
NURSING HOME VOLUNTEER AUXILIARY .....	6
FIRST MAJOR GRANTS .....	7
WHERE WE ARE NOW .....	7
<b><u>CHAPTER TWO: THE ESSENTIALS OF FRIENDS ACROSS THE AGES.....</u></b>	<b>9</b>
WHY WE FOCUS ON NURSING HOMES.....	9
HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR SUPPORT AND TRAINING STRUCTURE.....	10
AN INTERFAITH ORGANIZATION .....	10
OUR ROLE IS FRIENDSHIP .....	11
SUMMARY .....	12
<b><u>CHAPTER 3: HOW TO GET STARTED .....</u></b>	<b>14</b>
INTRODUCTION.....	14
FINDING A NURSING HOME .....	14
SELECTING A NURSING HOME.....	14
CONTACTING THE ACTIVITY COORDINATOR.....	15
FINDING RESIDENTS WHO NEED/WANT VISITORS .....	15
“OPENING LINES” .....	17
WHERE TO FIND VOLUNTEERS .....	18
VOLUNTEER SCREENING .....	18
EACH VISIT .....	19
IN CONCLUSION .....	19
<b><u>CHAPTER FOUR: ONCE THE PROGRAM IS UP AND RUNNING.....</u></b>	<b>21</b>
TASK FORCE/ADVISORY BOARD/BOARD OF DIRECTORS .....	21
INTERFAITH COALITION .....	22
KEEPING UP WITH VOLUNTEERS AND OTHERS AS YOU GROW .....	22
GROUP EVENTS .....	23
VOLUNTEER TRAINING SESSION .....	25
VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION .....	25
FUNDRAISING .....	26
PUBLIC EDUCATION .....	27
WHEN RESIDENTS DIE .....	28
TROUBLESHOOTING .....	29
IN GENERAL .....	31
<b><u>CHAPTER 5: CLOSING THOUGHTS.....</u></b>	<b>32</b>

## **Introduction**

*Friends Across the Ages* is a local nursing home volunteer organization located in Gainesville, Florida. Our main focus is visiting one-to-one with individual nursing home residents, especially the lonely and forgotten. We also run several group events each month for residents at various nursing homes, including “bingo” games, birthday celebrations, sing-a-longs, and even occasional outings.

We are offering this manual to anyone who may be interested in starting a program like ours in their own community, or anyone who may be interested in learning more about how *Friends* works. We want to share what we have learned, in the hope that it might make it easier for those who might like to try something similar. We are not experts—far from it; everything we have learned is through trial and error, and we are still learning, growing, evolving, adapting, each day, week, month, and year. This manual represents what we have learned up to this point; we plan to revise it from time to time as we continue to learn more. We also hope that each of you will share with us whatever wisdom you may have in this area, and whatever you may learn from your own experiences of trial and error. Toward the end of this manual you will find a feedback form inviting you to do just that. Future editions will reflect these comments, in addition to whatever else we may learn from our own experiences.

In light of that, please consider this to be a conversation starter. We hope that you will dialogue with us about how best to reach out to nursing home residents in need of friendship and companionship, and we hope that you will dialogue with those around you as well, to figure out what will work best in your own particular situation. Some of the things we suggest may work well for you; some certainly will not. Please take the ideas in this manual as suggestions only, and adapt things as you see fit.

We have been told over and over again by people from other communities that they wish there were programs like *Friends Across the Ages* in their area. Our dream is that this manual may help others to take the initiative and start other programs like ours in their communities, so that more and more volunteers and residents can benefit from the relationships formed when one is a “Friend Across the Ages.” A study we found on Eldergivers.org says that as many as 60% of nursing home residents never receive a visitor. While we are not certain if this statistic is accurate, what we are sure of is that we have met many nursing home residents who are very lonely, and who have much to offer anyone who will share their time and their love with them.

If you want to start a program like ours and would like to use the name “Friends Across the Ages”, we will ask you to agree to just a few things (see chapter two). You will find instructions there on how to proceed if you would like to become part of our network of *Friends Across the Ages* programs. However, if you do not want to be part of our network, you are still free to pick and choose from the suggestions we offer here, and we encourage you to share with us whatever suggestions and insights you may have to offer along these lines.

Do not let the length of this manual overwhelm you. We want to make things as simple as possible for those who may be in the very beginning stages of getting a program started in their area. The general outline is this:

- **Chapter one** describes the background of *Friends Across the Ages* – how we got started.
- **Chapter two** lays out our organization’s guiding principles.
- **Chapter three** will give you suggestions to assist you in starting your own *Friends*-type organization.
- **Chapter four** will give you tips to help you once you have started your organization and are in the process of fleshing it out and building it up.
- **Chapter five** contains final words of advice and encouragement.
- Finally, in the **appendices** you will find many resources that we hope will come in handy.

If you are in a hurry, you can just read chapters two and three to learn what you need to know to get started, and then turn to the other chapters as the need arises. Also, you will find our contact information at the back of this manual, so please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns that surface as you go along. We cannot promise to have all the answers, but we will do what we can to help.

So, happy reading! Thank you for your interest in our program, and thank you for your interest in helping those in your community who may be in need of a “Friend Across the Ages.”

## **Chapter One: Background**

In order for you to better understand who we are and what we do, we thought it would be helpful to tell you how we got involved in this in the first place.

*Friends Across the Ages* is actually a combination of two groups, one that got started in 1999, called *Friends Across the Ages*, and another that began much earlier, in 1983, called the Nursing Home Volunteer Auxiliary (NHVA), which was started by the Gainesville Woman's Club. The two groups merged in May of 2002 under the name *Friends Across the Ages, Inc.* We will include the story of how the NHVA began a little further on in this chapter.

### **Miller**

The story of *Friends Across the Ages* really should start with the story of Luther Miller, age 97, and Steve Blay, age 26. Steve graduated from the University of Florida with a degree in computer engineering in 1995. He got a job as a systems programmer at a local computer company, and decided to stay in Gainesville. In the fall of 1998, he began to feel like he wanted to try getting more involved in the community. He decided to experiment with a few different volunteering opportunities: he tutored kids in math at an elementary school, he helped serve lunch at a homeless shelter, and he visited four different gentlemen at a local nursing home.

Of these three volunteer assignments, he felt sure at the beginning that the nursing home was the one he would like the least. For one thing, he did not like germs, or being in places where a lot of sick people were, because he did not want to catch anything. For another, visiting the elderly, unlike tutoring or serving food, involved no set agenda, and he was not sure he would have anything to say to these gentlemen. He considered himself to be an introvert, which was why he enjoyed his job where he spent most of his time by himself on a computer. But he told himself to give it a month or two, and to decide later the volunteering experience on which he would concentrate for the long term. Very much to his own surprise, Steve ended up deciding that he would focus on visiting the nursing home, and he found himself looking forward to his weekly visits. This was especially due to his friendship with Luther Miller.

Luther Miller was one of the four gentlemen he had been assigned to visit by the nursing home's Activity Director. Of the four, Steve thought "Miller" (as he preferred to be called) would be the toughest to visit because he felt like he had the least in common with him. Miller was the oldest of the four, an African-American man from small town Georgia. Steve was a white city boy who grew up in Jacksonville and Miami. One of the other men liked football, as Steve did, but Miller liked baseball. Another man was Catholic like Steve, but Miller was Baptist. The third gentleman liked to play cards, and that was something Steve enjoyed too, but Miller did not play cards. On paper, Steve did not match up with Miller at all. But of the four, Miller was the one with whom Steve

began to develop the strongest connection over time. It was the sort of friendship between two very different people that defies logic. To this day he cannot explain why he and Miller ended up becoming such good friends, but it was a friendship which changed his life.

At first, Steve did not tell anyone that he was volunteering at a nursing home. But not long after the first month was over, he decided to invite his girlfriend, Allison, to come along with him to visit Miller. He and Allison would sit on the end of Miller's bed, or in his wheelchair, and just chat for about an hour or so with Miller. Miller had an incredible sense of humor. He was blind, and would often make jokes about this, such as "It's nice for you to see me." (Instead of "It's nice to see you.") He would also make jokes about daily life situations, whether it was about the fellow singing across the hall ("He wishes he could sing. Sometimes I wish the same thing."), or about the fact that, since he was 97, he would sometimes nod off in the middle of whatever he was saying ("Oh, I was just leaning over to stretch out my back."). Steve and Allison found themselves laughing till their sides ached, and often went home and wrote down Miller's latest joke so they would remember it later. They also found themselves reflecting on the bits of wisdom he shared from his many life experiences, many of which were rather difficult as an African-American man in the South.

Steve and Allison had a little over a year of beautiful friendship with Miller. By the time he passed on quietly in his sleep on February 2, 2000, they could honestly say that they considered Miller to be their best friend. Never had either of them experienced a friendship like this, and they promised themselves they would never forget him. Not long after Miller died they decided to dedicate the entire *Friends Across the Ages* project to his memory, and, to this day, they continue their work in honor of him.

### **Friends Across the Ages**

It was not long into their time visiting Miller that Steve and Allison began to think about starting some sort of group to bring more volunteers to the nursing home. This idea came about for two main reasons. First of all, they had begun to develop close relationships with many of the nursing home residents they met in the hallways, dining room, etc., and began to realize just how much they benefited from these relationships. Secondly they saw the great need for volunteers who had time to sit down one-to-one with nursing home residents. As they met more and more residents, they knew they could not spend the kind of time they wanted to with each of these residents, and could not meet all of their needs for friendship and companionship. They began to think to themselves, "We've got to get more people out here!"

Around that same time, Steve took charge of the nursing home ministry at their church. It had been in place for quite a while, but was not very active around that time. He decided this church nursing home ministry might be a good starting point for developing a new nursing home volunteer program. He began by informally bringing a few volunteers from church over to the nursing home that he and Allison were visiting. Eventually, with Allison's help, he began to develop a more structured program. Bit by

bit the program evolved, and eventually Steve and Allison decided it would be good to branch out beyond their church, and become more of a community program.

The group needed a name other than “St. Augustine Church Nursing Home Ministry.” Steve thought long and hard about this. He wanted something that would stress the idea of friendship—the fact that this program was about forming mutually beneficial relationships, not just “charity.” He also wanted something that would stress the intergenerational nature of the program: volunteers of all ages were welcome, and residents of all ages (albeit mostly elderly) would be involved. Finally he had it: *Friends Across the Ages*. Allison loved it. So did everyone else. And when the group merged with the NHVA in 2002, the members of that organization loved it too, and wanted to keep the name for the newly combined group. So, the name stuck.

Things progressed fairly rapidly in those early days of *Friends Across the Ages*. Steve had big dreams for the organization, and quickly found that there was more work to do to follow up on those dreams than he seemed to be able to handle in his spare time from work, especially since he tended to work 50 or 60 hour weeks. Allison helped him as much as she could, but she was finishing up graduate school at the time, and did not have a lot of time to spare in that spring of 1999. In June of 1999, Steve made a huge decision. He left his job, so that he could work full time on *Friends Across the Ages*. He had some money in savings which allowed him to do this; he had been earning a good salary from his job, but still living the lifestyle of a frugal college student. He decided the time was right to follow his heart and to go where he thought he was being called so that he could really dedicate himself to his newly found mission. Allison graduated from her master’s program that August and began working at their church in youth ministry. Over the next couple of years, she helped Steve in her spare time as much as she could, and the program continued to grow and develop.

### **Nursing Home Volunteer Auxiliary**

Stepping back in time a bit, The Nursing Home Volunteer Auxiliary (NHVA) was another local nursing home outreach that was founded in 1983 by the Gainesville Woman’s Club. The goal was to fulfill a humane and philanthropic role by providing trained volunteers to enhance the quality of life of residents in nursing homes. Sir James Barrie's words "Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves" were adopted as the NHVA motto. At one point the NVHA had over 100 members. NHVA volunteers were involved in all sorts of projects, including manicures for nursing home residents, birthday celebrations, and friendly visiting. They were the very first community nursing home volunteer organization in Florida.

In the spring of 2002, an article appeared in the local newspaper about Steve’s story. Ruth Hazen, one of the charter members of the NHVA, saw this article and called Steve to invite him to one of their meetings. Not long after this, they asked Steve if he thought it would be a good idea to join forces. Their group had a long history and a well-established structure, including articles of incorporation as a 501(c)(3) organization (the IRS designation for a charity), and bylaws. But their numbers were dwindling, and they felt they could use the energy and vision of the members of *Friends*. *Friends*, on the

other hand, had a lot of energy and enthusiasm, but no official status as a charity, and no well-established history in the community. Since the goals of both organizations were so similar, it seemed to make sense to combine their efforts, which would help both organizations. In May of 2002 it became official, and a small board of directors was established for the newly combined group.

### **First major grants**

Steve and Allison married in July of 2002. In the spring of 2003, they learned about a grant opportunity from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation which seemed to apply to their group, because it focused primarily on friendly visitation of elderly. They applied for the \$35,000, 30-month grant in June, around the same time that Allison left her job with the church so that she could focus more fully on the work with *Friends*. That summer, Steve also asked the United Way for a one-year, \$10,000 grant. At the end of the summer, Steve and Allison were thrilled to discover they had received both grants. This, they felt, was their chance to really develop *Friends* and to have the chance to explore what sort of future the organization might have. Over the next two years, they worked on building up the board of directors, developing a newly formed “*Friends Across the Ages* Interfaith Coalition”, and fine-tuning the structure of *Friends*, with the help of many loyal volunteers and board members. They also worked to spread the organization out to different nursing homes. When they got the grants, they had only branched out to one other nursing home besides the one at which they had originally begun. *Friends Across the Ages* now has at least some volunteer presence at all seven Gainesville area nursing homes.

### **Where we are now**

Both the RWJF grant and the United Way grant were one-time start up grants. They made it possible for Steve and Allison to be paid one small salary for 30 months. Because *Friends* is such a unique organization, it was difficult to find other grants for which the group could qualify. Along with this, Steve and Allison found that their passion lies not in fundraising, but in doing what they started out to do: spending time with nursing home residents, and creating an inviting and supportive organization to encourage others to do the same. So, Steve and Allison have gone back to running the organization on a volunteer basis. Without their salary in the picture, the organization is more than able to take care of its other needs at its current level of fundraising.

Steve and Allison do not consider this to be a step back, however. On the contrary, they see it as the next exciting phase in the ongoing story of *Friends Across the Ages*. They feel blessed to have had this opportunity for both of them to work full time on the organization for a couple of years. They think it has really given them the chance to work with others to build up the structure of *Friends* and to build a more solid foundation. They believe that the organization is well established now, and will continue its endeavors for many years to come. Their hope now is to invite others to take a larger role in continuing the mission and goals of *Friends* so that the organization can benefit from others’ talents. This applies not just to this chapter of *Friends* but to any other future chapters that might develop. They feel that *Friends Across the Ages* works best as



a small local group, and they want to spread the idea (rather than the “corporate structure”) to other communities.

This is the goal of this manual: to offer an invitation to all of you, wherever you may be, to consider the faces of the elderly and disabled in the nursing homes near you. It takes so little to reach out to them—just a little bit of your time and your love. It takes a little bit more to invite others to reach out, but it does not have to be very complicated or overwhelming. Read on—we will try to ease the way. What the residents have to offer in return is priceless: their wisdom, their friendship, and their love.

## **Chapter Two: The Essentials of Friends Across the Ages**

Gainesville, Florida, home to the state's largest university, is perceived by many as a "college town". Yet there is another side to Gainesville: a richly diverse community which includes wonderful small-town folks who have lived here for generations. In their later years, some find themselves at one of the city's seven nursing homes, at which over 700 people reside.

*Friends Across the Ages* is a volunteer nursing home outreach, dedicated to forming true friendships with socially isolated residents of nursing homes, to enrich their lives and ours. We base our service on respect and admiration for the elderly and disabled persons in care facilities. Our primary focus is on the recruitment, training, and support of one-to-one visitors. For the last six or seven years (as outlined in great detail in chapter one), our group has fine-tuned the program to create a volunteer service that both encourages the development of long-term friendships with elderly residents and provides the volunteers with the support they need to learn and grow from their experiences. Over this time period, we have grown from just a few volunteers to approximately 60.

### **Why we focus on nursing homes**

Many nursing home residents have no one visiting them regularly. Nursing home employees have their hands full just meeting basic health needs of residents. According to a recent National Nursing Home Survey, 94% percent of residents require help with bathing, 87% need help dressing, and over half need bathroom assistance. Loss of dignity, hope, and connection with the outside world remain a very real part of nursing home life. Our volunteers help restore dignity, and alleviate this pervasive sense of loneliness, by committing to be a *Friend* to a resident in need. Similar to the Big Brothers / Big Sisters philosophy, *Friends* build individual relationships with their assigned residents, through such activities as sharing stories, playing games, and listening to music.

You may have also heard of something called an "Assisted Living Facility" (ALF). ALFs differ from nursing homes because the residents are required to have a higher level of functionality (for example, they have to be able to feed and bathe themselves). In addition, most ALFs require private payment, whereas nursing homes generally accept some percentage of patients whose care is paid for by Medicaid. We have chosen to focus on nursing homes rather than ALFs because we have found that there seem to be more residents without family support in nursing homes. This could be due to a number of factors. First, family members who are more economically needy may need to work more than one job, and may simply not have as much time to visit their relatives. Also, they may lack transportation, or have to share transportation with other family members. So to sum up, we feel that our services are more needed in nursing homes.

*Friends Across the Ages* is the only program in Gainesville, and one of the few in the nation, which focuses completely on nursing home volunteers. New volunteers are assigned up to two residents and are asked to make an initial commitment to twelve weekly visits, of at least one hour each. By focusing on nursing homes, our unique training program has been designed specifically to counter some of the difficulties encountered by volunteers in that setting.

### **Highlights of our support and training structure**

Uncomfortable sights, sounds, and smells in long-term care facilities often overwhelm new volunteers. We have been able to help many volunteers overcome their early fears and insecurities by assigning each new volunteer an experienced mentor to accompany them on at least their first two or three visits. These mentors continue to stay in touch with the volunteers throughout their initial 12-week commitment. Recently, we have begun to ask volunteers to visit the nursing home at specific set times, so that all the new volunteers at a particular nursing home can support one another, and so that a volunteer coordinator is available should any problems arise. After this 12-week initiation period is completed, these new volunteers are encouraged to continue to visit, and some become mentors themselves.

To supplement the 12 weekly visits and the support provided by mentors and group visitation times, new volunteers are asked to complete weekly readings and reflection forms on our web site or contained in our volunteer manual (for those without internet access). The program director and the volunteer coordinator assigned to the particular nursing home review these forms; any questions or concerns raised by the volunteer can be addressed before the next visit. We have found that intentional reflection on the experience has been instrumental in helping volunteers recognize the beauty of intergenerational sharing and true friendship.

Finally, we also offer group training sessions to volunteers. In these sessions, we discuss how to communicate with nursing home residents, things the volunteers may want to talk about with the residents (such as stories from their life experiences), and how to address specific problems they may encounter in a nursing home setting. These sessions are offered two or three times a year.

### **An Interfaith Organization**

*Friends Across the Ages* is an interfaith community organization. We welcome volunteers of all faith backgrounds (or with no faith background), and we try to reach out to all nursing home residents, regardless of their religion. We have an interfaith coalition, which provides input to our organization and also holds bimonthly events at the various nursing homes. Currently, approximately 16 different faith groups belong to our interfaith coalition.

For those who may be considering becoming part of our *Friends Across the Ages* network, understanding that we are an interfaith effort is very important. If you wish to

use the *Friends Across the Ages* name in any way, we must ask you to agree to three very important principles:

- 1) No proselytizing: No member of *Friends Across the Ages* should pressure any nursing home resident, any other volunteer, or any nursing home staff to convert to their faith or to embrace their doctrine.
- 2) Accept volunteers of any faith background: All *Friends Across the Ages* organizations should be open to accepting volunteers of any faith group, including (but not limited to) Buddhist, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, and Protestant. They should also welcome those who belong to no particular faith group.
- 3) Reach out to nursing home residents of any faith background: Likewise, all *Friends Across the Ages* organizations should try to reach out to all nursing home residents in need of a friend, regardless of their faith background.

Many of the volunteers in *Friends Across the Ages* are motivated to volunteer based on their faith, and this is a good thing. However, *Friends Across the Ages* is not a faith organization, and we want for volunteers of all backgrounds to feel welcome. We also want to reach out to residents of all backgrounds, and we consider it to be inappropriate for any *Friends* volunteer to pressure a resident to convert to their particular faith.

This said, faith sharing between residents and volunteers can be a wonderful thing, and many residents enjoy activities such as reading the bible with a volunteer, or singing faith-based songs with volunteers and residents. This is completely acceptable, as long as no one feels pressured to participate in such activities against their will. In our minds, there is a marked difference between proselytizing and faith sharing. For those who may be confused on this point, we invite you to contact us, and we can discuss this further.

### **Our Role is Friendship**

The main purpose of *Friends Across the Ages*, as stated above, is to form friendships with nursing home residents. There are certain limits to our role, which we feel are important not to transgress.

First, we are not to get involved in the medical care of the residents. We are not trained to do things such as helping residents in and out of bed, helping them get dressed, etc. In addition to this, medical confidentiality has become a big issue in recent times, so volunteers are asked to abide by the policies of the various nursing homes along these lines. They are also asked not to try to find out any medical information such as which doctor a resident is seeing, or what medications they are receiving. This may be more difficult than it sounds at first, because as we develop relationships with the residents, we begin to care for them deeply, and we want to make sure the best things are happening for them. We want to know that they are receiving the best possible medical care, and we want to make sure they are on the best medications. Unfortunately, however, this type of information is not appropriate for us to pursue, and we must focus primarily on the

interpersonal needs of the residents. If there is a situation about which we are concerned, we may discuss it with nursing home staff (in a polite, non-confrontational manner), or, in certain situations we may need to call an ombudsman (see the “Troubleshooting” section in chapter 4).

It is also important for volunteers to understand that we are not an activist organization. We appreciate the efforts of those who work to improve the laws affecting nursing home residents, and who strive to improve the overall structure and climate of nursing homes statewide and nationwide. However, these are not the goals of our organization. We feel that it would be difficult for us to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves if we became involved in endeavors such as these. If you are interested in starting an activist or advocacy group, we encourage you to do so, but this would be beyond the scope of *Friends Across the Ages* and what it does. Therefore, members of the *Friends Across the Ages* network must agree to focus on the interpersonal needs of residents on an individual level, and not to get involved in any sort of lobbying or advocacy efforts.

### Summary

To see a full description of our values and goals, we strongly encourage you to read the “Our Vision” document contained in Appendix B. This document, written by a task force in the spring of 2003, outlines the central principles of what *Friends Across the Ages* is about. It contains our mission statement, our vision statement, our strategic values and the strategic goals we set for ourselves at that time. Here is a list of the headings under the strategic values:

- 1) Profound Respect for Residents: We value the residents as individuals with gifts, talents, and feelings.
- 2) Profound Respect for Volunteers: Volunteers should feel appreciated, needed, supported and inspired.
- 3) Authentic, Mutually Beneficial Relationships for Residents and Volunteers: An authentic connection should be fostered between resident and visitor.
- 4) Personal Character of Our Organization: Our primary goal is quality not quantity.
- 5) Professional Character of Our Organization: A commitment both to residents’ needs, and to comprehensive training and support of volunteers and mentors.

These five values represent our basic guidelines as we continue to develop and grow. Please see the “Our Vision” document for the full descriptions.

In short, *Friends Across the Ages* is an organization that:

- focuses on nursing home volunteering,
- focuses on friendship with nursing home residents (as opposed to other efforts such as advocacy or medical care), and
- is interfaith in nature.

For those who are interested in becoming a part of our network, please see Appendix A for the “*Friends Across the Ages* Chapter Agreement”. For those who would like to

learn more about our suggestions on how to get started, read on! We will address just that in chapter three.

## **Chapter 3: How to Get Started**

### **Introduction**

Our new volunteers often tell us, “I had thought of volunteering in a nursing home for a long time, but I just didn’t know how to get started.” Getting started is actually easier than you might think. Here’s a quick summary of the steps involved, which are elaborated upon in the rest of this chapter.

1. Find and select a nursing home in your community.
2. Call the nursing home and speak to someone in the Activity Department.
3. Tell them you would like to visit some residents one-to-one, and ask to come in for an orientation appointment.
4. Meet with the Activity Director and ask them about starting a one-to-one volunteer program (possibly bring this manual, and also a friend if you are nervous).
5. One by one, start to meet some of the residents and learn the layout of the nursing home (this may take a few visits).
6. Find some other volunteers to meet you at the nursing home each week at the same time, and you’ve got your group started!

### **Finding a Nursing Home**

Your community may have any number of nursing homes, depending on the size. Gainesville, Florida, where *Friends Across the Ages* was started, has a population of about 100,000, and has seven nursing homes.

You can look up nursing homes in the phone book, or if you live in Florida you can view the Florida Nursing Home Guide at <http://ahcaxnet.fdhc.state.fl.us/nhcguides/>. There are similar guides published in other states.

### **Selecting a Nursing Home**

You will want to weigh a number of factors when selecting the right nursing home for your program. Among the factors to consider are:

1. If you visit several prospective nursing homes, you may notice that you feel particularly drawn to one (for example, at one nursing home you may see very few family members visiting, or something else about it may make you feel like the program would work well). In particular, you will want to keep an eye out for the nursing home where you feel most needed, which we have found often corresponds to the nursing home where the residents are the most economically needy.

2. You may want to select a nursing home that is centrally located to your community, or near where you expect most of your volunteers will be coming from. This will minimize driving time.
3. Select a nursing home where the Activity Director (see the section below) is friendly and appears to be interested in working with you when you describe the program to him/her.
4. You may want to view the ratings in the Nursing Home Guide for your state, and see what nursing homes have gotten low marks in relevant areas.

It is perfect acceptable to just pick a nursing home at random, start visiting, and see how it goes! There is no magical formula for picking the right one.

### **Contacting the Activity Coordinator**

All nursing homes have an Activity Department with at least one staff member who coordinates activities and volunteers for the nursing home. This person is known as the Activity Director or Recreation Therapist. When you contact this person, tell them you would like to start volunteering and ask to schedule an appointment to come in for an orientation. Tell them you would like to start visiting some residents that get few or no other visitors. You may want to just begin by volunteering on your own for a while before you decide you are ready to start a volunteer group. But if you feel ready, when you go in for your appointment, you can show them some of the *Friends Across the Ages* materials and ask them how they would feel about you coordinating the program with their help. Here are some other important questions to ask at this meeting:

1. What are the visiting hours, and can volunteers visit in the evening if necessary?
2. May I bring other volunteers with me? What sort of orientation would be required for them?
3. What are the best hours for one-to-one visiting, so as to not conflict with meals or other activities?

Working with the Activity Director can sometimes be tricky. Most of time we have had good experiences but occasionally you will run into someone who just does not understand what *Friends* is trying to accomplish, or feels that you are stepping on his or her toes by coming in with a list of questions and a pre-set notation about how you want to run the program. Sometimes just reassuring him or her that you intend to work under their authority and abide by any rules and regulations they have can help. If you really feel that the Activity Director is not at all appreciative or accepting of what you are trying to accomplish, you may need to look for another nursing home. But again, in general that is probably not going to be the case.

### **Finding Residents Who Need/Want Visitors**

This is an area where the Activity Director can be of great help. The residents who are most in need are the ones who:



- do not have any family members or friends visiting them on a regular basis.
- are confined to their room, or choose to stay in their room for some reason.
- do get out of their room, but for whatever reason do not interact much with the rest of the nursing home community.

Or, the Activity Director may have other reasons for suggesting a particular resident. One caveat here: sometimes the goal of the Activity Director in selecting residents may not be the same as the goal of *Friends Across the Ages* (which is not to say that their goals are not also important). Activity Directors often have to show that each resident is involved in activities, even if they do not leave their room. So, for example, a resident with daily family visitation may be on their list of residents needing one-to-one visits, because they do not attend activities. Someone who gets daily family visits may or may not be the most needy resident at the facility; use your good judgment as to who would most appreciate visitation.

In addition, the Activity Director may give you the name of someone who is unable to interact very well with volunteers due to issues such as dementia or communication problems. This person does indeed need human contact, but may be a little too challenging for a brand-new, inexperienced volunteer. You may want to select residents who are able to communicate reasonably well with your brand-new volunteers.

Once you have obtained a list of possible residents to visit from the Activity Director, you will probably want to go around and meet them, to get a better feel for whether they would be good residents for your volunteers to try to visit, and to find out if they would be interested in receiving a visitor from your group. Most residents are interested, but some are not, and that is their prerogative. Some may say no at first, because they may not understand what your organization is about, and what sort of people will be visiting them, but they might be willing to give it a try for one visit, to get a better sense of what to expect. Do your best to explain your organization and its goals to them (you may need to simplify or expand your explanation depending on the level of “with-it-ness” of the resident), but if they say no, do not force the issue. The same goes for the family members of the residents. Up to this point we have never had a family member object to our visits, but if for some reason that should happen, especially in the case of residents who are not mentally able enough to make their own decisions, we certainly would not want to force ourselves on that resident.

In conclusion, resident selection is a very important task, but at the same time you should not spend too much time worrying that you have selected the *perfect* residents. If you are visiting some residents who seem lonely, smile when they see you, or give off other signs that let you know they appreciate your visits, you have succeeded. We are reminded of this quotation from Norman Cousins: "Certainly it is true that behind every human being who cries out for help there may be a million more equally entitled to attention... How to determine which one of a million sounds surrounding you is more deserving than the rest? You will never know; you will never need to know. Reach out and take hold of the one who happens to be nearest. If you are never able to help or save another, at least you will have saved one."

## “Opening Lines”

Sometimes we are asked, “What should I say to a resident when I meet them, and how do I explain why I’m visiting.” Sometimes the Activity Director will go with you to introduce you to a few of the residents to start out with. But if not, don’t despair. If you have ever been to a social gathering where you had to meet a few strangers, you probably have the required skills! Quite possibly the best opening line is:

*“Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. What is your name? It’s nice to meet you. I’m a volunteer here and I wanted to get to know some people. Would you mind if I pull up a chair and sit down?”*

Once you get started, here are a few other ideas of conversation topics:

- *Have you been outside at all today? It sure is a nice day outside.*
- *How are you feeling today? What you have been doing all day?*
- *Did you have anything good to eat for lunch today? [warning: don’t expect to get a ‘yes’ answer to this!]*
- *Are you from around here? Where were you born? I was born in Miami, Florida – have you ever been there?*
- *Next Monday is Veteran’s Day. Do you know any veterans? [or whatever holiday is coming up]*
- *My kids are at school right now. Did you have any children? What are their names? Where do they live now?*

Finally, when you are ready to leave:

*“I’m going to be back again this same time next week. Would it be o.k. if we talked some more?”*

Just try this a few times and you will see how easy it can be. Most of the time you will find the resident will be delighted to have someone to talk to. Occasionally, they will tell you to come back another time. Rarely, they will tell you to flat out “go away!” If that happens laugh it off, don’t take it personally, and remember that you too might be a bit grumpy when you get to be 90 years old!

One other thing we would like to mention along these lines is how to talk to a resident that you are scoping out for other potential volunteers to visit. Your conversation will probably be quite similar to the one just described, except that you will probably want to fit in a few pointed questions to get a better sense of whether or not they have any regular visits from family and/or friends (not that that would necessarily preclude them from having a *Friends* visitor). You will also need to say something like “I’m part of a group of volunteers that visits every week at this time. Would it be o.k. if I brought one of the other volunteers to meet you next week?” Depending on how “with-it” they are, they

may or may want to know more about your volunteer program and how it works. You will probably want to assure them that they do not have to continue visits with any particular volunteer if they do not want to; just ask if they would be interested in meeting one of them and seeing what happens. If not, do not force the issue; just thank them for allowing you to talk with them. We should tell you that these conversations are still not particularly easy for us; we have found that there are many nuances about how to proceed. If you would like to talk with us further about this topic, please feel free to contact us, and we will try to share a little more of what we have experienced.

## **Where to Find Volunteers**

Here are some ideas for finding your new volunteers:

1. Call your local newspaper and tell them about the new program you are starting. Many newspapers have a weekly section for volunteer opportunities.
2. Contact local churches and other faith groups, and ask about getting a small announcement run in their weekly bulletin or newsletter, or posting one of the *Friends Across the Ages* flyers somewhere in their facility.
3. If you have a local college or university they can be a source of volunteers (although students may not end up being long-term volunteers as often).
4. Members of civic groups such as the Rotary Club may be a good source of volunteers, or may be able to help out with locating volunteers.
5. Do not forget your family and friends—and the family and friends of your volunteers! Word of mouth has been our most successful recruiting tool.

## **Volunteer Screening**

It is important to meet with any new volunteers at least once *before* they go to the nursing home with you. This gives you a chance to get to know them a little and see if you think they will fit into your group. In our experience we have only had to turn away 1 or 2 volunteers in over 6 years, but it does happen. Some of the reasons for not accepting a new volunteer are:

1. If you feel they are volunteering for the wrong reasons. For example, a volunteer who is lonely and wants to visit the nursing home just to have someone to talk to. That would not be a good reason for volunteering. As far as talking goes at the nursing home, usually supply exceeds demand!
2. A volunteer who seems particularly argumentative, or has every intention of picking a fight with the nursing home staff at the first hint of perceived neglect.

3. Just a general feeling that the person will not fit in well with your group. Trust your instincts if they are making you uncomfortable or setting off some warning signs. As an example, once a prospective volunteer related to us several stories of **bad** volunteering experiences they had had previously, and gave specific names of other organizations that had “fired” him as a volunteer. Of course, he perceived it as their fault, but they were highly respected organizations in town.

Attached in Appendix D is a list of interview questions. You may or may not choose to use these questions depending on the situation. You may or may not also ask for references, again depending on the situation. Some people are of the opinion that calling references is a waste of time, because obviously a person will give you the names of references that will only speak highly of them. You might be surprised. Given the right set of questions, sometimes references have a lot to say!

### **Each Visit**

Your visits will never go exactly as planned. One resident will not feel like talking that day. Another will be asleep or not feeling well. A resident you have never met before will stop you in the halls and want to talk at length about what happened to him that day. It is important to be open to unexpected changes and to go with the flow.

We suggest you start small – even if you just meet one or two residents your first time. Gradually you will start to get to know more and more of the residents because you will meet them in the halls, hold the doors open for them, help push them down to their room, etc. Try to never be too busy to stop and help out in this way.

Eventually you will start to get to know the residents that the Activity Department originally helped you pick out, because you will be attempting to visit them each week. As your group grows, you can begin to “branch out”. You can all meet in the lobby or a predetermined meeting place, talk for a few minutes, and then go off in different directions to visit with various individual residents. Remember, the ultimate goal is to form friendships with these individuals, so as time goes on the same volunteer(s) should be visiting the same resident week after week.

It can be helpful, to get everyone in the right frame of mind, to have a topic for discussion at the beginning of each visit (right when everyone arrives and before you all branch out to your various residents). Some possible topics for discussion are contained in the “Weekly Readings and Evaluations” in Appendix E. You could bring one of these along each week, or come up with other quotations or ideas to discuss. You can also simply discuss how your visits went the week before.

### **In Conclusion**

Again, the ideas contained in this section are guidelines. They are things we have learned over years of trial and error, and they will probably work for most situations. But that does not mean that everything will work for your particular situation. You may have to make some adjustments as necessary. Be open to changes.

In addition, sometimes there will be special restrictions the nursing home may put on the program, such as visiting hours, or the size of your group. You will have to adjust the program for their rules, or go to a different nursing home. Remember, no matter how all the particulars work out in your situation, the goal is simply to visit lonely nursing home residents, and to be open to what they have to share with you. You can work out as you go how best to accomplish that goal, and how you can best get other volunteers involved.

## **Chapter Four: Once the Program is Up and Running**

This chapter addresses those issues you may be wondering about once you have begun your program and it has gained a foothold. These are things which may help you either to flesh out the program or to refine it.

It is important for us to note here that a lot of the material in this chapter may not apply to your program. Things like having a Board of Directors, organization group events, and fundraising – these are critical to **our** program because we work with about 60 volunteers and seven nursing homes. But, **your** program may be content to operate at one nursing home with a small group of volunteers, and/or to function without some of the things we discuss here. So in summary, your program can be a big success even without a lot of the components laid out in this chapter.

### **Task Force/Advisory Board/Board of Directors**

We highly recommend that you establish some sort of advisory board for your group, whether it is a formal board of directors, or a more informal group such as a task force. You will want to benefit as much as possible from the wisdom and ideas of others, and you will also want others to feel a sense of commitment to and ownership of your group in order for it to remain strong and vital. This is the sort of endeavor that works best when more than just one or two people are guiding it. After all, one of the biggest goals of this group is to build a sense of community (especially between volunteers and residents), and it has been our experience that community builds community. If you have at least a small core group of people who are helping you, that group can help to forge the type of connections you are seeking to build.

Putting together such a group may not be too difficult, depending on whether you know others who are interested in and believe in this project. You can start with friends, people you may know in the community, people you may meet at the nursing home, co-workers—anyone you know who may be sympathetic to your cause and may want to help in some way. You may also want to ask your initial recruits to help you recruit others.

Meetings do not need to be terribly lengthy or frequent at the beginning; you can work with your group to decide what would work best for you. You may want to start by just meeting 3 or 4 times a year for an hour, to ease people into the commitment. Or, you may want to have the group meet more often at the beginning with a specific task in mind, such as long-term planning, or organizing a more permanent board of directors. After that the group could meet less frequently.

Eventually, if you do have a board of directors, you will need to develop a set of bylaws. Looking well into the future, if you want to become a charity (to take tax-deductible donations), you will need Articles of Incorporation to become a non-profit corporation.

Again, you will find it helpful to NOT attempt these tasks on your own. Put together a small group of people to help you. Get input from a lot of different sources, so that no one person is overwhelmed, and so that some may think of things that others may not have thought of. Every group needs structure, and you will need to develop guidelines that are workable for your group. Please see Appendix C for a copy of our bylaws—they may not be the greatest, but they work for us!

### **Interfaith coalition**

Another type of advisory group that you might consider is an interfaith coalition. Many nursing home volunteers are motivated to volunteer on the basis of faith, and you may find that you recruit some of your most committed volunteers from various faith organizations. Having an interfaith coalition may help you to maintain a more reliable way of networking with the various faith organizations in your community.

You may want to start by finding one or two representatives from just a few different faith groups, and then build up from there. These representatives can help with things like setting up speaking engagements for you to come and educate their group about what you are trying to do, and seek their support either through volunteers, through donations, or other means. The representatives may also set up meetings with their leader or pastor so that you can explain your project to him or her and they can offer any helpful advice or input about how best to reach out to their community. The representative can also do simple things like post flyers on bulletin boards, put ads in bulletins or newsletters, and make verbal announcements at worship or other group events. And, most importantly, the representative can offer you his or her advice and input, especially from their faith perspective, but also just as a person of good conscience.

As said above, this type of volunteer endeavor is all about forging a greater sense of community, and that includes the various individual faith groups that make up your larger community. You can decide how best to network with these groups. You might find it helpful to have the representatives from the various faith organizations meet on a regular or semi-regular basis, or you may choose just to keep in contact with them each individually. However you decide to do it, we do encourage you to reach out to the various faith organizations in your area.

### **Keeping up with volunteers and others as you grow**

One of the most challenging things you may struggle with as your organization grows is how to keep up with everything and everyone as you get larger. You will want to set up reliable ways to keep in touch with all of your volunteers, with your advisory group, and with any other interested persons. Here are several suggestions along these lines:

- 1) Create a monthly e-mail newsletter, which talks about everything coming up for that month, any special needs you may have, and anything else you may find helpful. You may need to print a few hard copies of this for those who do not have e-mail. See Appendix G for a few samples of ours.

- 2) You may also want to have a “snail mail” newsletter, which goes into more depth about whatever has been happening with your group, and which invites volunteers to share their stories. See Appendix G for a couple of samples of our two-page quarterly newsletter, *The Bridge*. Remember that before taking pictures of residents you should speak with the Activity staff first to get the proper permissions.
- 3) If your group gets big enough that you branch out to more than one nursing home (or more than one visiting time at the same nursing home), you will want to set up a regular way for volunteers to check in with you. Email is a good way to keep in touch; you may also want to mark certain times on your calendar for regular phone calls to those volunteers. Making sure you have a volunteer coordinator (one of your more experienced volunteers who agrees to take this responsibility) at each nursing home you visit will help spread out the burden. Then, the volunteer coordinators will just need to make sure they talk to one another with a good bit of regularity, and they may also want to have meetings from time to time to discuss any issues they may encounter.
- 4) Group events (see below), volunteer training sessions, and social events for volunteers are all good ways to make sure you see many of the volunteers, and to let them interact with one another and get to know one another. Make sure you encourage your volunteers to attend these sorts of events, and make sure you and your coordinators make a special effort to reach out to those who attend.

### **Group Events**

Besides setting up a one-to-one visitation program, you may want to hold regular group events at the nursing home(s). These can include things like bingo games, birthday celebrations, singing events, etc. If you are feeling overwhelmed with all you have to do already, you may find it helpful to find a person to be in charge of all of your group events, or perhaps a person to be in charge of each kind of group event: one person will organize the birthday celebration each month, one person will organize bingo games, another will plan sing-a-longs, etc. Although we believe the one-to-one program is the aspect of *Friends Across the Ages* which seems to be most needed at nursing homes, and the residents generally do have a number of group activities available to them each week, there are several advantages to holding such events regularly:

- 1) Group events help build community. Group events give volunteers a chance to interact with one another and with different residents. In addition, they can be a lot of fun for all concerned!
- 2) Group events may give new volunteers or prospective volunteers an opportunity to get used to the nursing home environment in a non-threatening situation before committing to the one-to-one program, which they may find a bit more intimidating.
- 3) Group events may be a way for those who are not interested in the one-to-one program for whatever reason to still come and share their time and love with the



residents. There may be some who simply do not feel up to interacting in the one-to-one situation. Some may not be able to make the regular time commitment that the one-to-one situation entails. Some may have special gifts to offer, such as a talent with arts and crafts, or a special musical ability, that could better be exhibited in a group situation. At any rate, this will give any such volunteers a chance to get involved in another way.

- 4) Group events give you a wonderful opportunity to network with and engage the time and talent of various faith and community groups who may want to come out and sponsor a particular event. There may be a youth group of fun-loving teens who may want to come and enjoy playing bingo with residents. There may be a choir or a talented musical group who may want to come out and share their gifts. There may be a Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop who wants to come out and do a special project with the elderly. Group events are a great way to engage all of these sorts of people, and if they know they can come to your *Friends Across the Ages* program to coordinate such events, this may make it a little easier for them to do so, and, in turn, you have just built up your *Friends Across the Ages* community with one more connection.

As mentioned above, there are many different kinds of group events you might want to try. Here are some of the events we do most often:

- Bingo Games – Almost all nursing homes have bingo games on a regular basis, so if you'd like to learn how they work, just talk to your local Activity Director. You can plug into these by bringing prizes for the residents, and volunteers who will help them play.
- Birthday Celebrations – Again, talk to the Activity Director for help planning. We have a birthday celebration each month for all the residents that had birthdays in that month. You can bring music, birthday cake and punch, and flowers for the residents who had birthdays.
- Arts and crafts – You can bring all the supplies or sometimes the Activity Department can provide some help. Some of the ideas we have tried in the past include making door hangers, Valentine's Day cards, and Halloween goody bags. Use your imagination!
- Outings – These always have to be closely coordinated with the Activity Department and the Administrator. Sometimes a local church or organization will be able to pick the residents up in a wheelchair-accessible bus, or your local bus system may have the capability. If not, with enough volunteers you could push residents in wheelchairs up to a nearby store or restaurant.
- Sing-a-longs – If you would like to try a sing-a-long group event, no talent is required! All you need is a song book and (optionally) someone who can play an instrument such as piano or guitar (many nursing homes have a piano). The Sonshine Society nursing home ministry ([www.sonshinesociety.org](http://www.sonshinesociety.org), or (425) 353-4732) publishes a great book called "Heaven, Heart, and Home" that contains 96 favorite old ballads, love songs, patriotic songs, Christmas Carols, and old favorite hymns. All of them are set in lower keys which are easier to sing for tired old voices. And, the guitar chords are included. The book is available for

nothing more than their cost of printing and mailing. There is also available a companion book with the words to all the songs in **extra-large** print for those that can't quite see as well as they used to. You can also check out online stores like [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and search for books of favorite songs from the '30s and '40s, or books of children's songs or sing-a-longs. Believe or not, when we go sing at the nursing home we are more often asked for songs like "Yankee Doodle" and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" than any others.

### **Volunteer Training Session**

Along with all the individual mentoring/training involved in the *Friends Across the Ages* program, it is a good idea to get the entire group of volunteers together (or just any new volunteers) away from the nursing home to have a group volunteer training session. This is an opportunity to discuss any questions or concerns the new volunteers may have, and a chance to present some of the materials included in Appendix F (suggestions for one-on-one visits, and communication skills). You could also have a guest speaker present something of interest to the volunteers. For our program this group training session is seen as more of a supplement than a requirement, but it is up to you how you would like to work that out for your program. We have received much positive feedback from those who have attended these sessions in our group. We hold them about two or three times a year.

### **Volunteer Appreciation**

Part of maintaining a strong program is to be sure you are letting your volunteers know how much they are appreciated. We try to do this in several different ways:

- 1) We try to tell them early and often how much we appreciate the work that they do, and make sure they know that even if no one else seems to realize how important it is, we do.
- 2) Two or three times a year we throw a "volunteer appreciation party" for all of our volunteers, at which we formally recognize everyone, and usually have some sort of certificate and a little gift for them.
- 3) For those who may be unable to attend such parties, we make sure that we send them a certificate at the end of their initial twelve weeks, and sometimes we even try to schedule some alternative date to take those volunteers out to lunch. A sample certificate is shown in Appendix G.
- 4) Finally, one way we show some of our volunteers we appreciate them is by writing letters of recommendation or serving as references for them when needed.

We are currently in the process of finding other ways to motivate and recognize our long term volunteers—some sort of way of marking the milestones as they continue to volunteer with us. We are thinking of service pins for so many hours volunteered, or for

each year they volunteer with us, etc. We will update this section in our next edition if/when we develop something successful along these lines.

## **Fundraising**

Depending on the structure of your organization, it may or may not require a significant amount of funding to run. If you wish to have a salaried employee, either a director type position, or perhaps office staff, the organization will, of course, require much more. But even without this (and most of your nursing home volunteer programs will not require any paid staff), there will certainly be a minimal level of funding you will need, to purchase necessary supplies, perhaps to take care of purchasing little things for residents, etc. Here are some ideas for fundraising efforts:

- 1) Grants – These can be a good, but time-intensive, way of finding small or large amounts of funding. We will not go into great detail here except to say you may want to do some research to see what avenues may be available to you in this area. You can talk to your local United Way, or check the Foundation Center Directory (often available in your public library) for more information.
- 2) Individual donors – You will want to build up a donor base, especially through drawing on those who are most invested in your program (your volunteers can be a good source). You may want to send out some sort of annual appeal to your mailing list (see appendix G for a sample letter). Also, you may want to seek out speaking engagements to groups who are likely to have potential donors, such as church groups, Rotary Clubs, etc.
- 3) Bingo-a-thon – Our biggest fundraising/publicity event each year is our “Bingo-a-thon.” We usually hold this on a Saturday sometime in the spring. The idea is to hold bingo games at each of the different nursing homes we serve, and to send 10-15 volunteers to each of these nursing homes to help the residents play bingo. The fundraising aspect of the event comes in when volunteers collect pledges to be sponsored for so much for every game of bingo they help out with. We usually say ahead of time that we will definitely play 5 games of bingo, so a donor may want to pledge \$1 per game for a total of \$5, or \$5 per game for a total of \$25, etc. In this way, it works similarly to a walk-a-thon or dance-a-thon, etc. Once the 5 games of bingo are over (with plenty of donated prizes and candy given out to all the residents), we bring the volunteers from all the different nursing homes together for a wrap-up party, where we have a lot of food (usually donated from some local restaurant) and prizes (usually gift certificates donated by local merchants) for all the volunteers. It is a lot of work but a lot of fun. See Appendix G for samples of flyers and more information on this event.
- 4) Other fundraising events – There are books at your local library that have hundreds of ideas for other fundraising events, ranging from simple to complex. One event which a group put on for us was a chili cook-off. They got about 25 different volunteers to make chili, and some more volunteers to make corn bread, and desserts, and charged \$5 for people to come in and sample all the different kinds of chili. It’s a great lunch

and a lot of fun for all. Celebrity judges such as the fire chief and the local TV news anchor picked the best chili in each category (i.e. traditional, healthy, and exotic). This event did not raise as much money as the bingo-a-thon, but perhaps was better for publicity.

- 5) Donations of specific goods – One great way to offset your expenses is to get supplies donated. We have a special volunteer who loves to make homemade pillows, and another who donates homemade afghans to be given out as bingo prizes. We also ask for donations at some of the local churches and faith groups from time to time of used jewelry in good condition, lotions and perfumes, knick-knacks, etc. Sometimes you may also be able to find a sponsor for a specific need such as printing for your newsletter, or postage. People like to give specific things, and they also like to know exactly what their money is being used for, so, in our experience, if you say “I need \$75 for bingo prizes” you are much more likely to find a donor than if you just say “I need money,” or even “I need \$75.”

### **Public Education**

Since *Friends Across the Ages* is all about being a connection the outside world, we can educate the public about the needs of nursing home residents, and the importance of developing relationships with elderly and disabled in nursing homes. This is primarily accomplished on an individual level, with individual volunteers, but another good outlet for this is through public education efforts. Here are some suggestions along these lines:

- 1) The newsletter mentioned above can be one important way to raise awareness about your group and the residents you serve.
- 2) Public speaking engagements at various community groups and faith groups are another very important way.
- 3) Newspaper articles, telling the story of an individual volunteer or resident in your group, or else about your group as a whole, can be another great way of reaching out. You can try to call your local newspaper and find the appropriate person to talk to, often in the “features” department (do not be afraid to call them – most of the time they are busy looking for stories to write about!).
- 4) Radio spots, such as on your local NPR or talk radio station, can be another great way of raising awareness.
- 5) Finally, you may even be able to get your story on your local TV news.

Of course all of these sorts of things are also important for publicity, but publicity is mainly about raising awareness, and educating people. Nursing home residents are lonely and forgotten because in a way they are invisible to the larger community. It is your job to make them visible. Be their voice, and let the world know they are there, and that they have much to share with those who will come and share their time and their love.

## When Residents Die

One of the toughest things for volunteers to deal with in nursing home volunteering is the fact that it is not uncommon to encounter the death of a resident. We feel that this is one of the most bittersweet parts of what we do. On the one hand, especially if it is a resident with whom we have become particularly close, we miss them terribly, and we experience some of the natural stages of grief, as with the death of any other family member or friend whom we have loved. On the other hand, when a resident is suffering, we are happy that they have been taken from a body that was failing them. Also, we feel that it is part of our mission to be with the residents in their final days, and there is something rewarding in that. No one should have to die alone. No one should have to wonder if anyone will care when they pass on.

Along with this, the residents can teach us a lot as we try to be present with them as they face their own mortality, which, of course, is something we all will face at one time or another. Some residents approach death gracefully; others will “not go gentle into that good night.” There is much to learn either way. We discover much about them, and, perhaps, we discover at least as much about ourselves.

How can we learn to deal with the difficult reality of death in a nursing home volunteering situation? We certainly do not have all the answers to that challenging question, but here are some suggestions that have helped us and helped our volunteers in the past:

- 1) If the Activity Director is open to it, try to plan some sort of memorial service for that resident. You might even consider having semi-regular memorial services, say every six months or so, for all the residents at the nursing home who have passed on during that time. They do not have to be anything very formal or involved. Usually what we do just involves singing a few familiar spiritual songs that we think the resident might have liked, perhaps reading a scripture reading or some other inspirational poem or prose piece, and, most importantly, allowing plenty of time for anyone who feels inspired to share stories about the person or people who have passed on. When possible, we try to have a picture or a few pictures of the person or people we are remembering on display somewhere, and perhaps some flowers or other similar items to make the atmosphere more special. We also try to invite the family, and ask them to invite anyone else they think would like to come. And, of course, any and all residents and staff who wish to attend are more than welcome.
- 2) When possible, and with the permission of the family, we often try to attend the official funeral or memorial services for the person who has died. These opportunities to say good-bye can be very healing, and are an important part of the grieving process.
- 3) Sometimes we also ask the volunteer who was the “Friend Across the Ages” to that resident to write something for our newsletter or website about their special friend, as another way of remembering and honoring that person.

- 4) Informal things like simply talking about how we feel about the loss with one another can also be helpful. We try to support one another during such times as much as possible.
- 5) Keep in mind that the one-to-one volunteer who was visiting that resident might need a little bit of time off to deal with the loss of their special friend. We make sure we give them that time, but we also encourage them to come back if/when they are ready. We call or e-mail them from time to time to check on how they are doing.

### **Troubleshooting**

As with any other endeavor worth pursuing, you will surely encounter obstacles as you proceed with your nursing home volunteer program. Because this program mostly involves different sorts of people interacting with one another, the most common problems we have encountered have been “people problems” so to speak. This includes issues with residents who are difficult to work with or simply difficult to communicate with, volunteers who are difficult to work with, and nursing home staff who are difficult to work with. The specific types of problems vary widely, so we do not feel that we can give any sort of blanket responses that you might try. However, here are some general things to keep in mind with each of those three groups of people:

- 1) Difficult residents: Difficulties with residents may result from personality issues, or they may be more practical things such as residents who are unable to speak, who are difficult to understand, or who have dementia of some sort. In general, with all residents, it is important to maintain a respectful and caring demeanor, no matter what. That said, not every resident will be an ideal candidate for this sort of volunteer program, especially with new volunteers. You will need to keep this in mind, and try to get a sense of what the volunteer can handle, and what they are comfortable with. In general, it is probably best to start new volunteers with “easy” residents, which is to say residents who are able to communicate reasonably well, and who are relatively easy to get along with. If a new volunteer feels up to the challenge, you can certainly try them with a more difficult resident, but make sure you emphasize to them that they must keep you apprised of how they are doing, and be honest about it. The last thing you want is for them to get burned out and quit because they have bitten off more than they can chew. This goes for all volunteers, in fact: they should know that they are to be honest with you about how things are going, and not force a situation that is just not working out. It will be important for them not to make promises they can’t keep to residents, especially at the beginning when things are more uncertain as to whether they will work out for the long term. The most a volunteer who is just starting out should say to a particular resident would be: “is it o.k. if I come back to see you next week?” rather than “can I visit you every week for the next twelve weeks?”
- 2) Difficult volunteers: As discussed under “Volunteer Screening” in Chapter Three, you will need to trust your instincts to a certain extent when you first meet with a potential volunteer. Snap judgements are not fair, nor are they completely reliable.

However, if something seems “a bit off” to you about a certain person, it may be best to proceed with caution. First of all, as far as screening of volunteers, we generally follow whatever procedures the nursing home has in place for their volunteers. Beyond that, however, it will be up to your own judgement as to whether to take a particular volunteer, and what situation to place them in. An initial interview and references will help you to develop a more full picture of this person. If you are still uncertain, you may want to consider a second interview, or, at the least, just inviting them to one group event, making no commitment one way or the other as to volunteer opportunities beyond that initial event. That will give you the chance to observe them a bit further, in a supervised situation, before you consider placing them one-to-one with a resident. You might also consider seeking advice from other members of your leadership, and perhaps invite them to observe this person as well. In the end, you will have to just make the best decision you can, one that is both fair to the volunteer and considers what is best for the residents, and this will not always be easy. It can be very difficult to turn people away, but in the long run, if you become convinced that this is necessary, it is best to go ahead and do so, especially for the sake of the residents this volunteer would be encountering.

Occasionally you will run into a volunteer who is “too good”. This volunteer will, from week one, be talking about visiting the resident every day, and becoming directly involved in their medical care (remember, it is inappropriate for volunteers to become involved in medical care), and sometimes will even talk about taking the resident out of the nursing home to live at home with them. In our experience, this lasts a few weeks and then they get burned out and you will never see them again, leaving the resident heartbroken. If you encounter one of these volunteers, it is crucial that you try to get them to pace themselves.

That all being said, we have only had a few bad apples in all our years doing this, but we could not even begin to count the number of wonderful volunteers.

- 3) Difficult staff: The staff with whom you will have the most interaction will be the recreation staff. If the recreation/activity director or the administrator prove to be difficult to work with, this will make things a lot more difficult for you, but perhaps not impossible. All we can say is, just do your best to work with that person. Do your best to meet any expectations they may have, but if they are being unreasonable, you may need to politely and firmly tell them so. If they still will not back down, you may ultimately need to take your program to another nursing home.

Other staff difficulties may not be as problematic for the success of your program, but they may prove bothersome. You may find yourself in a situation where you will feel it is necessary to file a complaint with their supervisor. In a situation where you suspect abuse or injustices of some kind, it may even be necessary to contact an ombudsman. “Ombudsman” is a Swedish term meaning protector or defender of citizens’ rights. The long-term care ombudsmen are impartial volunteers appointed by the state, whose role is to listen to concerns about resident rights in an informal way. Speaking to an ombudsman is confidential, and you do not have to file a formal

complaint. In our experience they are very caring and knowledgeable, and it is always best to call them before calling the state's Elder Abuse hotline. You can go to <http://www.ltcombudsman.org/> to find the ombudsmen in your state, or feel free to contact us if you have further questions about just who they are. There are ombudsmen in all 50 states.

Beyond filing complaints or contacting an ombudsman, however, you and your volunteers will need to simply do your best to work with the person in question. You should do your best to be polite and calm with them, but you also should not allow them to mistreat you or the residents. Use your best judgement as to what is most appropriate in a given situation.

### **In General**

Take lots of deep breaths, and try not to get overwhelmed! This may seem like a big job, but if you take one day at a time, and if you can rely on those around you to help you, it will not be so bad. See the next chapter for final words of advice and encouragement.



## **Chapter 5: Closing Thoughts**

We hope all this information has not overwhelmed you! We tried to make this document as complete as possible, incorporating all the things we have learned over the years. But overall, starting up your own nursing home volunteer program is as simple as picking up the phone and calling a local nursing home. Speak to the Activity Director and start visiting that first person. Little by little start to expand your group and add more residents and more volunteers.

If we had to sum up our experiences over the years in one phrase, it would certainly be “Three steps forward, two steps back.” Your experience will be no different, no matter how much information you absorb from this document. Even so, your visits to the nursing home will be a beautiful thing that changes lives. Every time we set foot in the nursing home we end up leaving happier than when we entered.

We hope you will fill out the feedback form in Appendix A and let us know what you thought of this document. We are especially looking for constructive criticism to help improve the usability of the document for future readers.

We would like to end with a story written by one of our volunteers. You will also find this story in the readings and evaluations in Appendix E.

### **THE EMPTY CHAIR**

**By M. Violet Asmuth**

*The chair was the first thing Lily noticed when she was carried into the room. It was a large chair and perhaps too elegant for its surroundings. The plush material felt soft to the touch. Tiny white woven dots over the cobalt blue color created a three-dimensional effect. It will be a comfortable chair for my visitors, Lily thought on her first day in Merry Manor Care Center.*

*Confined to her bed, Lily's social contacts were limited to only those persons who entered the room. No visitors came from outside the facility as her family lived far away.*

*A nurse brought morning medications into the room. Lily said, “Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute.” The nurse smiled and said, “I wish I could but I have a lot of residents waiting for their pills.”*

*A CNA entered the room to help Lily get dressed for the day. Lily said, “Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute.” The CNA smiled and said, “I wish I could but I still have six more residents who need me to help them dress.”*

*A volunteer carried a plastic meal tray into the room. Lily said, “Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute.” The volunteer smiled and said, “I wish I could but I have other trays to deliver.”*

*The activity director looked into the room to ask if anyone wanted to play Bingo. Lily said, “Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute.” The activity director smiled and said, “I wish I could but Bingo starts in five minutes.”*

*The doctor walked into the room to check on Lily's condition. Lily said, “Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute.” The doctor smiled and said, “I wish I could but I have four other patients to see in this facility.”*

*A social worker stepped into the room to ask a question about Lily's family. Lily said, "Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute." The social worker smiled and said, "I wish I could but I have to catch up on my paper work."*

*A resident entered the room and handed Lily an ad and a catalog. Lily said, "Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute." The resident smiled and said, "I wish I could but they gave me the job of delivering the mail today."*

*So it went, day after day, smiling people walking in and out of Lily's room. One evening when the nurse came into the room to administer pills, she smiled and said, "You are fortunate that you chose such a friendly nursing home." "Very fortunate," replied Lily. She turned her head and stared at the comfortable blue chair. As always, it was empty. A tear rolled down Lily's cheek.*

Next time you are at the nursing home, find the person with the empty chair. Sit down and stay a while. They have been waiting for you.

# ***Friends Across the Ages***

## **Starter Manual:**

### **Appendices**

**Appendix A – Forms to Return**

**Appendix B – “Our Vision” Document**

**Appendix C – Bylaws of Friends Across the Ages**

**Appendix D – Materials for New Volunteer Interview**

**Appendix E – Weekly Readings and Evaluations**

**Appendix F – Volunteer Training Session Materials**

**Appendix G – Other Sample Materials**

**Space for your notes**

# APPENDIX A

## Forms to Return

- Network Agreement – please sign and return this form if you wish to use the name *Friends Across the Ages* for your nursing home volunteer program.
- Feedback Form – please fill out this form and return it to us with your comments and suggestions!

# *Friends Across the Ages* Network Agreement

Friends Across the Ages, Inc. is designated a 501(c)(3) charity by the Federal Government, and is registered with the State of Florida as a non-profit corporation. We are located in Gainesville, Florida. If other nursing home volunteer organizations in other cities or states would like to use the name “Friends Across the Ages,” they are welcome to do so on certain conditions. If you would like to become part of our network of *Friends Across the Ages* programs, please review the provisions below, and return this form to us with your signature. You may use any of the ideas in this manual without restriction, but must agree to the following conditions if you will use the name “Friends Across the Ages.”

---

As part of the *Friends Across the Ages* network, my organization and I agree to abide by the following:

- 1) My organization will focus mainly on volunteering in nursing homes (rather than assisted living facilities, retirement centers, or in private residences). In this way, the name *Friends Across the Ages* can be identified with nursing home volunteering.
- 2) My organization will not discriminate against anyone for any reason (such as race, gender, etc.) and will be interfaith in nature. This means that we agree to the following rules:
  - (a) No proselytizing: No member of *Friends Across the Ages* should pressure any nursing home resident, any other volunteer, or any nursing home staff to convert to their faith or to embrace their doctrine.
  - (b) Accept volunteers of any faith background: All *Friends Across the Ages* organizations should be open to accepting volunteers of any faith group, including (but not limited to) Buddhist, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, and Protestant. They should also welcome those who belong to no particular faith group.
  - (c) Reach out to nursing home residents of any faith background: Likewise, all *Friends Across the Ages* organizations should try to reach out to all nursing home residents in need of a friend, regardless of their faith background.
- 3) The role of the volunteers in my organization will be friendship only with nursing home residents. We will not get involved in the medical care of the residents. We will not seek out medical information about the residents, and we will keep any information we do learn confidential. We will focus only on the interpersonal needs of the residents. We will not engage in lobbying or advocacy efforts.
- 4) My organization will uphold the following values of *Friends Across the Ages*:
  - (a) Profound Respect for Residents: We value the residents as individuals with gifts, talents, and feelings.
  - (b) Profound Respect for Volunteers: Volunteers should feel appreciated, needed, supported and inspired.
  - (c) Authentic, Mutually Beneficial Relationships for Residents and Volunteers: An authentic connection should be fostered between resident and visitor.
  - (d) Personal Character of Our Organization: Our primary goal is quality not quantity.
  - (e) Professional Character of Our Organization: A commitment both to residents’ needs, and to comprehensive training and support of volunteers and mentors.

The members of the organization I represent and I agree to all of the above requirements, and hereby ask to become part of the “Friends Across the Ages” network. We will uphold the honor and good name associated with the name “Friends Across the Ages.” Should we ever fall out of compliance with any of the above requirements, we will immediately discontinue our use of the name “Friends Across the Ages.”

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name and Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## ***Friends Across the Ages* Starter Manual**

### **Feedback Form**

We invite you to share your thoughts on the materials that we have included in this Starter Manual. We also invite you to share anything you have learned from your own experiences with volunteering in nursing homes. You may either (1) fill out this form and mail it back to us, or (2) contact us via e-mail or phone.

Did you find this Starter Manual to be helpful? What did you find most helpful? What was least helpful? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

What suggestions do you have for future editions of this manual? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

Is there anything you would like to share with us about your own experience of volunteering in nursing homes? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

Send this form to:  
Friends Across the Ages  
P.O. Box 14698  
Gainesville, FL 32604

Or contact us at: (352) 381-1117, or [info@acrosstheages.org](mailto:info@acrosstheages.org)  
We would love to hear from you!

# APPENDIX B

## “Our Vision” document

The strategic values and goals in this document were obtained from the results of a series of interviews and evaluations conducted by the Strategic Planning Committee in early 2003. We used a process called “Appreciative Inquiry,” which is an organizational development method that focuses on the positive aspects of an organization, and builds on these to create a vision and plan for the best possible future. Many of our long-time volunteers were interviewed, as well as nursing home residents and members of the Gainesville community.

*A profound respect for the residents we serve* is the first value listed, and not by accident. We base our value system on this respect and admiration for the elderly in care facilities, and we endeavor to pass this on to the volunteers we recruit and train. We also highly value the *personal character of our organization*. Ours is a community-based organization, and we will never sacrifice the quality of the existing volunteer/resident relationships for quantity.

So, enjoy reading this document and please contact us with any comments or suggestions!



## **MISSION STATEMENT:**

Friends Across the Ages is dedicated to forming true friendships with residents of nursing homes, especially the lonely and forgotten, to enrich their lives and ours. We strive to increase community support and recognition for the importance of authentic and respectful connections with the elderly we serve.

## **VISION STATEMENT:**

Through compassion, respect, and recognition of the needs of the elderly, Friends Across the Ages will be recognized by the community as an organization that relieves loneliness, restores dignity, and renews a connection to the outside world for residents in nursing home facilities. We will also be recognized as an enriching and life changing volunteer opportunity.



# **Statement of Strategic Values**

## **Strategic Value 1: Profound Respect for Residents**

Friends Across the Ages must have profound respect for the residents it serves. We value the residents as individuals with gifts, talents, and feelings. We seek to better understand this “hidden” group of people and to increase our sensitivity to their needs and experiences. Residents should feel needed, appreciated, and sincerely cared about.

## **Strategic Value 2: Profound Respect for Volunteers**

Friends Across the Ages must also have profound respect for the volunteers who participate in the program. They too are individuals with gifts, talents, and feelings. Volunteers should feel appreciated, needed, supported and inspired.

## **Strategic Value 3: Authentic, Mutually Beneficial Relationships for Residents and Volunteers**

In a program that is called “Friends Across the Ages,” one can and should expect that true friendship is valued. An authentic connection should be fostered between resident and visitor. Ultimately, the relationship should be one from which both residents and volunteers can derive meaning for their lives. Some of the benefits of this relationship can include:

### For Residents:

- Relief from loneliness.
- Restoration of dignity and hope.
- Renewal of connection to the outside world.
- A sense of support in daily life.

### For Volunteers:

- A better understanding of a valuable group of people.
- A transformational experience.
- An opportunity to practice compassionate living.
- Increased appreciation of their own situation.
- A feeling of success, productivity, and experience in working with the elderly.

### For Both:

- Intergenerational/intercultural sharing
- A chance to share their own personal gifts and talents.
- A chance to love and be loved.

**Strategic Value 4: Personal Character of Our Organization**

Friends Across the Ages should retain its personal character and avoid excessive bureaucracy. This includes the following key concepts:

- The resident always comes first.
- One-on-one interaction is our primary objective.
- Volunteer support should be personal.
- We should remain community-based. Growth should be gradual, and should entail spreading the concept, but not necessarily the organizational structure.
- Our primary goal is quality not quantity. The number of residents we visit matters far less than the quality of the existing volunteer/resident relationships.

**Strategic Value 5: Professional Character of Our Organization**

Friends Across the Ages, while remaining personal and accessible, should also be professional. It should be respected in the community as a high-quality organization.

The Friends Across the Ages leadership should exhibit professionalism in their commitment both to residents' needs, and to comprehensive training and support of volunteers and mentors. The volunteers should also exhibit professionalism by honoring their commitment to the residents they are visiting, and to this organization.

# **Statement of Strategic Goals**

## **Strategic Goal 1:**

**We will constantly strive to improve the services we offer to nursing home residents.**

By continuing to listen to the residents, and to the volunteers that visit them, we will learn about new and exciting ways to serve them. Volunteers will be encouraged, when appropriate, to bring the full depth of their experience to their visits, including their gifts, talents, interests, and spiritual/cultural background. At the same time, volunteers should understand, and not underestimate, the power of their presence – of just being there.

---

## **Sample Strategic Initiatives:**

**Music Therapy** – Patients with memory disorders, such as Alzheimer’s disease, have difficulty communicating. Music can become a link to family and friends. Sometimes the ability to form meaningful sentences is lost, but the rote memory of lyrics from songs learned in their youth remains. Volunteers should be encouraged to use songs, instrumental music, and recordings to kindle feelings and activate memories.

**Creative Interactions** – A number of creative ideas can enhance visits with residents. Volunteers may be encouraged to do the following, when it seems fitting:

- Bring their children or pets with them.
- Bring in resources such as books, art, and movies
- Bring in “pieces of the past”, such as antiques, old newspaper clippings, and pictures of classic cars.

In the future, Friends Across the Ages may wish to establish formal programs along these lines, such as a pet program, a book club, or a reminiscence event.

**Spiritual/Cultural Sharing** – Residents in care facilities come from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds. The loss of sight and hearing, as well as separation from family, have robbed them of actively participating in spiritual and cultural traditions. Although we are not a faith-based organization, volunteers can help fill this void, without proselytizing, by responding to requests for faith sharing, praying together, and listening to stories of their youth and family. For residents who specifically request a faith-sharing partner, we may recruit from our interfaith coalition. (See strategic goal 3)

**Letter Writing** – Volunteers, especially individuals who are new to the nursing home setting, can experience the development of a friendship with a resident by serving as a mail courier. Many residents need someone to read the correspondence from family and friends (including other volunteers who may be away), and to help them respond. A new volunteer in this capacity quickly learns facts and information about the resident in a way that encourages easy communication.

**Developing Self-esteem** – Disabilities in a care facility vary widely in level of severity. When possible, residents can be given responsibilities like visiting someone who is confined to their room, calling numbers during a bingo game, playing a rhythm instrument during a musical presentation, or crafting a card for another resident celebrating a birthday. Contributive acts like these can help develop feelings of usefulness and can enrich lives of other residents.

## **Strategic Goal 2:**

**Friends Across the Ages will remain faithful to its tradition of providing personal attention to all volunteers, and will explore ways to further develop volunteer formation and support.**

We will never let financial or time constraints cause us to process volunteers in a “cookie cutter” manner. Each volunteer is an individual with differing needs, goals, skills, and shortcomings. Our mentors and leadership are always available to discuss a problem or concern with a volunteer.

One way we can increase our level of support for volunteers is by further developing our formation programs. The goals for these programs will include:

- Enhanced knowledge and skills for working with the elderly.
  - Identification of common pitfalls.
  - Increased understanding of and appreciation for nursing home volunteerism.
- 

### **Sample Strategic Initiatives:**

**Volunteer Formation Sessions** – Volunteers will, at the beginning of their commitment, and on a periodic basis thereafter, have access to training and education sessions to improve their understanding of nursing home residents. The topics of these sessions might include current legislation affecting nursing home care, ideas for visiting with Alzheimer’s patients, and communication skills.

**Mentor Training Sessions** – The mentoring program (experienced volunteers paired with new volunteers) has proven to be one of the most effective ways of supporting our volunteers. To improve the mentoring program, we will offer more comprehensive mentor preparation. Mentors will be trained to listen to volunteer concerns and to respond to questions about death and dying, fear of rejection, and communication breakdowns. Mentors will learn to instruct volunteers on concrete interaction skills and the importance of sitting peacefully in silence when fitting.

**Interaction between volunteers** – Gatherings will be held for all volunteers on a regular basis to share stories and concerns. A facilitator (board member, mentor, or other experienced volunteer) and an occasional guest speaker will attend these gatherings. The gatherings will be held at a relaxed location such as a book store or coffee shop.

### **Strategic Goal 3:**

**Community support is a must for any growing organization. Friends Across the Ages will seek to increase awareness of its presence in our community and beyond.**

At the nursing homes we visit, we will consider ourselves representatives of Friends Across the Ages, and, when questioned, we will share freely with family members and nursing home staff about the organization which we support.

In the community, we will talk about Friends Across the Ages with our family, friends, and coworkers. We will work with our connections at our places of worship and other community organizations to raise awareness about the elderly and their needs. We will attempt to be in the “sphere of perception” of people in our community. We acknowledge that word-of-mouth personal referral is the most effective way to educate the public about our organization.

We will also seek to obtain publicity for Friends Across the Ages through various media sources.

---

### **Sample Strategic Initiatives:**

**Interfaith Coalition**--Historically, faith-based groups have been an excellent source of support and volunteers for Friends Across the Ages. They have also been a good connection for FATA to raise awareness about nursing home residents and their needs. Friends Across the Ages will seek to form a more deliberate and organized partnership with the various faith groups in our community by forming an interfaith coalition, which will meet bimonthly and report to the Board of Directors. This coalition will give interested congregations a way to work more closely and systematically with FATA, and will give FATA a better way of communicating with them.

**Media Committee** – The Board of Directors will appoint and supervise a committee that will explore ways to communicate with the public about our organization. Options they will explore will include newspaper, internet, presentations to groups and churches, and public service announcements (PSAs).

**Marketing Committee** – The board will also appoint and supervise a committee to work with a marketing expert and create or re-evaluate marketing materials for our organization. Specifically, the marketing committee will look at our current brochures, flyers, newsletters, and web site.

**Fundraising Committee** – This committee, composed of board members, will prepare an annual budget for our organization. In consultation with the media and marketing committees, and other interested members of the organization, they will establish goals and methods for meeting those funding needs.

## **Strategic Goal 4:**

**Our organization should be open to grow and expand as opportunities become available, but without losing its personal character. We support gradual growth and development, never sacrificing quality for quantity.**

In Gainesville and the surrounding areas, growth will take place when motivated and able volunteers step forward, ready to coordinate the program at a nursing home at which we currently have no volunteers. Mentors and Board Members will actively seek out these special volunteers at appropriate times (i.e. when funding, management resources are in place).

Outside our immediate area, we will provide guidance to new organizations who want to make use of our program in their communities. As stated in Strategic Value 3, we will spread the concept, but not necessarily the organizational structure.

---

### **Sample Strategic Initiatives:**

**“How-to” Document** – A committee of volunteers and board members will create a “How-to” document on starting a nursing home one-on-one visitation program like Friends Across the Ages. It will include topics such as:

- How to approach a nursing home administrator or activity director about coordinating such a program at his/her nursing home.
- Motivating volunteers, volunteer training, and mentor training.
- Assessing residents and matching volunteers with residents.
- Excerpts from this “Our Vision” document that communicate our mission, vision, and values.

The “How-to” package can be sent to individuals and organizations who contact us from other cities and states interested in starting up their own program.

**“How-to” Online** – The above document should be supplemented with an excellent website with resources. Also, a condensed version of the document will be made available on our website so that interested people can investigate it before sending for the full package.

**Workshops/Presentations** – Friends Across the Ages will host workshops and/or give presentations to those interested in starting their own nursing home outreach. Based on interest these could either be held in Gainesville, or we could travel to various locations.

## **Strategic Goal 5:**

**We feel it is important to educate the public about the difficulties faced by nursing home residents. We want to make people aware of the loneliness that many residents experience, and the difference one visitor can make.**

Many people in our community are not aware of how many residents in nursing homes never get a visitor. We will work to change people's attitudes about the elderly by being witnesses to the importance of the residents we visit. We acknowledge that the presence of family, community, and individuals – our presence – can powerfully influence the quality of life for both residents and volunteers.

---

### **Sample Strategic Initiatives:**

**Media Committee** – (*Same initiative listed in Strategic Goal 3.*) The Board of Directors will appoint and supervise a committee that will explore ways to communicate with the public about our organization. Options they will explore will include newspaper, internet, presentations to groups and churches, and public service announcements (PSAs).

**Education Committee** – This committee will be related to the Media Committee, but with more of a focus on education on elderly issues (rather than spreading the word to the public about Friends Across the Ages specifically). It will develop programs and materials both for external and internal use, such as the following:

- Volunteer education materials.
- Educational presentations for the general public.
- Educational materials for the website.
- Written materials for public and volunteer distribution.

**Individual Efforts** – Friends Across the Ages leaders and volunteers will each strive to increase awareness about nursing home residents and their needs. We will keep an open ear for opportunities such as lectures, presentations, and volunteer fairs, to educate, inform, and motivate people about nursing home residents and their needs.

# APPENDIX C

**Bylaws of *Friends Across the Ages***



# **Bylaws of Friends Across the Ages, Inc.**

## **Article 1**

### **Name**

The name of this corporation shall be Friends Across the Ages, Inc.

## **Article 2**

### **Purpose, Office, and Non-Discrimination Policy**

#### **Section 1. Purpose**

The object of this corporation shall be humane and philanthropic: to form true friendships with residents of nursing homes, especially the lonely and neglected. This corporation shall strive to increase community support and recognition for the importance of authentic and respectful connections with the elderly in nursing homes.

#### **Section 2. Office**

The principal office of the corporation is located in the city of Gainesville, Alachua County, State of Florida.

#### **Section 3. Non-Discrimination Policy**

This corporation is an Equal Opportunity Employer and shall make available its services without regard to race, creed, age, gender, color, ancestry, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation.

## **Article 3 Officers**

### **Section 1. Elected Officers**

The elected Officers of *Friends Across the Ages* Board of Directors shall be a President, a Vice President, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The Board may also have a Chairperson of the Board, one or more Vice Presidents, Assistant Secretaries, Assistant Treasurers and other such officers with such titles and duties as may be determined from time to time by the Board of Directors.

## **Section 2. Qualifications**

Any Board member may serve as an elected Officer. They must have the skills necessary to perform the duties of the office.

## **Section 3. Term of Office**

The Officers shall be elected each year by the Board of Directors at its annual meeting. Unless an Officer dies, resigns, or is removed from office, he or she shall hold office until the next annual meeting of the Board of Directors or, if later, until his or her successor is elected. Officers may be reelected.

## **Section 4. Vacancy in Office**

A vacancy in any office created by death, resignation, removal, disqualification, creation of a new office or any other cause may be filled by the Board of Directors for the unexpired portion of the term or for a new term established by the Board of Directors. Vacancies occurring in offices of Officers appointed at the discretion of the Board may or may not be filled as the board shall determine. An Officer may resign by submitting a written resignation to the Secretary of the corporation. The Secretary may resign by submitting a written resignation to the President of the corporation.

## **Section 5. Duties of Officers**

### **A. Duties of the President**

The President's duties shall be to preside at all meetings of the Board of Directors; to appoint committee chairs for all committees except the nominating committee; to appoint chairs for all task forces; to represent the Corporation to the community; to execute documents on behalf of the corporation; to facilitate on-going Board development.

### **B. Duties of the Vice President**

The Vice President's duties shall be to assume the duties of the President in the President's absence and to serve as President in the event of the death or resignation of the President. The vacancy then created in the Vice Presidency shall be filled by special election. The Vice President shall have other powers and perform such other duties as may be prescribed by law, by the Articles of Incorporation, or by these Bylaws, or as may be prescribed by the Board of Directors.

### **C. Duties of the Secretary**

The Secretary's duties shall be to record, in writing, and maintain the business minutes of each Board meeting and to make said minutes available for public inspection as may be required by law; to distribute minutes from the previous Board meeting to the Board prior to each Board meeting; to be responsible for notifying members of the Board of each Board meeting or action pursuant to the notice provision provided by these by-laws; to maintain such other corporate records as may be necessary or advisable for the Corporation.

### **D. Duties of the Treasurer**

The Treasurer's duties shall be to oversee the financial record-keeping and accurate accounting of all money received and disbursed by the Corporation; to chair the corporation's finance committee with a primary duty to oversee annual auditing functions; to review all budgets for funding and the Corporation's annual budget.

### **E. Duties of a Director**

Each Director shall:

1. Perform the duties of a Director, including the duties as a member of any committee of the Board of Directors upon which the Director may serve, in good faith, and in a manner that such Director believes to be in the best interests of the Corporation, and with such care, including reasonable inquiry, as an ordinarily prudent person in a like position would use under similar circumstances.
2. Meet at such times and places as required by these Bylaws;
3. Register their addresses with the Secretary of the corporation, and notices of meetings mailed, e-mailed, or faxed to them at such addresses shall be valid notices thereof.

## **Article 4**

### **Nominations and Elections**

#### **Section 1. Nominating Committee**

- A. Membership  
The Nominating Committee shall consist of at least 3 members.
- B. Eligibility to Serve  
Any Board member other than the president may serve on the committee. No Board member shall serve two terms consecutively on the committee. Participation in this committee does not disqualify that person from running for office.
- C. Election of the Committee Chairperson  
The Committee Chairperson shall be elected by the Board of Directors. The Committee Chairperson shall then appoint at least two other committee members.
- D. Vacancies  
The Committee Chairperson shall fill vacancies in the membership.
- E. Duties  
The Nominating Committee shall consider the qualifications of all candidates for elected Officers and Directors. Names submitted to the committee shall be accompanied by a statement of qualifications and received by committee no later than the monthly Board meeting three (3) months prior to the election. The Committee shall hold a meeting by the monthly Board meeting two (2) months prior to the election. The Nominating Committee shall submit at least one name for each position to be filled.
- F. Committee Report  
The report of the Committee shall be submitted to the Board of Directors by the monthly meeting just prior to the annual meeting.
- G. Nominations from the Floor  
Following the report of the Committee, additional nominations may be made from the floor. No name shall be placed in nomination without written or verbal consent of the nominee.

#### **Section 2. Election of Directors and Officers**

Directors and Officers shall be elected by voice vote.

## **Article 5**

### **Board of Directors**

#### **Section 1. Composition**

The Corporation shall have a minimum of five (5) and a maximum of fifteen (15) Directors and collectively they shall be known as the Board of Directors. A minimum of two (2) Directors must serve as regular Friends Across the Ages nursing home volunteers.

#### **Section 2. Qualifications**

A. General

Directors shall be of the age of majority in this state, and have such other qualifications as the Board of Directors prescribe by resolution.

B. Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest may exist when the interests or activities of any Director, Officer, or staff member may be seen as competing with the interests or activities of the Corporation, or the Director, Officer, or staff member derives a financial or other material gain as a result of a direct or indirect relationship. The Board of Directors may adopt a conflict of interest policy and procedures to implement the provisions of this Article.

#### **Section 3. Duties**

The Board of Directors shall constitute the membership of the corporation and shall have full power to operate and manage it. The Board shall provide leadership to the organization, and shall determine that the organization is fulfilling its mission and goals.

#### **Section 4. Meetings**

A. Regular

The regular monthly meeting of the Board of Directors shall be held with a minimum of seven (7) days advance notice. The Board shall meet regularly, with not fewer than nine (9) monthly meetings per year.

B. Special

Special meetings of the Board of Directors may be called by the Chairperson of the Board, the President, the Vice President, the Secretary, by any two Directors, or, if different, by the persons specifically authorized under the laws of Florida to call special meetings of the board. Such meetings shall be held at the principal office of the Corporation or, if different, at the place designated by the person or persons calling the special meeting.

C. Annual

The Board shall set aside one of its monthly meetings as an “annual meeting.” At that meeting, Officers will be elected, year-end reports will be presented, and other business will be conducted as determined by the Board.

D. Postponement

In case of emergency, as determined by three members of the Executive Committee, any meetings may be postponed and set for a later date.

E. Notice

1. *Regular Meetings*: At least seven (7) days notice shall be given of any regular meeting of the Board of Directors.

2. *Special Meetings*: At least one week prior notice shall be given by the Secretary of the Corporation to each Director of each special meeting of the Board. "Notice," as defined here, may be verbal or written, may be given personally, by first class mail, by telephone or by electronic means, and shall state the place, date, and time of the meeting and the matters proposed to be acted upon at the meeting.
- F. Waiver of Notice  
Whenever any notice is required to be given to any Director under the provisions of these Bylaws, the Articles of Incorporation or applicable Florida law, a waiver thereof in any manner and by any means permitted under the Articles, these Bylaws, and Florida law, executed by the Director entitled to such notice, whether before or after the time stated therein, shall be deemed equivalent to the giving of such notice. Neither the business to be transacted at, nor the purpose of any regular or special meeting of the Board of Directors need be specified in the waiver of notice of such meeting.

### **Section 5. Quorum**

A quorum shall consist of a simple majority of the entire Board being present at the meeting. No business can be acted upon without a quorum present. If a Director is unable to attend any meeting, then he or she may vote by submitting to the secretary in advance of the meeting a written (item specific) proxy. Each Director shall have one (1) vote.

### **Section 6. Classification and Term of Office**

- A. Initiating Staggered Terms :  
The Directors shall be divided into three (3) groups and shall be known as Class I, Class II, and Class III. The initial Class I Directors shall hold office until the first annual election of Directors, the initial Class II Directors shall hold office until the second annual election of Directors, and the initial Class III shall hold office until the third annual election of Directors.
- B. Staggered Terms :  
Thereafter, Directors of each class shall serve for a term of three (3) years, commencing on the date of election and each Director shall hold office until his or her successor is elected and qualified, or until his or her death, resignation, or removal. At each subsequent annual meeting of directors, the successors of those directors whose terms then expire shall be elected to serve for a term of three (3) years and until their successors are elected and qualified, or until their death, resignation, or removal.
- C. Successive Terms :  
Any Director, including the initial Directors, may serve an unlimited number of terms, including successive terms, and shall not be disqualified by reason of having served previously as a Director.

### **Section 7. Election**

Unless the Board of Directors is reducing the number of Directors as provided in these Bylaws, the Board of Directors shall appoint a successor director to replace each director whose term is ending. The Board of Directors may make any such appointment at the annual meeting at which the director's term is scheduled to end. Directors may succeed themselves.

### **Section 8. Vacancies**

The Board of Directors may appoint an individual to fill any vacancy in the position of Director. The Board of Directors may do so at any meeting of the Board of Directors by the affirmative vote of a majority of the remaining directors even if less than a quorum of the Board of Directors

is present at the meeting. A Director who fills a vacancy shall serve for the unexpired term of his or her predecessor in office. A Director may resign by filing a written resignation with the Secretary of the Corporation.

#### **Section 9. Increase in Number**

If the Board of Directors increases the number of Directors as provided in these Bylaws, such position shall be filled by the affirmative vote of a majority of the remaining Board of Directors even though less than a quorum of the Board of Directors may be present at the meeting. The Board of Directors may make any such appointment at any of its meetings.

#### **Section 10. Compensation**

The Directors shall serve without compensation but reasonable expenses incurred may be reimbursed when expended in the interest of the Corporation and approved by the Board. No part of the article or any other shall be construed so as to prevent any non-officer Director of the corporation from being employed as a paid employee of the corporation, or to prevent the Executive Director(s) of the corporation from becoming a member of the Board of Directors of the Corporation.

#### **Section 11. Majority Action as Board Action**

Every act or decision done or made by a majority of the Directors present at a meeting duly held at which a quorum is present is the act of the Board of Directors, unless the Articles of Incorporation, these Bylaws or provisions of law require a greater percentage or different voting rules for approval of a matter by the Board.

### **Article 6 Executive Committee**

#### **Section 1. Composition**

The members of the Executive Committee shall be the officers of the Board of Directors.

#### **Section 2. Duties**

##### **A. Authority between Board Meetings**

The Executive Committee shall exercise the authority of the Board of Directors between meetings of the Board, but only to the extent:

1. Necessary to take action on unanticipated business that requires action between Board Meetings; and
2. Action taken is not contrary to the instructions of the Board of Directors

##### **B. Other Duties**

The Executive Committee shall also:

1. Approve appointments by the President of standing and special committee chairpersons, members, and subcommittee members.
2. Make employment recommendations concerning the Executive Director(s), and make recommendations regarding personnel policies, salaries, and fringe benefits for employees.
3. Analyze the progress of *Friends Across the Ages* in achieving its objectives.
4. Provide leadership and strategic planning for *Friends Across the Ages*, and present progress and results of the plan at each annual meeting.

5. Set the place, date, and time of Board meetings.
6. Determine and give notice of the place, date, and time of special meetings.
7. Be accountable to rest of the Board of Directors.
8. Make recommendations to the rest of the Board of Directors.
9. Have such other duties as are prescribed for the Executive Committee in these bylaws or by the Board of Directors.

### **Section 3. Meetings**

Meetings of the Executive Committee shall be called by the President or any two members of the Executive Committee with at least 24 hours' verbal notice. Notice may be waived by the members of the Executive Committee in accordance with statutory requirements.

### **Section 4. Quorum**

A majority of the members of the Executive Committee shall constitute a quorum.

### **Section 5. Vote Required**

In accordance with the requirements of the statutes under which *Friends Across the Ages* is incorporated, adoption of a main motion and approval of appointments shall require the affirmative vote of a majority of the members of the Executive Committee present.

## **Article 7 Committees**

### **Section 1. Standing Committees**

- A. The standing committees of *Friends Across the Ages* shall be Budget-Finance, Bylaws, and Committee on Nominations.
- B. No Board members shall chair more than one standing committee.
- C. All standing committees shall report to the Board of Directors and shall be responsible to the President between meetings of the Board.
- D. The President shall be an ex-officio member of all committees except the Nominating Committee.
- E. The term for committee members shall correspond to that of officers.

### **Section 2. Budget-Finance Committee**

The committee shall:

- A. Have general supervision of the finances and investments subject to the approval of the Board of Directors;
- B. Prepare an annual budget for presentation to the Board forty-five (45) days prior to the Annual Meeting; and
- C. Present the proposed budget, with recommendations, for adoption by the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting.

### **Section 3. Bylaws Committee**

In regard to *Friends Across the Ages* Bylaws and Standing Rules, the committee shall:

- A. Review all submitted amendments and edit for composition;
- B. Consolidate similar amendments for joint proposal subject to acceptance by the proposers;
- C. Have the right to originate amendments;
- D. Submit proposed amendments to the bylaws to the members together with the committee's recommendations for action;
- E. Ensure with assistance of legal counsel that the bylaws are in compliance with applicable federal and state statutes;
- F. In the event a revision is authorized, prepare and submit the proposed revision.

### **Section 4. Special Committees**

Special (Ad-hoc) committees may be created as deemed necessary by the *Friends Across the Ages* Board of Directors, or the Executive Committee.

## **Article 8 Electronic Meetings**

The Board of Directors, Executive Committee, standing committees, and special committees are authorized to meet by telephone conference or through other electronic communications media so long as all the members may simultaneously communicate and participate during the meeting.

## **Article 9 Administrative Operations**

### **Section 1. Executive Director(s)**

The conduct of business of *Friends Across the Ages* shall be under the direction of an Executive Director or Directors.

#### **A. Accountability**

The Executive Director(s) shall be employed by and report to the Board of Directors for such compensation as the Board may determine. The Executive Director(s) shall consult with and be responsible to the President between meetings of the Executive Committee.

#### **B. Duties**

1. The Executive Director(s) shall comply with Board policies and shall submit to the Board of Directors such reports, analysis, statistics, plans, and other information as may be required from time to time and shall assist the finance committee in the preparation of its annual budget.
2. The Executive Director(s) may be a member of the Board, or may designate someone to be an official member of all committees of the organization.
3. The Executive Director(s) give(s) staff support to the Board of Directors and to the Executive Committee.



4. The Executive Director(s) is/are the only staff person(s) with a line of responsibility to the Board. Authority shall be exercised only by and through the President of the Board.

### **Section 2. Other Staff**

All other staff are retained by the Executive Director(s) in accordance with Section 1 of this Article; they are accountable to the Executive Director(s). The Board of Directors shall maintain a high level of concern for all employees. The Board or its designee shall review the personnel policies each year and distribute current copies to all staff and Directors. All job descriptions will be prepared by the Executive Director(s) in writing and shall be given to each prospective employee and to each employee.

### **Section 3. Fiscal Year**

The fiscal year shall be from March 1 to February 28, or, in case of leap year, February 29.

## **Article 10 Indemnification, Nonliability, and Insurance**

### **Section 1. Indemnification by Corporation of Directors and Officers**

The Directors and Officers of the Corporation shall be indemnified by the Corporation to the fullest extent permissible under the laws of the State of Florida.

### **Section 2. Nonliability of Directors**

The Directors shall not be personally liable for the debts, liabilities, or other obligations of the Corporation.

### **Section 3. Insurance for Corporate Agents**

Except as may be otherwise provided under provisions of law, the Board of Directors may adopt a resolution authorizing the purchase and maintenance of insurance on behalf of any agent of the Corporation (including a Director, Officer, employee or other agent of the Corporation) against liabilities asserted against or incurred by the agent in such capacity or arising out of the agent's status as such, whether or not the Corporation would have the power to indemnify the agent against such liability under the Articles of Incorporation, these Bylaws or provisions of law.

## **Article 11 Parliamentary Authority**

The Board will utilize *Robert's Rules of Order* (current edition) as the Parliamentary Authority, insofar as such rules are not inconsistent with or in conflict with the Articles of Incorporation, these Bylaws, or with provisions of law.

## **Article 12**

### **Disciplinary Action**

A Director may be removed from office after two (2) consecutive absences for which prior notice is not given, or after three (3) total absences in a calendar year, or for just cause, by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Board of Directors.

## **Article 13**

### **Amendment of Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws**

#### **Section 1. Modification Procedures**

These Bylaws may be altered, amended, or repealed and a new set of Bylaws adopted by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Board of Directors. At least ten (10) days prior notice setting forth a proposed action and times and place of meeting shall be given to all directors. Notice may be verbal or written, may be given personally, by first class mail, by telephone, or by electronic means.

#### **Section 2. Enactment and Placement**

All amendments to and changes in the Bylaws shall be signed by the President and Secretary, dated, and attached to the original set retained in the corporate books.

## **Article 14**

### **Dissolution**

As stated in the Articles of Incorporation, this Corporation may be dissolved with the assent given in writing and signed by not less than two-thirds (2/3) of the Board members. A petition requesting dissolution shall be presented by the Board of Directors to the Circuit Court of Alachua County, Florida requesting a decree of dissolution upon proper proof of publication of notice. The Board of Directors shall also file a certified copy of the decree of dissolution with the Department of State and in the Public Records of Alachua County, Florida. Upon dissolution of the Corporation, other than incident to a merger or consolidation, the assets of the Corporation shall be dedicated to an appropriate public, private, charitable, educational, or religious organization as shall at the time qualify as an exempt organization or organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, as the Board of Directors shall determine to be used for the purposes similar to those for which this Corporation was created. In the event that such dedication is refused acceptance, such assets shall be granted, conveyed and assigned to any non-profit corporation, association, trust or other organization to be devoted to such similar purposes.

# APPENDIX D

## **Materials for New Volunteer Interview**

- Sample Interview Questions (use as needed)
- Questions for references (ask each new volunteer for two or three references)
- Volunteer Pledge (for them to sign)

## ***FRIENDS* INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Name of potential volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is your motivation for wanting to visit the elderly?
2. Do you feel that you work well with others?
3. Sometimes residents can get agitated, because they are confused, or do not feel well. Also, staff might sometimes act in a curt or impatient manner because they work long hours. How would you deal with these situations?
4. What is your greatest quality and/or what achievements are you especially proud of?
5. Can you describe for us a difficult obstacle you have overcome? How do you feel this affected your personality or ability?
6. Sometimes a resident may try to make you feel guilty for not visiting more often, or may ask you to do more for them than you feel capable of doing. Do you feel you are able to successfully set limits with people?
7. Our program focuses on friendship. What are your gifts as a friend?
8. Nursing Homes all have their own policies and procedures which they require us to follow, even when they do not always make sense to us. How do you feel about following procedures with which you do not necessarily agree?
9. We try to avoid controversial subjects when talking to residents, but sometimes one can accidentally come up. Do you feel you are tolerant of other people's viewpoints?
10. Is there anything else about yourself that you would like to share with us?

## Questions for Reference Check:

You may wish to use these questions or variations of them when you call references. We usually ask each new volunteer for two or three references (at least one should be an authority figure, i.e. employer, teacher, minister).

You can start by telling each reference you reach that the conversation you have with them will be totally confidential and none of their responses, good or bad, will be shared with the prospective volunteer.

1. What can you say about the moral character of this person?
2. Would you say they are a patient person? Tell me a story about it.
3. It is possible that they might be working with patients with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia. How do you think they would handle a situation like that?
4. Can you give me an example of how they would respond to an emergency situation?
5. Would you consider them to be a reliable person? Why or why not?
6. Would say they work well with people, or would it be better to give them some job other than one in which they interact with people?
7. If a close family member such as your mother needed help would you want this person to visit him or her?



## **FRIENDS ACROSS THE AGES**

P.O. Box 14698 Gainesville FL 32604

<http://www.AcrossTheAges.org>  
352.381.1117

### **VOLUNTEER PLEDGE**

I wish to become a Friends Across the Ages volunteer because of my desire to help the elderly in nursing homes, and to become more informed about the issues facing the elderly in our society. As a new volunteer I promise:

- 1. To complete 12 weekly visits to the nursing home of one hour each at my assigned time. I will spend time with each of the residents to which I have been assigned. If I feel that I cannot continue to visit a specific resident for whatever reason, I will ask the volunteer coordinator to assign me to another.**
- 2. To read the required reading for each week before my visit to the nursing home, and to fill out the evaluation form after my visit.**
- 3. To not get involved in the medical care of the resident I am visiting. I am there for friendship only.**
- 4. To conduct myself appropriately as I am a representative of Friends Across the Ages when I am at the nursing home. I will not get confrontational with staff members at the nursing home if I feel that I see an injustice. When in doubt about anything, I will ask a staff member (before helping a resident out of bed, before bringing in food, etc.)**

---

Signature of Volunteer

---

Date

# **APPENDIX E**

## **Weekly Readings and Evaluations**

# Week 1 Reading - Orientation Information

Usually the reading of the week will be a short story or poem written by a nursing home resident, or a reflection written by a nursing home volunteer. For this week, however, the required reading is simply orientation information to be read before your first visit. This is the longest of all the readings.

## VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION INFORMATION

Welcome to the Friends Across the Ages nursing home outreach. Your willingness to share your time and friendship is greatly appreciated. Volunteers occupy a very special place at nursing homes. The residents there have their physical needs taken care of. Some have family members that visit periodically. But what they lack is someone to be their friend. You can be a friend to someone who has no other friends. This is something the nursing home cannot provide without the help of volunteers.

## IN-ROOM VISITATION

You will be introduced to one or more residents of the nursing home whom you will commit to visit once a week. It is required that you visit **at least one hour per week** at your assigned time (with your group). Your visits may become longer as you get to know your new friends better, but at least one hour is required. If you are visiting two or more residents be sure to spend some time with each.

You are part of an effort to make sure that every resident gets at least one visitor per week. Some residents may get more than one visitor, but many will not. If you feel for any reason that you are unable to visit a specific resident to whom you were assigned, **it is imperative that you notify the volunteer coordinator** or your mentor. This way a new volunteer can be assigned to that resident. Failure to do so could mean that someone is not getting visited.

## LENGTH OF COMMITMENT

You are committing to complete a training period of **12 weekly visits of at least one hour each**. We ask you to make this commitment out of consideration for both the nursing home residents and the Friends Across the Ages coordinators; it is difficult on all concerned when volunteers are constantly coming and going. Also, we feel that three months is just enough time for you to get acquainted with the nursing home and learn the skills you will need. After 3 months you will receive a certificate declaring you an official "Friend Across the Ages." We hope you will continue volunteering at that point, although you are not required to do so.

## READINGS AND EVALUATIONS

Each week there is a reading and a short evaluation form to fill out. Both are an integral part of your experience, so it is required that you complete both of them -- read the weekly reading before your visit to the nursing home, and once to fill out the evaluation after your visit to the nursing home. The reading is an inspirational or thought-provoking article or poem about the elderly. The evaluation form helps you sum up your visit, and gives us a record of your visit we are required to keep.

## TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

You are encouraged to bring a roommate, family member, or friend with you when you visit the nursing home. It's more fun that way!

Many volunteers ask "What will I do with the residents when I visit?" The most important part is just being there. Things for you to do together will follow when you find out more about them. The most popular activity is quite simple -- just talking. Current events, the weather, family, favorite foods, and childhood experiences are all popular topics. Some other activities include:

- Eating dinner together
- Playing cards or board games like checkers
- Bring a book, magazine, or newspaper you can read to them
- Watching sporting events or other TV shows
- Helping them write a letter to a family member
- Going outside on the porch to catch some sunshine
- Or just sitting together in silence

That last item is the toughest one to be comfortable with. *Just sitting together in silence*. If you remember nothing else from reading this material, remember this: **We have been taught in our society that we always have to have the perfect thing to say. Nothing could be further from the truth at the nursing**



home. There are no "uncomfortable silences" there. Many of the elderly at nursing homes are, sadly, used to sitting by themselves in silence. Your mere presence makes a difference. By just being there it shows them that someone cares. Your visit has been a success simply because you were there. Before reading on further, stop here and let this sink in for a minute.

## THE PEOPLE YOU WILL VISIT

The people you will visit will vary greatly in their abilities. Some will be able to leave their bed, others will not. Some will be very aware of their situation; others will not know where they are. Some will remember you every time you walk in the door; others will have forgotten you by your next visit. You won't always be thanked. It is important to not have any expectations when first getting involved. Know in your heart that you are making a difference in their lives, but they may never be able to express their gratitude.

Here are just a few hints on communication with nursing home residents in general:

- **Don't** talk down to residents or assume they are senile. **Do** speak a little slower, wait a little longer for responses, demonstrate personal interest and sympathy.
- Treat all residents with the respect they deserve regardless of their physical or mental condition.
- Be relaxed. Even when staying only a few minutes, sit down and don't appear hurried.
- It is often best to validate what a resident tells you even when you know it to be incorrect (a humorous but real example: if a resident tells you it snowed yesterday, "Oh really?" would be a good response, not "You're out of your mind! This is Florida!").
- Try not to take it personally if a resident doesn't remember you, is unintentionally rude, or isn't a good listener (prefers to do all the talking).

## OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NURSING HOME

The *Friends Across the Ages* program has worked very hard to establish an excellent relationship with the nursing homes we visit. We are known to the staff to be one of the most involved organizations in the area. Since we provide companionship to residents and help out with activities, we make their jobs easier, and therefore they appreciate us. Likewise, we appreciate that they allow us to visit whenever we want, and in general put very few restrictions on our volunteer efforts.

Unfortunately, this great relationship we have can be jeopardized very easily. Every volunteer is looked upon as a representative of *Friends Across the Ages*. For this reason, **you should never get confrontational with a staff member for any reason**. Residents will sometimes complain of injustices, or you may see what you feel to be an injustice, but if so you should talk about the problem with us, and not jump to conclusions. We will discuss together what action to take.

An example -- there is a elderly lady who will tell you that she had been asking for headache medicine for three days and they won't give her any. It would be easy to immediately accuse the nurses of abuse. In actuality, this lady suffers from short-term memory loss and doesn't remember, even when they gave her pain medicine minutes before.

It is very important that you do not get involved in the medical care of the resident you'll be visiting. **We are there for friendship only**. It is not appropriate for a volunteer to ask what doctors a resident is seeing, what medications he or she is on, etc.

## IN GENERAL

Get to know the staff members when you can and ask them if you have any questions. It is always better to be safe than sorry. For example, never bring food, medicine, or cigarettes for a resident unless you check first with their nurse. Don't help a resident in or out of their bed or wheelchair, ask a staff member. Don't take a resident out of the facility without permission. In general, don't assume -- ask. Remember that the nursing home employees have complete information on each resident's condition, and will generally appreciate that you were cautious.

## Week 1 Evaluation

1. Tell us the names of the nursing home residents you visited, and in a few sentences describe one interesting thing that you learned about each.
2. During your visit with these residents, did you run out of things to talk about? If so, how did this silence make you feel? What were some of the highlights of your visit?
3. In a few sentences, describe the atmosphere at the nursing home. Did you see anything that you found surprising? Was there anything that happened that made you uncomfortable? What things helped the experience to be enjoyable?
4. Do you think you'll be remembered by next week? If not, does that bother you? What things help you to know you are making a difference whether or not you are remembered?

## Week 2 Reading – “A Crabby Old Woman”

*The following poem appeared when an elderly lady died in the geriatric ward of a hospital near Dundee, Scotland. It was believed that she had left nothing of value. The nurses, going through her possessions, however, found the following poem. Its quality so impressed the staff that copies were made and distributed to every nurse in the hospital. The old lady's sole bequest to posterity is presented below. As you read it, consider how the people you've met at the nursing home might be feeling similarly. The best way we can serve our forgotten elderly is to treat them as real people, and as people, to give them the respect they deserve.*

### "A CRABBY OLD WOMAN"

What do you see, nurses, what do you see,  
What are you thinking when you're looking at me?  
A crabby old woman, not very wise,  
Uncertain of habit, with faraway eyes.

Who dribbles her food and makes no reply  
When you say in a loud voice, "I do wish you'd try?"  
Who seems not to notice the things that you do,  
And forever is losing a stocking or shoe.

Who, resisting or not, lets you do as you will  
with bathing and feeding, the long day to fill.  
Is that what you're thinking? Is that what you see?  
Then open your eyes, nurse; you're not looking at me

I'll tell you who I am as I sit here so still,  
As I do at your bidding, as I eat at your will.  
I'm a small child of ten with a father and mother  
Brothers and sisters, who love one another.

A young girl of sixteen, with wings on her feet,  
Dreaming that soon now a lover she'll meet.  
A bride soon at twenty -- my heart gives a leap,  
Remembering the vows that I promised to keep.

At twenty-five now, I have young of my own  
Who need me to guide and a secure happy home.  
A woman of thirty, my young now grow fast,  
Bound to each other with ties that should last.

At forty my young sons have grown and are gone,  
But my man's beside me to see I don't mourn.  
At fifty once more babies play around my knee,  
Again we know children, my beloved and me.

Dark days are upon me, my husband is dead;  
I look at the future, I shudder with dread.  
For my young are all rearing young of their own,  
And I think of the years and the love that I've known.

I'm now an old woman and nature is cruel;  
'tis jest to make old age look like a fool.  
The body, it crumbles, grace and vigor depart,  
There is now a stone where I once had a heart.

1. Tell us the names of the nursing home residents you visited this week. If they were the same residents from week one, did they remember you from your last visit?
2. What is one new thing you learned about the residents you visited today?
3. Did you feel any more or less comfortable this week at the nursing home as compared to last week?

## Week 3 Reading – “Letter to My Children”

*The letter below was written by an 80 year old lady to her children. We chose it as the reading for this week because it gives us insight into what the elderly we visit truly want at this point in their lives. She tells her children, "All I want is just a few unhurried minutes." As you visit the nursing home this week, keep that phrase in mind. Try to give them just a few unhurried minutes. Sit down. Relax. Be comfortable. Try not to look at your watch. Be present with them.*

To all my children:

A few years ago, I saw a tee-shirt with the words "Live Long Enough to Be a Burden to Your Children." Back then, I thought it was funny. Today, I don't think it's funny at all, because I am afraid I'm doing just that. None of us want to be a burden to our family, but the older we get, the more we realize that age comes not only to the aging person, but to the family, as well. Both must accept old age and make the necessary adjustments.

Sometimes I wonder how the children of Methuselah felt about their father who lived to be 969 years old. Imagine, at more than 900 years old, did he have all of his faculties at that age? Or was he blind, deaf, and maybe so feeble that he couldn't walk? Did his children worry about whether he was eating right, getting enough exercise and dressing warmly enough? How did he accept his advancing years? These questions came to mind because, as a parent, I hate having to rely on my children to do things for me that I could do for myself a few years ago.

You children are always so kind and generous about looking after me, but I want to be doing for myself. I long to drive my car again. I want to go alone to the grocery store to shop, and I want to drive myself there. I want...but you get the idea. What I really want is to be 70 again. The truth of it is, that our roles are reversed, and now I am your child needing you in a special way.

I suppose my upcoming birthday started my thoughts along these lines. You never forget my birthday, or any other special day, without a gift. I realize the problems you must have in choosing a gift, because I have what I need in material possessions. This is a good time to tell you that what I truly want are things I can never get enough of, yet they are free. I want the intangibles. I want just a little more of your time, and that's selfish of me, I know, because you have your own children, and grandchildren, who want your time, and also you need time for yourselves. But all I want is just a few unhurried minutes. I would like for you to come and sit with me, and for you to be relaxed. It makes me so nervous when you sit on the edge of your chair and keep looking at your watch. We can talk, or we can be silent. I would just like for us to be together.

I need your patience when I don't hear what you say the first time, so please don't be annoyed. I know how tiresome it is to always be repeating, but sometimes I must ask you to repeat. Now, you don't need to yell at me, just speak slowly. I need your patience when I think too much about the past. I need your patience with my slowness and my set ways. I want you to be tolerant with what the years have done to me physically.

Please be understanding about my personal care habits. I really can't see when my dress is dirty. I spill things. I lose things. I can't remember what time to take my medication. I take too many naps, I know, because you have said, "Quit spending all of your time sleeping." Well, sometimes when I sleep in the daytime, it was because I was awake half the night. At other times, sleep helps to pass the day. When I have nothing but time on my hands, a 15-minute nap seems like an hour.

Well, there you have it: time, patience, and understanding. These are the priceless gifts that I want. Over and over again, I take my bible, (thank God that I can still read), and I read what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:11: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." But oh, how trying!

Love,

Mom Keltner

*The letter above was originally read on the "Focus on the Family" radio broadcast entitled, "Caring for Elderly Parents". Permission has been given to reprint it without prior approval. It has been edited for length and purpose.*

## Week 3 Evaluation

1. The reading for this week talked about being present with the people we are visiting at the nursing home. Being present means we leave our troubles behind, we don't look at our watch every few minutes, and we listen like a true friend. Is it difficult for you to be present with those at the nursing home? In what way could you improve?
2. Have you met a resident or residents that you plan to visit weekly yet? If so, what has helped you to connect to them so far?
3. Are you able to relax while you visit people at the nursing home, or is it still somewhat scary or uncomfortable (be honest -- most volunteers tell us it took them 4 or more weeks until they truly felt at ease there)?

## Week 4 Reading – “The Empty Chair”

*We keep our houses and apartments neat. We want to be ready in case we have a visitor. We have guest rooms, hide-a-bed couches, and comfortable chairs for visitors to sit in. We enjoy having visitors stay. But what if they never did?*

### THE EMPTY CHAIR

**By M. Violet Asmuth**

The chair was the first thing Lily noticed when she was carried into the room. It was a large chair and perhaps too elegant for its surroundings. The plush material felt soft to the touch. Tiny white woven dots over the cobalt blue color created a three-dimensional effect. It will be a comfortable chair for my visitors, Lily thought on her first day in Merry Manor Care Center.

Confined to her bed, Lily's social contacts were limited to only those persons who entered the room. No visitors came from outside the facility as her family lived far away.

A nurse brought morning medications into the room. Lily said, "Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute." The nurse smiled and said, "I wish I could but I have a lot of residents waiting for their pills."

A CNA entered the room to help Lily get dressed for the day. Lily said, "Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute." The CNA smiled and said, "I wish I could but I still have six more residents who need me to help them dress."

A volunteer carried a plastic meal tray into the room. Lily said, "Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute." The volunteer smiled and said, "I wish I could but I have other trays to deliver."

The activity director looked into the room to ask if anyone wanted to play Bingo. Lily said, "Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute." The activity director smiled and said, "I wish I could but Bingo starts in five minutes."

The doctor walked into the room to check on Lily's condition. Lily said, "Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute." The doctor smiled and said, "I wish I could but I have four other patients to see in this facility."

A social worker stepped into the room to ask a question about Lily's family. Lily said, "Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute." The social worker smiled and said, "I wish I could but I have to catch up on my paper work."

A resident entered the room and handed Lily an ad and a catalog. Lily said, "Sit down in my comfortable blue chair and visit a minute." The resident smiled and said, "I wish I could but they gave me the job of delivering the mail today."

So it went, day after day, smiling people walking in and out of Lily's room. One evening when the nurse came into the room to administer pills, she smiled and said, "You are fortunate that you chose such a friendly nursing home." "Very fortunate," replied Lily. She turned her head and stared at the comfortable blue chair. As always, it was empty. A tear rolled down Lily's cheek.

## **Week 4 Evaluation**

1. You have been visiting the nursing home for 4 weeks now. What do you like the most about your visits so far? What do you like the least?
2. How do you feel about the remaining 8 visits? Do you think you will have trouble completing them?



## Week 5 Reading – “The Hope of Results”

*One of the most difficult things about visiting the nursing home is that we can't always see the positive results of our actions.*

*Maybe we will be forgotten five minutes after we leave. Yes, that is true. But for the time we are there, we are making people happy, and that time can never be taken away.*

*Sometimes we feel overwhelmed -- there are so many people in need -- we can't possibly make a difference, right? Here's what Thomas Merton, one of the great spiritual writers of our time, had to say:*

"Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself. And there too a great deal has to be gone through, as gradually you struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. The range tends to narrow down, but it gets much more real. In the end, it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything."

"Letter to a Young Activist" by Thomas Merton

*As you visit the nursing home this week, make just one, or two people happy. Remember those "personal relationships" make all the difference.*

## Week 5 Evaluation

1. Do you feel overwhelmed sometimes by all the loneliness at the nursing home? If so, what helps you to deal with this?
2. What do you think about the way we treat people who are elderly in America? What concrete steps can we as a society take to reach out to those who are elderly and/or disabled?

## Week 6 Reading – “The Importance of Trees”

*Perhaps the reason why there are so few visitors at the nursing home is because people fail to see the value in it. Anyone could explain the value to society in feeding the hungry, or working with children. And those are definitely worthwhile endeavors. But what about visiting some forgotten old people, living out the rest of their lives in a nursing home? How does that benefit society?*

*Well, first we could argue that it benefits society because we will all be old someday. And we all hope that someone will come to visit us someday when we are old and forgotten.*

*But there is another even more important benefit, described in the passage below:*

"The other day our children were telling me about the importance of trees. If they were not always releasing oxygen, they explained, life on earth would perish. A person whose mind is free from negative thinking spreads life-giving oxygen in much the same way. On a smoggy day in California, the trees along the freeway look gray and drab in the haze; they do not seem to add anything valuable to the landscape. Yet if they were gone, our big cities could suffocate from their own activity. In the same way, although a selfless man or woman may seem to go through the day doing nothing extraordinary, such people are life-giving. Without them, nothing would revitalize the atmosphere in which we think."

From "The Little Lamp" by Eknath Easwaran

*Agreeing to visit a complete stranger in need is such a beautiful, selfless act. Although your visit to the nursing home this week may be nothing extraordinary, remember that selfless acts like these inspire others and revitalize the world in which we live.*

## Week 6 Evaluation

1. The reading for this week talked about selfless acts and how they inspire others. Has anyone at the nursing home (staff / family / other visitors) or outside the nursing home (your family/friends) taken notice of your visits? If so, how did they react?
2. How do you feel immediately after your visit to the nursing home? Does it give you energy or tire you out?

## Week 7 Reading – “Being Wanted”

*The statistic says that 60% of nursing home residents will never have a visitor. Never! Together we are doing something about it, in our own small way.*

*Mother Teresa of India saw thousands of people afflicted with all kinds of diseases in her lifetime. But read below what she describes as the "worst disease" of all:*

"I have come more and more to realize that being unwanted is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience. Nowadays we have found medicine for leprosy and lepers can be cured. There's medicine for TB and consumptives can be cured. But for being unwanted, except there are willing hands to serve and there's a loving heart to love, I don't think this terrible disease can be cured."

- Mother Teresa

*Some residents of the nursing home are lucky enough to have families that visit them and care about them. But there will always be the unwanted ones, whose families have forgotten them. If you are visiting such a person, know that your visits mean everything to them. You are the "willing hands" and "loving heart" that Mother Teresa spoke about. You restore their hope and dignity. You are their friend.*

## Week 7 Evaluation

1. The reading for this week talked about being "unwanted". Have you found out anything about the families of the residents you've been visiting? Do they have any family members who visit them?
2. If you visit someone who does receive other visitors, what do you think is unique about the friendship you can offer to them? What signs have you noticed that your visits are meaningful to the resident(s) you visit?

## Week 8 Reading – “The Starfish”

*Back a few weeks ago the reading was about how difficult it can be to see the positive results of our volunteering. Thomas Merton reminded us that the personal relationships we form make all the difference, even if we can't measure the results.*

*There is a story about a starfish -- it's an old story that made a comeback recently, as it was popularized in the book Chicken Soup for the Soul. The original story went something like this:*

As an old man walked down a Spanish beach at dawn, he saw ahead of him what he thought to be a dancer. The young boy was running across the sand, rhythmically bending down to pick up a stranded starfish and throw it far into the sea.

The old man gazed in wonder as the young soul again and again threw starfish from the sand into the water. The old man approached him and asked why he spent so much energy doing what seemed a waste of time. The young boy explained that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun.

"But there are thousands of miles of beach, and miles and miles of starfish. How can your effort make any difference?"

The young boy looked down at a small starfish in his hand, and as he threw it to safety in the sea, said, "It makes a difference to this one!"

*It's overwhelming sometimes! It would be easy to think we can't possibly make a difference. Well, we can. We can make a difference to those few people we encounter during our visit to the nursing home. We must be prepared for what we will see... miles and miles of starfish, and no way to help them all. But with a little time, a little effort, and a little help from above, we'll make a difference to as many as we can.*

"Certainly it is true that behind every human being who cries out for help there may be a million more equally entitled to attention. But this is the poorest of reasons for not helping the person whose cries you hear. How to determine which one of a million sounds surrounding you is more deserving than the rest? You will never know; you will never need to know. Reach out and take hold of the one who happens to be nearest. If you are never able to help or save another, at least you will have saved one." - Norman Cousins

## Week 8 Evaluation

1. The reading for this week was the story of the "starfish". How can the analogy of the starfish relate to visiting people in the nursing home? In what ways is visiting the nursing home more than just throwing starfish back in the ocean?
2. Encouraging people to keep their elderly family members at home, encouraging people to visit their family members who are in nursing homes, or fighting for changes to the law to improve conditions in the nursing home. Which of these 3 causes would you be most likely to support? Explain.

## Week 9 Reading – “Feeling Safe”

*The elderly we meet at the nursing home aren't always capable of a two-way friendship. Sometimes they won't remember us. They're afraid to trust us. Sometimes they are bitter because of all the people who have hurt them.*

*But if we keep coming back...maybe, just maybe, our faces will become familiar. Maybe they will know that we accept them, however worthless they might feel. Maybe someday they'll let themselves feel safe with us...*

Oh, the comfort --  
the inexpressible comfort  
of feeling safe with a person,  
having neither to weigh thoughts  
nor measure words,  
but pouring them all right out  
just as they are  
chaff and grain together  
certain that a faithful hand  
will take and sift them  
keep what is worth keeping  
and with the breath of kindness,  
blow the rest away.

- Dinah Maria Mulock Craik

## Week 9 Evaluation

1. The reading this week spoke of friendship as "the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person." Have you ever felt this kind of safety with a friend? If so, what was that like?
2. What kinds of things do you think help your friends at the nursing home feel safe with you? Now that you have been visiting for several weeks, what would help to further build up this trust?

## Week 10 Reading – “Don’t Come”

*Visiting the nursing home isn't always easy. Can you leave your own troubles behind, to tend to the troubles of the people you visit? Are you afraid to shout into deaf ears, to look into blind eyes, and to hold hands with someone who isn't physically attractive?*

*Nursing Home outreach is one of the most challenging fields of volunteering. Can you be one of the brave ones, who accepts the challenge to visit those who society has shut away?*

If you fear death and don't want that fear intensified by seeing it on many faces where I live, don't come.

If strange behavior bothers you, don't come. Some of us have receded from reality. Some reality is too painful to face.

If you find it difficult to communicate with people who can't immediately give you a warm positive response, don't come.

If you would feel uncomfortable shouting into my deaf ears or talking to my unfocusing eyes, don't come.

If you have problems that need to be solved, don't come. Stay home and solve them, don't come share them with me. I have my own problems that overwhelm me. I can't help you.

If you expect that I can return your first smile and invite you to sit down for a stimulating conversation, don't come. I might just as likely frown at you and make you feel unwanted.

But if you could understand how I feel deep down inside, you'd not feel rejected. You'd somehow know that I need your friendship even more than if I could smile and welcome you.

I have no one. My family and friends are gone; I've outlived them all. There's no one to give me the 24-hour nursing care I now need. I understood this when I came here, and I've told myself many times that this nursing home is the only place for me.

But I've ached with loneliness so long that I now feel only bitterness. This is why I may not smile at you at first, if you come. I hope God can forgive me; I can't seem to feel otherwise.

I don't think I really matter as a person anymore. I can do very little for myself and nothing for others. Modern drugs have kept me alive beyond my years of usefulness.

My world has been reduced to monotonous meals on trays in bed, pills for pain at regular intervals and services of nurses for my bodily functions. Having to let others take care of my simplest needs drains me of my dignity as a human being.

Now that you may understand how I feel –

Can you come to see me and keep coming so that I can dare to trust you not to desert me? I have nothing to offer you except my memories, and often they're confused. But perhaps if I can share them out loud, I can begin to think more clearly.

Have you the patience to hear out my bitterness until I've emptied myself of it? Can you bring news of what goes on outside this place to reinstate reality to me before it's too late – before the shell of senility enshrouds me?

Can you come to give me something to think about besides myself; my narrow world, and my death? If not, don't come.

But if you don't come, please pray to God that He may move the heart of someone who can come to visit me. He knows that I need a friend.

**By Myrth Hudgins**

*reprinted with kind permission of The Sonshine Society*

## **Week 10 Evaluation**

1. The reading for this week was "Don't Come" by Myrth Hudgins. Do any of the feelings expressed in the reading apply to the residents you visit? For example, maybe they are bitter or untrusting, or have receded from reality. How do you deal with their limitations?
2. The nursing home resident in the "Don't Come" story seems to think he or she has nothing to offer you, their visitor. Do you agree? What have you found they have to offer?

## Week 11 Reading – “Defining Friendship”

*Eleven weeks ago we started with a mission. To go out and make friends with someone in need. Someone whose health is failing them; someone who is slow to trust. We found out quickly that it isn't always easy. So, how do we know if we've made any real friendships at the nursing home? Perhaps the best way is to read some quotations about friendship, and decide for ourselves:*

"A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out."

"When you're looking for a friend -- don't look for perfection, just look for friendship."

"The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when they discover that someone else believes in them and is willing to trust them with their friendship."

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Silences make the real conversations between friends. Not the saying but the never needing to say is what counts."

- Margaret Lee Runbeck

"The most I can do for my friend is simply to be his friend. I have no wealth to bestow on him. If he knows that I am happy in loving him, he will want no other reward. Is not friendship divine in this?"

- Henry David Thoreau

"Having someone who understands is a great blessing for ourselves. Being someone who understands is a great blessing to others."

## Week 11 Evaluation

1. The reading this week was a collection of quotations describing friendship. Based on those quotations, what aspects of a friendship are exhibited in your relationship with the people you visit?
2. How would you describe friendship in your own words? Has your definition of friendship been affected at all by your friends at the nursing home?



## Week 12 Reading – “Miss Me But Let Me Go”

*Death. It's something we don't ever like to talk about, but it is a reality at the nursing home. Our friends there have lived many years -- 80, 90, even 100. We may be talking, laughing, and singing with them one day, and they can be gone the next.*

*It's only proper that for our last weekly reading we reflect on death a little. As we spend more and more time at the nursing home, sooner or later we will experience the death of a friend there. It's natural to be sad, but we should only be sad for ourselves, and the loss of that friendship. We don't mourn for them, because they have been set free from a body that was failing them, with hopes of being reunited with family and friends in another life.*

### **Miss Me But Let Me Go**

When I come to the end of the road  
And the sun has set for me,  
I want no rites in a gloom-filled room!  
Why cry for a soul set free?  
Miss me a little, but not too long  
And not with your head bowed low;  
Remember the love  
That we once shared  
Miss me, but let me go.

For this is a journey we all must take,  
And each must go alone;  
It's all a part of the Master's plan –  
A step on the road to home.  
When you are lonely  
And sick at heart  
Go to the friends we know  
And bury your sorrows  
In doing good deeds.  
Miss me, but let me go.

- Author unknown

## Week 12 Evaluation

1. Are you satisfied with your volunteering assignment? Do you feel like you have been able to connect with the residents you are assigned to visit? If not, would you have preferred to have been assigned to someone more outgoing, happy, in better health, etc?
2. Did you enjoy the weekly readings and evaluations? Did they contribute to your experience, or would you have rather just visited the nursing home and not been burdened by readings and evaluations?
3. Did you receive adequate orientation when you first started visiting the nursing home? Was your mentor helpful? Did your mentor keep in contact with you until you were comfortable visiting on your own, or were you forced to visit on your own before you were ready?
4. Are the paid staff at the nursing home (nurses, aides, administration) friendly when you speak to them? Are they willing to give you guidance when you need it, or do they make you feel unimportant?
5. Do you feel that you are serving an important role at the nursing home? Did you receive recognition for your dedication?
6. Do you think you'll continue to visit the nursing home now that your "obligation" is finished? How often will you visit?
7. If you were in charge of the Friends Across the Ages program, what one thing would you change?

# **APPENDIX F**

## **Volunteer Training Session Materials**

- Coordinator's Plan / Agenda
- Guidelines for In-Room Visits
- Tips for Interviewing an Older Adult
- Seven Verbal Communication Skills
- Five Non-Verbal Communication Skills
- Five Body Communication Skills
- Seven Levels of Communication

# **Volunteer Training Session Coordinator's Plan**

## **I. Gather, Welcome, Introductions**

## **II. Brief Introduction to Session**

## **III. Part One—Communication Skills**

- Explain Skills
- Practice with partner—5 minutes each. Topics: weather, family, jobs, etc.
- Recap:
  - How did it go?
  - Do you have any questions/comments?
  - What has been your greatest challenge (or, what do you think your greatest challenge will be) in communicating with nursing home residents? (Note these; come back to these later)

## **IV. Part Two—Visiting a Nursing Home Resident**

- Roundtable discussion (20 min) -- sample questions for discussion
  - How do you interact with residents who are hard of hearing?
  - How do you interact with residents who can not talk?
  - What do you say to residents who want you to buy something for them (i.e. a hat)
  - How do you react to residents with dementia?
  - How do you react to residents who want to hug you?
  - What are some of the best topics to talk about?
  - What do you do if you accidentally hit a sensitive topic?
  - What do you do when they ask you to come back *tomorrow*?
  - What about when they beg you not to leave?
  - Should you call a resident by their first name, or Mr. or Mrs.?
  - Should you wake up a resident who is sleeping?
  - Any other random questions?
- Any other questions or comments
- Final admonitions:
  - When in doubt, ask!
  - Do not help residents in and out of bed, to the bathroom, get dressed, etc.
  - Do not get involved in issues pertaining to medical care
  - Do not become confrontational with staff. Do not jump to conclusions.
  - Remember not to make promises you cannot keep: friendships are built on trust.
  - Keep us informed about how things are going (mentors and/or coordinators)
  - Remember what is important: your presence and your love—Just show up!
  - Do not be concerned if you cannot think of anything to say; do not be afraid of silence.
  - Thank you for coming!!

# **Guidelines For In-Room Visits**

## **How To Say Hello:**

Introduce yourself, shake hands or touch in some way if comfortable for you. Ask the resident's name, and try to remember it for future visits. Always treat them with the dignity and respect their long years deserve.

## **What To Talk About:**

Admire the resident's hairdo, or what they are wearing. Comment on possessions displayed in their room - keep in mind that most residents have given up a house or other residence for half a room, and the things you see may be treasured mementos from the past. Talk about current events – what is happening in the world, your state, town, office, home, etc. Such discussion with an interested listener gives residents valuable mental stimulation that can help them remain alert and involved. Try to find a subject of mutual interest - perhaps it is music, books, travel, sports, or children. Avoid controversial or depressing topics. Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer - "Tell me about your childhood". Be patient if the reply takes a while - residents have memories to sift through before finding the one that answers your question. Share a hobby, bring pictures (large size) of animals, flowers, or travel scenes. Ask your friends or family to join you in a visit or bring a pet (you will need to clear pets with the nursing home).

## **How To Talk:**

Try to converse at eye level - residents can become uncomfortable looking up from a wheelchair or bed for any length of time. Sit on a chair, or ask if you may sit on their bed. When addressing someone who is hard of hearing, be sure to let him or her see your face, or lean close and speak directly into one ear. Talk slowly and distinctly - you do not have to shout. To avoid startling a blind person, speak as soon as you enter the room – do not wait until you are right next to him or her, say where you are going to stand or sit. If such a resident is ambulatory, offer your arm for walking. Do not ever come up behind anyone sitting in a wheelchair and start moving the chair without warning - such unexpected motion can cause a real scare. A smile and touch can communicate your caring to residents who may not be able to speak to you or respond visibly in any way. Try to see through their disabilities and find the special person within.

## **How To Listen:**

Be attentive, be patient with repetition - encourage residents to share memories and experiences with you. Try to give your undivided attention to the story tellers. Respect confidences. Try not to think about the time or about other things you have going on.

## **How To Say Good-Bye:**

Watch for signs of fatigue such as labored breathing, lack of concentration, restlessness, drowsiness, inattentiveness, and be ready to leave when such occur. A 10 to 15 minute visit may be just right one day, while an hour might do another day. Use good judgment.

A cheery good-bye, and a promise to come again is an easy way to end your visit - but DO NOT make that promise IF you cannot keep it. Arrive when expected, and, to avoid disappointment, be sure that a resident receives your message if they are awaiting your visit and you cannot make it.

### **What To Do If...**

A resident becomes ill or agitated? Call a nurse or aide.

A resident needs help getting to the bathroom, in or out of a wheelchair or bed? Call a nurse or aide - though your intentions are good, you may not know the proper techniques for lifting and moving residents. Do not take chances.

A resident becomes upset or tearful during your visit because of a subject you feel uncomfortable with or not qualified to discuss, such as, death, financial matters, family resentment? Do not attempt to give advice. Notify the Volunteer Director/ Social Services person; they will see that appropriate follow-up or counseling is provided.

A resident asks for sweets, cigarettes, medication, etc? Do not offer any of these things. Check with the Nurse or Volunteer Director. Some may be allowed, but others may be prohibited due to dietary or medical restrictions. Do not rely on what the resident may tell you.

A resident asks you to remove vest or waist restraints? Do not remove or untie. Check with the Nurse. These restraints are worn to prevent injury and can be used or removed only under a doctor's order.

You see something in the facility that you do not understand or you hear something that causes concern? Talk it over with a staff member (Nurse or Volunteer Director) or the Administrator. (Or your Friends Across the Ages coordinators.)

REMEMBER: Knock before entering a room, address the resident and introduce yourself, explain that you are a volunteer visitor. If you should learn things of a confidential nature, please keep them confidential.

Also, please keep your *Friends Across the Ages* mentor and/or coordinators informed about how things are going. If you have questions or concerns, they will do their best to address them.

## **Tips for interviewing an older adult about their life experiences:**

- Use open-ended questions like "What was it like when...?" and "Describe..."
- As you listen to answers, other questions will come to mind. Asking follow-up questions will help you get more information.
- Use memory triggers like old photographs and keepsakes.
- Listen attentively and do not interrupt or correct. Maintain eye contact and show interest by leaning forward and nodding.
- If someone is talking about a painful or unhappy experience, show empathy through comments like, "That's very sad." Accept emotion as part of the process.
- If a person does not want to talk about something, that is o.k. -- just try another topic.
- Pay attention to signs that the person may be tired.
- Do not forget to thank them for sharing their stories with you.

## Seven Verbal Communication Skills

1) **Listening**—Physically and emotionally focus on the person who is talking; convey your interest and intention to listen. Face the person to whom you are listening; lean forward if you are sitting, relax, and maintain good eye contact. Use brief phrases like “yes, really?” and “how interesting!” to show the speaker you are attentive. Listening is a real art, and is just as important to effective communication as speaking.

2) **Seeking information and opinions**—Use questions to get a conversation going. The use of first names is important. Examples: “Mary, what do you think about this?” “Joe, I’d be interested in your opinion on this subject.”

3) **Clarifying**—Misunderstanding can arise when we assume we understand a speaker’s meaning. When the meaning is unclear, ask a question for clarification. Examples: “I’m not sure what you meant. Could you please restate that?” “Could you repeat that and say a little more about what you mean?” Clarification is complimentary, as it shows a speaker you are listening and attentive.

4) **Paraphrasing**—A listener restating a speaker’s thought or idea in his own words demonstrates careful listening and concern. Examples: “This is what I heard you saying...Is that it?” “Mark, your central concern is..” “David, your reactions seem to be...”

5) **Justifying**—This involves asking people to give reasons for what they have said, and should be done in a positive, non-argumentative way. Example: “Why do you say that?”

6) **Redirecting**—When speaking with more than one person, if one person continues to address all his or her questions and comments to you and another person is being very quiet, try re-directing. Using names, encourage the quiet person to answer questions, or encourage both of the others to talk with each other. If Mary continues to focus on you, you might respond to her question, “Tom, what do you think about Mary’s last question?” “How would you answer that Tom?”

7) **Affirming**—It is important to recognize and affirm the person who is talking. You might say, “Thank you for your comment,” or “That’s an interesting point.” Never tell a person he or she is wrong. Even when a comment seems unimportant, the speaker is important.



## Five Nonverbal Communication Skills

1) **Actions**—Actions are at least as important as words in communicating. The way a person stands or sits, uses his or her arms and legs, and makes or does not make eye contact can communicate not only the message, but the intent of the speaker. To help create a positive image and to communicate a positive message, every action should be relaxed, open, responsive, and attentive. Arms should be relaxed, legs crossed toward the listener, eyes and face showing pleasant expressions, and attention keen. Any deviation—legs crossed away from the listener, a frown or grimace, a bored or disinterested look—will undermine the most positive verbal message.

2) **Articulation**—The difference between effective and ineffective communication is often articulation. Proper articulation requires good vocal inflection, a clear and understandable rate of speech, a pleasant voice tone, and crisp enunciation. (For those hard of hearing this is especially important. One may need to speak louder than usual in order to be heard, and certainly clear enunciation and rate of speech are important as well.)

3) **Appearance**—Although a speaker can overcome a negative appearance to effectively communicate, an attractive appearance greatly enhances communication. Good posture, whether the speaker is seated or standing, appropriate, neat clothing, and control of distracting mannerisms all combine to provide a positive outward appearance.

4) **Awareness**—Although the audience may not be aware of them, effective communication can be enhanced or diminished by many factors. When the speaker is as physically close as possible to the listeners, when he or she pays strict attention to the audience, and when he or she responds quickly to questions and shifts in audience mood, communication effectiveness is enhanced.

5) **Appointments**—The appointments or setting greatly affect non-verbal communications. All participants, if possible, should sit on the same level, not some standing, some sitting. It may not always be possible to control the environment in a nursing home, but volunteers should be aware and do what they can to make things more pleasant and more accommodating for good conversation. This can include simple things like making sure the resident is as comfortable as possible, or perhaps going outside if that is feasible and the resident is open to it.

## Five Body Communication Skills

The letters **S – O – L – E – R** can remind us of the five basic things we can do with our bodies to let others know that we are involved with them.

\* **S**: Face the other person **Squarely**

This is the basic posture of involvement. If you face someone squarely, you say by your posture “I’m available to you; I choose to be with you.” Turning your body away from another person while you talk to him or her lessens your involvement with that person. Even if you are seated in a group, you can turn in some way toward the person you are speaking to. By directing your body toward the other person, you say “I am with you right now.”

\* **O**: Adopt an **Open** posture.

Crossed arms and crossed legs can be signs of lessened involvement with others. An open posture—especially open arms—is a sign you are open to the other person and to what he or she has to say. An open posture is a non-defensive position.

\* **L**: **Lean** toward the other.

This is another sign of presence, being-with, availability, involvement. Watch two people sometime in a restaurant booth who are really engaged in conversation. Very often they are both leaning forward as a natural sign of their involvement. Then look at people who are leaning back and looking around the restaurant. They seem to be bored. They certainly do not look involved.

\* **E**: Maintain good **Eye** contact.

As you speak with another person, spend much of the time looking directly at him or her. Some object and say that such eye contact is unnatural; they see it as staring the other person down and think that it makes people feel uncomfortable. However, the two people who are deep in conversation in the restaurant booth have almost constant eye contact with each other. It does not look unnatural at all, because they are deeply involved with each other.

\* **R**: Try to be at home or relatively **Relaxed** while attending.

If you are really involved with others and want to communicate with them, you can be both intense and, in a sense, relaxed at the same time. You are relaxed because you are doing something natural. If you are attending to another person but you are on edge and rigid, then you are not at home with this person, and perhaps it would be best to deal openly with your anxiety. If you are taking an oral exam from a teacher, you may be attending to him or her but still be very much on edge. But if you are the same way in talking with a friend, you should begin to ask yourself, “What is going on here? What is making me so nervous?”

## **Each person brings three social needs to the relationship:**

- 1) **Need for belonging**—Feeling connected.
- 2) **Need for significance**—Having gifts recognized and feeling responsible.
- 3) **Need for acceptance**—Be positive and build each other up.

## **Five Levels of Communication**

- 1) **Cliché conversation.** Discussing “safe” public information takes place during the first few minutes of a meeting—or even for the first few meetings. Topics include the weather, family and friends, and current affairs.
- 2) **Sharing information and facts.** People talk generally about events, ideas, and facts, but not about themselves, their commitments, and their beliefs.
- 3) **Sharing ideas and opinions.** This deeper level of communication involves a willingness to talk about personal ideas and opinions. There is some risk-taking at this level.
- 4) **Sharing feelings.** People are willing to risk telling group members what they feel, not just what they think. Members are less protective and more open.
- 5) **Peak Communication.** The deepest level of communication involves openness, transparency, and self-disclosure. It is a risky and rare but powerful level of communication. Think of a close relationship you have; what you most remember is probably peak communication.

# **APPENDIX G**

## **Other Sample Materials**

- Three samples of our monthly “Nursing Home News” email, sent out to all our volunteers.
- Two samples of our quarterly newsletter “The Bridge”, mailed to all our volunteers, supporters, and friends of the organization.
- Sample certificate (for volunteers who complete their 12 weeks).
- Sample fundraising letter
- “How to run a Bingo-A-Thon” event
- Sample Bingo-A-Thon flyer
- Sample Bingo-A-Thon pledge sheet

# NURSING HOME NEWS – SEPT. 2005

Welcome back to all returning students! We'll have some new volunteer recruitment activities this month, along with some group events and other ways to get involved.

This is also a good chance for us to remind everyone that if you've ever thought of becoming a one-on-one volunteer, now would be a good time. One-on-one volunteers commit to do 12 weekly visits of one hour each. You will be assigned to visit a nursing home resident with the hopes of forming a friendship with them. Contact us for more details – either by replying to this email or calling us at 381-1117.

Finally, we want to point out that we are having a singing event this month at a nursing home we have never been to before – Woodlands Care Center. It is located at 7207 SW 24<sup>th</sup> Ave. and you can get the directions on our web site by clicking on the link below:

<http://www.acrosstheages.org/directions.asp>

---

## SEPTEMBER GROUP EVENTS

**Thursday, September 1st, -- United Way “Day of Caring”** –The United Way is organizing a “Day of Caring” which will rally over 200 volunteers who desire to make a difference in the lives of people in our community. These volunteers will be giving their day to participate in a wide range of community projects. Some of them will be going to local nursing homes to volunteer and we are proud to be taking part in coordinating this effort. Email us for more information!

**Tuesday, September 6th, 6:30-7:30PM – Singing Night!** – We will be visiting a new nursing home at which we've never had an event – *Woodlands Care Center*. We need **YOU** to make our group complete. Just bring yourself, your voice, or any instrument you'd like to play. Everyone is welcome to come along and help sing (words to all songs will be provided) and **no talent required**, any voice will do. Meet us in the dining room. You're welcome to RSVP (by replying to this email), so we'll know to be looking for you.

**Tuesday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, 10AM-3PM – University of Florida Volunteer Fair** – Come see *Friends Across the Ages* as we promote our program to the student community. The event will take place at the Reitz Union colonnade.

**Tuesday, September 27th, 7:00-8:30PM – Volunteer Training Session** – This training session is highly recommended for all new volunteers, especially one-to-one volunteers. But everyone who would like to learn something or participate in the discussion is welcome. We will talk about communication skills, and well as other elder care related topics. We'll also spend time answering questions from our new volunteers. The

meeting will be held in the conference room at Barr Systems; please contact us for directions. If you plan to attend, please reply to this email so we'll know how many people to expect. [note: If you would like to become a one-to-one volunteer, please let us know so we can meet with you individually at our office.]

**Thursday, September 29th, 3-4PM -- Birthday celebration --** Help us wish a happy birthday to all residents of *The Manor at Gainesville* with birthdays in September. Meet us in the dining room where we'll have singing and cake. Volunteers are needed to help gather the residents together, serve the cake, sing, clean up, etc.

---

### **DONATIONS ARE NEEDED!**

Please consider making a donation to *Friends Across the Ages* to help us continue to serve our elders in nursing homes. Our organization is a charity and donations are tax-deductible. Your donation can pay for a bus trip, Bingo supplies, and volunteer recruitment. Donations can be made with a credit card on our web site ([www.acrosstheages.org](http://www.acrosstheages.org)), or by check made out to Friends Across the Ages and sent to:

Friends Across the Ages  
P.O. Box 14698  
Gainesville, FL 32604

---

### **MORE INFORMATION**

Remember, be sure to check above to find out the nursing home at which an event will be held. Directions to all the nursing homes can be found at:

<http://www.acrosstheages.org/directions.asp>

All events are open to everyone (children are welcome at most events, please inquire). If you've never been to a nursing home before, feel free to reply to this email and let the coordinators (Steve and Allison Blay) know what events you'll be attending, so they will be looking for you. You can also call them at 381-1117.

---

This is the September 2005 newsletter of Friends Across the Ages nursing home outreach.

Visit our website at <http://www.acrosstheages.org>

To be removed from this list, send a blank email to [unsubscribe@acrosstheages.org](mailto:unsubscribe@acrosstheages.org)

# NURSING HOME NEWS – OCT. 2005

A new issue of our quarterly newsletter, **The Bridge**, was just finished and is now up on our website at:

[http://www.acrosstheages.org/news/newsletter\\_fall\\_2005.pdf](http://www.acrosstheages.org/news/newsletter_fall_2005.pdf)

You should also be receiving a copy of it in the mail in a couple days. If you are not receiving it in the mail, it might be because we don't have your correct address. Reply to this email with your U.S. Postal address and we'll update our list.

---

## OCTOBER GROUP EVENTS

**Friday, October 7th, 11AM – 1:30PM – BUS TRIP TO PARADE** – A group of residents from *The Manor at Gainesville* will be going to the U.F. Homecoming Parade. About 6-8 residents plan to go, and we will need lots of help with this event. Volunteers will be needed to meet us either at the nursing home or at the parade at a pre-determined location. Volunteers will help with holding space for us along University Ave, helping residents get from the bus to the parade site, help with getting lunch for the residents, and so many other things that usually come up! In order that we know how many volunteers we'll have, please RSVP by replying to this email if you can help. Lunch will be provided for all volunteers.

**Saturday, October 15th, 10-11AM -- "Spooky Bingo"** -- This event will be held in the main dining room at *Park Meadows* nursing home. Volunteers help residents play, call out the numbers, and give out prizes. Even though Halloween will still be a couple weeks away, we have a feeling there will be some Halloween-themed prizes to be given out! Thanks goes to a "life group" from Grace United Methodist Church for coordinating the volunteers and prizes for this event.

**Sunday, October 23rd, 3:30-4:30PM -- "Halloween Goody Bags"** -- The Friends Across the Ages "Interfaith Coalition" is organizing this event with the residents of *Gainesville Health Care Center*. We will be teaming up with the residents and helping them make Halloween "Goody Bags". Our ultimate goal is to find a way to get those goody bags to children who were affected by Hurricane Katrina. (Most of the nursing home residents do watch TV and have been very moved by the suffering out there and have wanted to help out in some way.) But, we know it might be difficult to get the candy out there, so if that doesn't end up working out it will still be put to good use – the goody bags will be sent home with grandchildren and children of family members and nursing home staff members. We will need lots of volunteers for this event so please come join us! All supplies are provided by Friends Across the Ages, just bring yourself. Meet us in the day room on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor – ask at the front desk if you need directions.

**Wednesday, October 26th, 7PM -- "Coffee House" Volunteer Gathering --** All volunteers are welcome to join us for this gathering. We especially welcome all new volunteers to attend to meet other volunteers, share stories, and discuss questions or concerns. First cup of coffee is on us -- simply meet us at Maude's Cafe, 101 SE 2nd Pl, in the Sun Center next to the Hippodrome. Please RSVP if you can so we'll be looking for you.

**Thursday, October 27th, 3-4PM -- Birthday celebration --** Help us wish a happy birthday to all residents of *The Manor at Gainesville* with birthdays in September. Meet us in the dining room where we'll have singing and cake. Volunteers are needed to help gather the residents together, serve the cake, sing, clean up, etc.

---

### **DONATIONS ARE NEEDED!**

Please consider making a donation to *Friends Across the Ages* to help us continue to serve our elders in nursing homes. Our organization is a charity and donations are tax-deductible. Your donation can pay for a bus trip, Bingo supplies, and volunteer recruitment. Donations can be made with a credit card on our web site ([www.acrosstheages.org](http://www.acrosstheages.org)), or by check made out to Friends Across the Ages and sent to:

Friends Across the Ages  
P.O. Box 14698  
Gainesville, FL 32604

---

### **MORE INFORMATION**

Remember, be sure to check above to find out the nursing home at which an event will be held. Directions to all the nursing homes can be found at:

<http://www.acrosstheages.org/directions.asp>

All events are open to everyone (children are welcome at most events, please inquire). If you've never been to a nursing home before, feel free to reply to this email and let the coordinators (Steve and Allison Blay) know what events you'll be attending, so they will be looking for you. You can also call them at 381-1117.

---

This is the October 2005 newsletter of Friends Across the Ages nursing home outreach.

Visit our website at <http://www.acrosstheages.org>

To be removed from this list, send a blank email to [unsubscribe@acrosstheages.org](mailto:unsubscribe@acrosstheages.org)



## NURSING HOME NEWS – NOV. 2005

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Friends Across the Ages “Interfaith Coalition,” along with other *Friends* volunteers, organized a big event with the residents of [Gainesville Health Care Center](#). About 15 Friends volunteers attended, and at least as many or more residents. Volunteers teamed up with the residents in helping them make and decorate Halloween “goody bags”. Some of the goody bags were kept by the residents, for themselves or for family members. But most of the goody bags (about 75 of them) were boxed up and delivered to Trinity United Methodist Church. A representative from TUMC went to Mobile, Alabama to help with the hurricane relief efforts, and delivered the candy bags to children out there. This is just one in a series of similar events – the nursing home residents are so often the recipients of “charity”, but how beautiful an occasion it is when they get to experience the joy of helping others!

The event was made even the more special by an unplanned appearance from the *Nueva Alianza* Hispanic student group from St. Augustine Church who brought about 10 singers and 2 guitarists, and played music for everyone while they were hard at work. Our thanks goes out to them!

---

## NOVEMBER GROUP EVENTS

**Monday, October 31st, 2:30 - 3:30PM – Halloween Party** – Don’t forget this afternoon is the Halloween party at [The Manor at Gainesville](#). Volunteers are needed to help gather the residents together, give out candy, and just to interact with the residents so that everybody has a good time. Wear your Halloween costume if you’d like.

**Tuesday, November 8th, 6:30-7:30PM – Interfaith Coalition Meeting** – The Friends Across the Ages *Interfaith Coalition* is a group of people from many different churches and faith backgrounds that get together once every two months to talk about issues related to nursing home volunteering. They also hold interfaith events at nursing homes (such as the Halloween Goody Bags event mentioned above). The meetings are held at Barr Systems. If you’d like to join as a representative from your religious background, contact us at 381-1117.

**Tuesday, November 15th, 7 - 8PM – Singing Night!** – A group of us will be going to [Woodlands Care Center](#) and singing for the residents. We need **YOU** to make our group complete. Just bring yourself, your voice, or any instrument you’d like to play. Everyone is welcome to come along and help sing (words to all songs will be provided – we sing folk songs and a few old church hymns) and **no talent required**, any voice will do. Meet us in the dining room. You’re welcome to RSVP (by replying to this email), so we’ll know to be looking for you.

**Thursday, November 17th, 3-4PM -- Birthday celebration --** Help us wish a happy birthday to all residents of *The Manor at Gainesville* with birthdays in November. Meet us in the dining room where we'll have singing and cake. Volunteers are needed to help gather the residents together, serve the cake, sing, clean up, etc.

---

### **DONATIONS ARE NEEDED!**

Please consider making a donation to *Friends Across the Ages* to help us continue to serve our elders in nursing homes. Our organization is a charity and donations are tax-deductible. Your donation can pay for a bus trip, Bingo supplies, and volunteer recruitment. Donations can be made with a credit card on our web site ([www.acrosstheages.org](http://www.acrosstheages.org)), or by check made out to Friends Across the Ages and sent to:

Friends Across the Ages  
P.O. Box 14698  
Gainesville, FL 32604

---

### **MORE INFORMATION**

Remember, be sure to check above to find out the nursing home at which an event will be held. Directions to all the nursing homes can be found at:

<http://www.acrosstheages.org/directions.asp>

All events are open to everyone (children are welcome at most events, please inquire). If you've never been to a nursing home before, feel free to reply to this email and let the coordinators (Steve and Allison Blay) know what events you'll be attending, so they will be looking for you. You can also call them at 381-1117.

---

This is the November 2005 newsletter of Friends Across the Ages nursing home outreach.

Visit our website at <http://www.acrosstheages.org>

To be removed from this list, send a blank email to [unsubscribe@acrosstheages.org](mailto:unsubscribe@acrosstheages.org)



# THE BRIDGE

*Bridging Generations with Ageless Friendship*

*Faith in Action Friends Across the Ages is a Nursing Home Outreach in Gainesville, Florida*

A Quarterly Publication  
**vol. 3, no. 2**  
**Spring 2005**

## Directors' Message

### Chili Cook-off a huge success!

STEVE and  
ALLISON  
BLAY

*Friends Across  
the Ages, Inc.*



To our  
volunteers and  
supporters,

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to S.P.I.C.E. (Special Projects Interagency Council for the Elderly) for so generously donating the proceeds from their "Chili Cook-off" event to *Friends Across the Ages*. *Friends* has recently become a member of S.P.I.C.E., which is a co-op of various organizations, businesses and agencies that serve the elderly in the Gainesville community. This was their third annual chili cook-off and it was a huge success! It was held at Hospice of North Central Florida, and approximately 30 different kinds of chili were entered in 3 categories -- Traditional, Healthy, and Exotic. Local celebrities judged the chili, including Paige Beck from TV- 20 news, and Storm Roberts from 98.5 KTK radio. The committee who organized this chili cook-off put a lot of hard work into it and we sincerely appreciate all they did.

On the subject on thank-you's, you will find a list of our new volunteers and new board members on page two. We are very grateful to all who continue to support the efforts of *Friends*!



Alfonso Lesesne made this Valentine's day card for his granddaughter Madeline. He was assisted by volunteer Vi Asmuth and her granddaughter Carli Sue.

## Love is in the air

### Home-made Valentines express love and thanks

On Saturday, February 12, the *Friends Across the Ages* Interfaith Coalition hosted a Valentine craft event at *The Manor at Gainesville*. Approximately 20 volunteers and as many residents participated in this event. They worked together to make valentines for the residents' family and friends as well as the nursing home staff.

Those who participated in the event said that it was a lot of fun, and residents especially seemed to enjoy the chance to give their loved ones something special. Alfonso Lesesne, pictured above, made a valentine for his granddaughter. "I appreciated the help because it's good for her to know her grandfather was thinking about her," he says with a smile.

Recipients of the homemade valentines were greatly touched. Rezella Howard, who faithfully visits her uncle Annias Gaskin, received a valentine made for her by Mr. Gaskin with the assistance of volunteer Alex Brody. She said that it made both her and her uncle smile when he gave it to her. "It was very nice, to know that someone helped him make it, and that he thought to give it to me."

Board member and volunteer Vi Asmuth, who holds a Ph.D. in communication, thinks simple things like Valentines can make a significant contribution to a positive atmosphere at the nursing home.

She recently completed a study on the relationships between C.N.A.s (nurses aides) and residents of care facilities. She says that many C.N.A.s expressed to her what a difference it makes to feel appreciated by the residents. As one C.N.A. put it: "I really appreciate them saying thank you. It means more to me than anything else."

The *Friends* Interfaith coalition sponsors events like this every other month. The idea is to give volunteers from many different faiths a chance to work together in doing something special with nursing home residents. For their next project, they are going to assist with the *Friends Across the Ages* 2nd annual Bingo-A-Thon! (Details of Bingo-a-thon on page 2.)



On Thursday, February 17, TV-20 news aired a story about *Friends Across the Ages*. Featured in the story were interviews with volunteer Jon Shinn and resident Connie Kolvas, pictured above. Connie's poignant remarks included: "Everyone needs a friend," and "It helps us to feel connected to the world out there when something like this happens."

## Bingo-a-thon: April 2, 2005!

*Friends Across the Ages* will be having its second annual "Bingo-A-Thon" on Saturday, April 2nd. The event will be held at 5 local nursing homes, and more than 50 volunteers will be needed to help play bingo games with nursing home residents. Also needed are donations to make this fundraiser a success! All proceeds benefit *Friends*. For more information on volunteering at the Bingo-A-Thon, or to make a donation, call 381-1117 or email us at [info@acrosstheages.org](mailto:info@acrosstheages.org). You can also sign up to volunteer or make a donation online at [www.bingoathon.com](http://www.bingoathon.com).

## THE BRIDGE

Published quarterly by Friends Across the Ages, Inc.

Friends Across the Ages Board of Directors:

**George Hamilton**, President

**Bob Tancig**, Vice-President

**Martha Green**, Treasurer

**M. Violet Asmuth, Ph.D.**, Secretary

**Merton Chumack**      **Karen Epple, L.C.S.W.**

**Rev. Bob Ellenberg**      **Ruth Hazen**

**Jean Lansford**      **Leanne Mohler**

**Angela Monroe**      **Jon Shinn**

**Keri Shinn**      **Robert Slaton, M.D.**

**Steve and Allison Blay**, Executive Directors

Please consider Friends Across the Ages in your charitable giving priorities. Your tax deductible donation can be sent to the address below, or made by credit card at [www.acrosstheages.org](http://www.acrosstheages.org).

Graphic design and layout by Jay Magee Creative Types --  
Jacksonville, Florida, 904.880.0439 or [www.creativetypes.net](http://www.creativetypes.net)



This year my friend Dianne and I  
Joined Friends Across the Ages  
It's run by Steve and Allison  
But for youth, they could be sages

Matching up the residents  
With Volunteers who care,  
FATA creates new friends  
True happiness is there.

Once a week like clockwork,  
We climb into our car  
And drive out to Palm Garden,  
Which isn't very far

There we visit 107  
To chat with our new friends;  
We speak of many things we share,  
Too soon our chatter ends.

Our friends are Ruth and Betty,  
Two very different gals.  
They fit together very well  
In fact, I'd say they're pals.

Betty is now 84  
St. Augustine was home;

## Resident Spotlight: Betty Edenfield and Ruth Hovland

by Gretchen Grigsby

Gretchen and her friend Dianne Walsh  
are Betty and Ruth's  
Friends Across the Ages

(pictured from left to right, Dianne,  
Betty, Ruth, and Gretchen)

She loved her little house so much  
She never thought to roam.

A fall, however, made it clear  
That she would need more aid,  
So with her cheerful attitude  
A change of place was made.

Ruth was from Wisconsin  
She is 92.

She has a lovely daughter,  
And a handsome grandson too!!

She's quiet but quite friendly  
At first she was quite still.  
And we, two noisy, chatty girls  
Feared that she might be ill.

But soon we grew to know her,  
She speaks of family dear.  
So many things she grew to share  
She learned she need not fear.

So Dianne and I feel happy  
As Wednesday rolls around;  
To spend an hour with Betty and Ruth  
Two fine, new friends we've found.

## Friends Across the Ages New Volunteers and New Board Members

We would like to recognize and thank the following people who have become *Friends Across the Ages* one-on-one volunteers in the new year:

### The Manor at Gainesville

Stephanie Briefman

Alex Brody

Deirdre Fitzwilliam

Nettie Van Wye

### Park Meadows

Vi Asmuth

Eric Dorman

### North Florida Rehab and Spec Care

Erica Cook

Melissa Harris

Laura DiAlbarto

### Univeristy Place

Maria "Pili" Paz

Colleen Schenker

Theresa Toby

### Palm Garden

Catherine Alford

Alexandra Lester

Jennifer Pitts

Erica Ross

We would also like to welcome three new members to our Board of Directors. **Karen Epple** is a social worker with much experience working with the elderly. **Jean Lansford** is a local business woman and a dedicated *Friends* volunteer who has recently taken on the coordination of our program at University Place nursing home. **Angela Monroe** is a native of Gainesville and a Senior Advertising Sales Rep. for the Gainesville Sun. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to our outgoing board members, **Ann Doak** and **Doris Whittaker**. Ann is leaving after one year of excellent and generous service to the board. She is moving to St. Augustine. We will miss you, Ann! Doris is retiring from the Board of Directors after many years of dedicated service to this organization. She will still continue to be involved in many other ways however!



# THE BRIDGE

*Bridging Generations with Ageless Friendship*

*Faith in Action Friends Across the Ages is a Nursing Home Outreach in Gainesville, Florida*

A Quarterly Publication  
**vol. 3, no. 3**  
**Summer 2005**

## Directors' Message

### Branching out to Gainesville Health Care Center

**STEVE and  
ALLISON  
BLAY**

*Friends Across  
the Ages, Inc.*



#### To our volunteers and supporters,

We are very pleased to announce that as of May, we have branched out once again to include another nursing home among those served by *Friends Across the Ages*. Gainesville Health Care Center, located near Shands and the UF campus, has over 150 residents. Sandy Johnson, the activity director, has been extremely enthusiastic and helpful as she has welcomed *Friends Across the Ages* volunteers. She says she thinks that *Friends* is an important organization, and she is thrilled to have us on board.

We began our volunteering venture at GHCC on Mother's Day when nine volunteers went there to distribute carnations as part of our National Nursing Home Week activities. We are now working to get our one-to-one visitation program established at GHCC and so far have met many wonderful residents. A small group of one-to-one volunteers will continue to visit there every Sunday.

The addition of GHCC brings the total number of nursing homes served by *Friends Across the Ages* to six!



**James Chandler and Stephanie Smith enjoy a round of Bingo with the help of volunteer Suzy Diner (middle) at the Friends Across the Ages 2nd annual "Bingo-a-thon."**

## Friendship, Fun, and Future

### 2nd Annual Bingo-a-thon a success in many ways

On Saturday April 2nd, excited cries of "Bingo!!!" echoed across nursing homes in Gainesville. That's because *Friends Across the Ages* held its second annual "Bingo-a-thon" that day. Over 70 volunteers and over 100 nursing home residents participated at 5 different nursing homes, and over \$4300 was raised for *Friends*.

The concept of the "Bingo-a-thon" was developed last year. The event has three goals: to provide an opportunity for nursing home residents and volunteers to interact and have fun together, to raise awareness in the community about *Friends Across the Ages* and its mission, and to be an annual fundraiser for *Friends* so that it can continue its mission for many years to come. Thanks to many volunteers, donors, and supporters, this year's Bingo-a-thon was even more successful than last year.

Although the idea of a "Bingo-a-thon" might be new to many people, the concept is quite simple, and it works much like a walk-a-thon or dance-a-thon. Bingo games were held at each of the five different nursing homes that *Friends* served. 10-15 volunteers were recruited for each nursing home to help the residents play Bingo for fun and prizes. The fundraising aspect of the event involved donors pledging a particular volunteer a certain amount per Bingo game, or pledging a certain amount for every volunteer that participated.

Prizes for the residents were donated by various supporters of *Friends* and included lotions, powders, jewelry, knick-knacks, clothing, hand-made pillows and afghans. Each winning resident also received a small "winner" medal, and many residents liked these so much they have decided to keep wearing them every day!

After the Bingo games were over, the volunteers came together for a wrap-up party in the beautiful courtyard at Barr Systems. Salads, sandwiches, and cookies donated by Crispers were served, as well as ice cream donated by DeConna and other delicious dishes prepared by board members. Prizes (gift certificates donated by local businesses) were awarded to all volunteers, in appreciation for their participation.

We would like once again to express our deep gratitude to all volunteers and donors who made the event such a success!



**The youngest "Bingo-a-thon" volunteers: from left to right, Ena Schentrup, Max Schentrup, (held by his mom Anne Schentrup), and Ashley Sarkees.**

## New volunteers and Board members

We are pleased to welcome the following new volunteers so far this summer:

*Teresa Abercrombie--Gainesville Health Care*

*Celeste Meyer--University Place*

*Anees Moopen--Park Meadows*

*Nettie Van Wyen--The Manor at Gainesville*

We are also pleased to welcome two new members to our board of directors:

*Gretchen Grigsby and Dianne Walsh,*

Both are *Friends* volunteers at Palm Garden and both are also retired teachers.

## THE BRIDGE

Published quarterly by Friends Across the Ages, Inc.

Friends Across the Ages Board of Directors:

**George Hamilton, President**

**Bob Tancig, Vice-President**

**Martha Green, Treasurer**

**M. Violet Asmuth, Ph.D., Secretary**

**Merton Chumack      Rev. Sh'mal Ellenberg**

**Karen Epple, LCSW      Gretchen Grigsby**

**Ruth Hazen      Jean Lansford**

**Leanne Mohler      Jon and Keri Shinn**

**Robert Slaton, M.D.      Dianne Walsh**

**Steve and Allison Blay, Executive Directors**

*Please consider Friends Across the Ages in your charitable giving priorities. Your tax deductible donation can be sent to the address below, or made by credit card at [www.acrosstheages.org](http://www.acrosstheages.org).*

*Graphic design and layout by Jay Magee Creative Types --  
Jacksonville, Florida, 904.880.0439 or [www.creativetypes.net](http://www.creativetypes.net)*



## Resident Spotlight: Warren Bowshot

by Eric Dorman,

Mr. Bowshot's  
Friend Across the Ages

(pictured are Mr. Bowshot and Eric  
with Mr. Bowshot's model of the  
*Mayflower*)

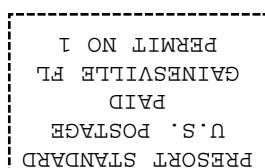
Before I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Bowshot, I was shown to his room; it was truly a spectacle. Most nursing home rooms I had seen in the past consisted of a bed, a television, and perhaps a few personal trinkets scattered around. His was much more complex. Besides those usual items there were shelves put into the walls and a full dresser filled to the brim with all sorts of paperwork overflowing out of each drawer. Underneath the shelves was a makeshift desk on which were set numerous little containers, each with its own set of tools within, and in the center was a half completed model of the Titanic.

On the first shelf, lined up in perfect rainbow order, were little paint cans. On the second were glues, pencils, brushes, and a stack of old instruction booklets. Finally, on the third shelf I saw a beautiful replica of the Wright brothers' first flight, complete with details and historically accurate specifications. I recall wondering where he purchased such an exquisite piece, only to find out later that it was of his own construction, and what significance it had to make it here with him. As I stood there in

awe I heard the gruff voice that I would recognize so well in so little time asking what I was doing at his desk.

The last four months have been a wonderful experience for me as I take an hour every week out of my busy student life to come sit with one of the most interesting men I have ever met. Mr. Bowshot has done more in his life than most could imagine. He spent a few years in the military during the Second World War, flying in planes over Europe. He pursued his incredible musical talent by touring the country and even playing in Dean Cooper's band for some time. After that, Mr. Bowshot entered into the field of engineering and built steel mills, among several other things.

Above all, his stories of wanderlust and the value of hands-on experience have really made an impact on my life. I can relate to his desire to travel and his views that only so much work can be done from behind a desk. Every day I go in I see some new model sitting on his desk and I know that this simple hobby is representative of the life of Mr. Bowshot and I feel privileged to be even a small part of it.



**Friends Across the Ages, Inc.**  
**PO Box 14698**  
**Gainesville FL 32604**



# CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

\_\_\_\_\_

This certificate is awarded to

\_\_\_\_\_

Who is hereby designated a

FRIEND ACROSS THE AGES

For exemplary service and outstanding commitment  
to visiting our brothers and sisters in nursing homes

\_\_\_\_\_  
Coordinator, Friends Across the Ages

Date: \_\_\_\_\_







## **FRIENDS ACROSS THE AGES**

P. O. Box 14698  
Gainesville, FL 32604  
352.381.1117

<http://www.acrosstheages.org>  
[info@acrosstheages.org](mailto:info@acrosstheages.org)

### **Board of Directors**

George Hamilton, *President*  
Bob Tancig, *Vice President*  
Martha Green, *Treasurer*  
Dr. M. Violet Asmuth, *Secretary*  
Merton Chumack  
Ann Doak  
Rev. Bob Sh'mal Ellenberg  
Ruth Hazen  
Leanne Mohler  
Jon Shinn  
Keri Shinn  
Dr. Robert Slaton  
Doris Whittaker

### **Interfaith Coalition**

Abiding Faith Christian Ministries  
Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is  
Emmanuel Mennonite Church  
First Baptist Church  
Gainesville Vipassana Society  
Highlands Presbyterian Church  
Holy Faith Catholic Church  
ISKCON of Alachua  
Micanopy United Methodist Church  
P'nai Or Jewish Renewal  
Congregation  
Presbyterian Disciples of Christ  
Student Center  
Religious Society of Friends  
(Quakers)  
Shiloh United Methodist Church  
St. Augustine Catholic Church  
Trinity United Methodist Church  
University United Methodist Church

### **Staff**

Steve and Allison Blay,  
*Executive Directors*



December, 2004

Dear Friends,

It was over six years ago when we first stepped into a nursing home as volunteers, and we don't regret a minute of the time we have spent there. In fact, even as our responsibilities have grown as executive directors of this organization, we still make time to be volunteers ourselves (you'll see us pictured above with two of our best friends, **Annie Mae** and **Jethro**).

We hope you enjoy receiving our quarterly newsletter "The Bridge". Each December we enclose an envelope and ask you to send a contribution to help us financially. We hope you'll be able to help us this year. *We rely heavily on individuals like you*, because we lack the vast national support base available to larger charities.

The need for programs like *Friends Across the Ages* is great. Imagine how it feels to live in a nursing home and **never** receive a visitor. Some studies show this may be true of as many as **60%** of nursing home residents. Unfortunately, loss of dignity, hope, and connection with the outside world remain a real part of nursing home life. *Friends* is trying to bring new life to these wonderful people. Our volunteers help restore dignity, and alleviate the pervasive sense of loneliness.

This past year we trained over **40 new one-to-one volunteers**. We coordinated **35 group activities at 5 different nursing homes**. *Friends* volunteers tell us that the connections they make at the nursing home change their lives forever. We have many exciting plans, hopes and dreams for the new year, including **continuing and expanding our new group volunteer training**, which supplements our individual training of volunteers. We are also hoping to **expand our service area** from five nursing homes to **all seven Gainesville area nursing homes**. But we cannot remain a vibrant organization without your financial help. Please help us to continue to bring the beautiful gift of friendship to those in nursing homes.

We want to thank you for all you do for us already, and thank you in advance for your continued support. Many blessings to you in the new year.

Gratefully,

Steve and Allison Blay, *Executive Directors*





## HOW TO RUN THE BINGO-A-THON

If you're reading this, you've been put in charge of running the bingo-a-thon at one of our nursing homes. Don't panic! There will be help from the Activity Department, and all the steps are outlined below. Just follow them in order, that's all there is to it. There are at least two coordinators for each nursing home. Decide now with your teammate who will be Coordinator 1 and 2, or if you have more than 2 coordinators divide tasks however you like.

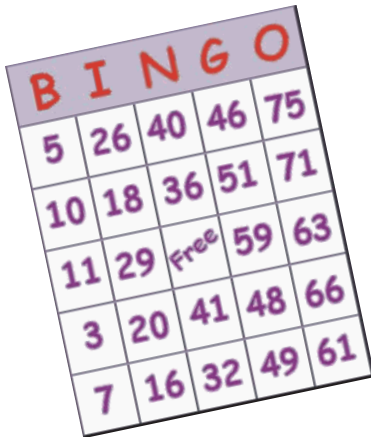
### **Supplies Needed (all are provided):**

- **"Bingo-a-thon" Poster and signs, plus balloons.**
  - **Pre-made name badges for coordinators**
  - **Pre-made name badges for volunteers**
  - **Blank stick-on nametags for residents and unexpected volunteers**
  - **Markers for writing name tags**
  - **Sign in sheet**
  - **Big manila envelope for collecting pledges**
  - **"Pledges Collected" sheet**
  - **Big crates of prizes for nursing home residents**
  - **Bingo Scoresheets**
  - **Maps to wrap-up party**
  - **Bingo cards, Bingo Numbers, Bingo Markers (provided by nursing home – ask the Activity Staff Person).**
  - **Pens for signing in**
1. Be there at 1PM wearing your name badge. Find the Activity Staff Person, introduce yourself, and have them help you set up a "sign in" table near the entry doors of the nursing home. Depending on weather and logistics, the sign in table can be either outside or inside. On the sign in table you should have:
    - Sign in sheets and pens
    - Blank name tags and markers
    - "Pledges Collected" sheet (for your use) & manila envelope
  2. Hang the big poster in the room where the actual bingo games will be played (ask the Activity Coordinator where). There are balloons we are providing too – and most of the nursing homes have told us they will provide helium; just ask. Float some helium balloons in the bingo room. The other signs can be used for the front door (put a couple balloons up on front door too), sign in table, and another door (if necessary).

3. Coordinator 1 should staff the sign in table from 1:45 to at least 2:15 in case some volunteers arrive late. When a volunteer arrives:
  - Welcome them! Have them sign in and get their name tag (or make one).
  - Ask if they have a pledge form to turn in. Volunteers are being asked ahead of time to bring their pledge forms and all pledges collected. Put their name on the “Pledges Collected” sheet, the amount of pledges listed on their pledge form, and the actual amount of money (cash and checks) they turned in to you. Hopefully these two values will be the same, but if not let them know that they will be contacted by us at a later date to get the rest of the pledges.
  - If someone didn’t get any pledges, that is fine. Just have them sign the “sign in sheet” but don’t list them on the pledge sheet. It isn’t a requirement that all volunteers get pledges.
  - If someone collected pledges but forgot to bring the pledges with them, ask them approximately how many \$ they got in pledges, and put that down in the “Total Pledges” column. Put \$0 in the “Amount turned in today” column.
4. While Coordinator 1 is at the sign in table, Coordinator 2 should be setting up for Bingo. As volunteers show up, they can help out too. Setting up involves:
  - Gathering the residents into the playing area. Have the Activity Coordinator help locate residents and give each resident a name tag.
  - Giving out Bingo cards and Bingo markers to residents (the Activity Coordinator will provide these).
  - Assigning one volunteer to be the “number caller” for all 5 games (alternately, volunteers can take turns doing this job).
  - Assigning one volunteer to be the “Prize Awarder”. This volunteer gives out the prizes, and when not busy with that walks around the room giving out candy to residents and volunteers (have them ask the Activity Coordinator which, if any, residents can’t have candy, and which need sugar free candy – there’s plenty of that too).
  - Assigning each remaining volunteer to “team up” with a particular nursing home resident. We use the term “team up” instead of “help” because some of the residents may not feel they need help playing, and might decline if you suggest they need a helper. So, just let them know that the person being assigned to them is their teammate. If volunteers are limited, have the Activity Coordinator recommend which residents need the most help. If there are too many volunteers, you’ll have to double them up with residents, or they can team up to call the numbers, give out prizes, circle the numbers as they are called. Just make sure they have something useful to do – they’re there to help!
  - We told the volunteers to arrive at 2PM this year (instead of 2:30). Last year it was too rushed trying to start the Bingo games right as everyone was arriving. The downside this year is there may be a little lag time between when they arrive and when the games start. If there is nothing they can do to help (such as gathering the residents together), then just ask them to be patient! (They can always spend time chatting with the residents.)

5. When ready to begin, Coordinator #2 should make a quick announcement i.e. “Welcome to the Friends Across the Ages Bingo-a-thon. We’ll be playing 5 games and taking several winners for each game.” Introduce yourself, the number caller, and the “Prize Awarder”.
6. Start the Bingo games as close to 2:30 as possible. Play a total of 5 games of Bingo, but you can take several winners for each game. Use the number marking sheet if necessary to keep track of the numbers called (some facilities will have equipment that will do that automatically). When a resident calls “BINGO”, have them call out the numbers to verify it, then have the “Prize Awarder” give the resident their choice of a prize (not the volunteer). If you’re going to take another winner, say “Don’t clear your boards yet, we’re going to take another winner!” (You can continue playing while the prize is given out.) There should be plenty of prizes – take plenty of winners (5 winners each time would be a good number).
7. In general, if any disputes break out between residents (trust us – it happens!), do whatever you can to keep everybody happy. The Activity Coordinator will help. If 2 or 3 residents call BINGO at the same time, give them all prizes. If a resident calls BINGO and doesn’t really have 5 in a row, but is getting really upset about it, give them a prize. You may have to set a limit on how many times someone can win if one particular resident seems to be winning all the prizes, but that probably won’t happen.
8. A note on prizes for men: most of the items in the general pool of prizes will probably be more appealing to women than to men, so we have set aside a bag of prizes specifically for men (shaving cream, deodorant, socks, watches, etc.). The men are welcome to choose prizes from the general pool instead if they wish, but this is just to make sure that there is enough stuff that will appeal to them.
9. Volunteers don’t get prizes for now (other than give them plenty of candy!).
10. You should try to get through 5 games of bingo and end close to 3:30. If you get short on time, you can try some quick games of bingo, for example only require “4 in a row” for a bingo, or 3 in a row. Or, just call out numbers in the “B” column for example, until someone covers all 5 of them.
11. At the end of the bingo-a-thon, thank everyone for coming and remind them that awards for volunteers will be given out at the wrap-up party (along with lots of good food) that evening. Give out maps to the party. Thank the residents for allowing us to come share a good time with them!

# Friends Across the Ages



## Second Annual **BINGO-A-THON**

Have fun with nursing home residents...  
Raise funds for *Friends Across the Ages*!

### Saturday, April 2



Play Bingo: 2:00 - 3:30 PM  
At five Gainesville area nursing homes

Wrap-Up Party: 4:00 - 6:00 PM  
With free food and prizes

**No experience necessary to volunteer. Groups are welcome!**

Call (352) 381-1117 or visit [www.bingoathon.com](http://www.bingoathon.com)

Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to:  
Friends Across the Ages, PO Box 14698, Gainesville, FL 32604



Serving the Gainesville community since 1983,  
*Friends Across the Ages* connects volunteers  
with local nursing home residents, forming  
friendships that bridge generations.

*Friends Across the Ages is an interfaith organization supported in part  
by the Faith in Action program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.*





**PLEASE COLLECT ALL PLEDGE MONEY AS YOU OBTAIN SPONSORS**

Team / Congregation Name (optional):

Make your tax-deductible donation payable to:  
**Friends Across the Ages**

Total Pledges Per Game	Total Amount Received
1	100
2	200
3	300
4	400
5	500
6	600
7	700
8	800
9	900
10	1000

- **Start Now** to get as many sponsors as you can. There is no limit. You can always get extra pledge forms.
- **Be Sure** your sponsors understand they are sponsoring you for exactly 5 games of Bingo.
- **You** are responsible for collecting all pledges.
- **Keep** a copy for your records.
- **Thank You!** Any questions, call us at (352) 381-1117.

## **NOTES**

## **NOTES**