



# MEDICAL CONTROL DIRECTIVE

## 2024-05

**DATE:** January 5, 2024

**TO:** Pinellas County EMS Agencies  
Pinellas County Emergency Communications  
Pinellas County Certified EMTs and Paramedics  
Pinellas County Certified Advanced Practice Paramedics, Nurses  
Pinellas County Online Medical Control Physicians  
Pinellas County Ambulance Billing and Financial Services  
ED Nurse Managers

**FROM:** Dr. Angus Jameson, EMS Medical Director 

**RE:** Health Buddies Referral Program - Expansion

**DISTRIBUTION/TRAINING PERIOD:** N/A

**Effective Date: Immediately**

- ALL Agencies are authorized to refer a patient to the Health Buddies Program by Seniors in Service.
  - Eligibility Criteria:
    - 18 years of age or older
    - Chronic medical condition(s)
    - Resides in Pinellas, Pasco, or Hillsborough Counties
    - Has a phone
    - Wants to receive phone calls
- Clinicians will register an eligible patient for services by clicking on the “Make a Health Buddies Referral” button on the [www.pcemso.md.com](http://www.pcemso.md.com) home page and enter applicable information.
- Clinicians must document a referral in the ePCR using the “Community Referral - Health Buddies” intervention.

For more information about the program: <https://seniorsinservice.org/health-buddies/>

**Attachments:**

- Referral Handout (example)
  - A quantity is being auto-shipped to each agency
- Health Buddies Program Information

**Distribution:**

- EMS Chiefs e-mail distribution group
- Vector Solutions
- Pinellas County EMS Office of the Medical Director Webpage [www.pcemso.md.com](http://www.pcemso.md.com)

# Referral Handout

## Welcome to Health Buddies!



Encouraging better health through social connection

### You've been referred to Health Buddies

#### What to Expect Next:

1. A member of the Health Buddies team will be giving you a call.
2. Get ready to start your 12-week journey toward better health through friendly phone calls.
3. You'll receive 2-3 friendly phone calls per week from your dedicated Health Buddy.

#### Health Buddies will empower you by:

- Providing encouragement
- Lowering stress and anxiety
- Improving your health
- Connecting you to resources

This free program is provided by:



Do you know someone who is lonely? Scan here to connect them with a Health Buddy!



#### Questions? Reach out!

Phone: (813) 492-8931 [SeniorsInService.org](http://SeniorsInService.org)  
Email: [healthbuddies@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:healthbuddies@seniorsinservice.org)

## ¡Bienvenido a Health Buddies!



Promoviendo la buena salud a través de la conexión social

### Usted ha sido referido a Health Buddies

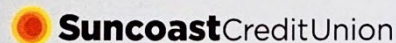
#### ¿Qué puede esperar a continuación?

1. Un miembro del equipo le llamará para la entrevista inicial.
2. Usted recibirá 2-3 llamadas telefónicas a la semana.
3. Prepárese para iniciar una experiencia de 12 semanas en la cual mejorará su salud física y emocional, mediante la conexión social.

#### Su voluntario de Health Buddies le empoderará a través de:

- Apoyo mediante llamadas telefónicas
- Herramientas para mejorar su salud mental
- Conectándolo con recursos disponibles en su comunidad

Este programa es gratuito y posible gracias a:



¿Conoces a alguien que se siente solo? Escanee aquí para conectarlo con un Health Buddy.



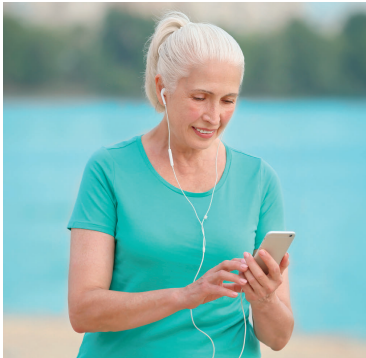
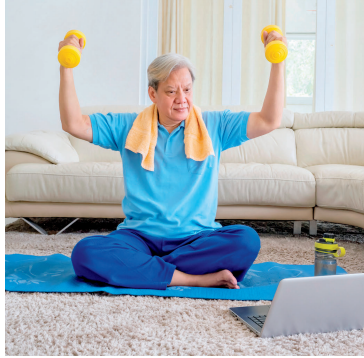
#### ¿Preguntas? ¡Contáctenos!

Teléfono: (813) 492-8931 [SeniorsInService.org](http://SeniorsInService.org)  
Email: [healthbuddies@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:healthbuddies@seniorsinservice.org)

# Health Buddies



Encourage better health through social connection



Health Buddies engages compassionate, trained volunteers to provide encouragement, education, and support to individuals living with chronic conditions. Through regular telephone reassurance, we are improving the health of individuals who need it most.

Health Buddies empower individuals living with chronic conditions to...

- *Enhance their quality of life*
- *Lower stress and anxiety*
- *Self-manage their health*
- *Live independently*
- *Reduce loneliness*

## What do Health Buddies do?

### Commit

To calling their "buddy" on a regular schedule.

### Engage

In meaningful conversation about their well-being.

### Listen

For "red flags" that may need to be addressed.

### Connect

Them to additional community resources.

## Become a Volunteer

If you are a compassionate individual who cares about health, you can help today! All volunteers complete a background check and receive training from Seniors in Service. **Sign up to be a Health "Buddy" today using the link below.**

## Refer a Patient

Social relationships have a positive impact on physical health. **"Prescribe" companionship as medicine and refer a client today using the link below.**

## Contact us today!

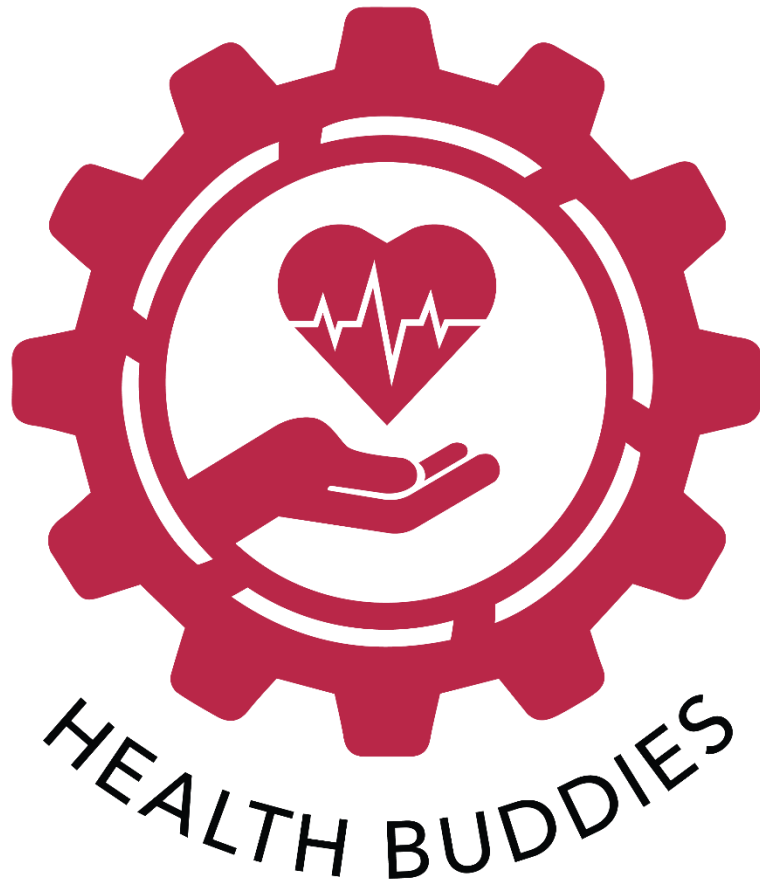
Phone: (813) 492-8931

Email: [healthbuddies@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:healthbuddies@seniorsinservice.org)

[www.SeniorsinService.link/HealthBuddiesInfo](http://www.SeniorsinService.link/HealthBuddiesInfo)



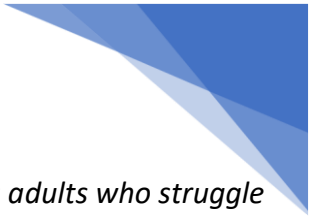
SENIORS **in SERVICE**  
GEARED UP TO SERVE



*Program Provided by*



**SENIORS in SERVICE**  
GEARED UP TO SERVE



*Health Buddies is an innovative, intergenerational model that helps adults who struggle with chronic conditions by matching them with a Health Buddy. Health Buddies are college students preparing for health careers and Seniors in Service Volunteers who offer “companionship as medicine” through supportive phone calls to improve social connection, health knowledge and ability to age-in-place. After 12-weeks, clients who still need support get ongoing telephone reassurance; in-home companionship; and/or referred for other community resources. Health Buddies is a scalable, equitable, cost-effective way to promote aging in place while developing our next generation of aging services and health professionals.*


**MISSION:** Foster interaction between different generations, sharing skills/life experiences and building relationships that benefit both individuals and community.

**GOALS:** Help isolated adults increase social-connection, confidence to self-manage wellness so they can age-in-place while reducing burden on our healthcare-system and developing our next generation of health professionals.

**ACTIVITIES:** Clients with chronic-conditions who are isolated/lack family-support are referred by partners (adult-living-communities, churches, healthcare-providers). Health-Buddies volunteers are college-students preparing for health-careers who participate as part of their course-curriculum through partnership with University-of-South-Florida. We assess client needs, perform background-checks, match volunteers based on needs/culture/skills. Health-Buddies receive bi-weekly expert-training (i.e. Active-Listening/HIPAA/Medication Compliance/Fall Prevention/Nutrition/Chronic-Disease-Management/Elder-Fraud) to provide supportive phone-calls with frequency/dosage to meet client needs. Health-Buddies share health-information; become trusted friends; follow-up on any concerns. After 12-weeks, clients are surveyed/re-evaluated to determine Next-Step. Those who still need support are referred for our other existing Senior Services: ongoing telephone-reassurance; in-home-companionship; other community-resources essential to social-determinants-of-health.

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES:** 75% of older-adult clients report increased social-connection; ability to self-manage wellness; and will not have hospital-readmission/Emergency-Room-visit for the same medical-condition. 80% of college-student Health-Buddies report improved-skills/satisfaction with volunteering.

**2021 ACTUAL # SERVED/ENGAGED & OUTCOMES:** 55 Health-Buddies served 55 older-adult-clients (26 Diabetes/6 Stroke/53 Other Chronic-Conditions). 1,193 calls were logged. 31 referrals for other non-medical support-services e.g. meal-delivery/transportation. 87% of older-adult clients reported increased social-connection/ability to self-manage wellness; 94% didn't have hospital-readmission/100% didn't have ER-visit for same medical-condition. 100% of student Health-Buddies reported improved-skills/satisfaction with volunteering.



Launched in 2020 with a 3-year Florida-Blue-Innovation-Grant, we are projected to engage 150 college-student Health Buddies to serve 220 older-adult clients during program year beginning in 2023, with the ability to scale up during that time period.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

**OLDER-ADULT-CLIENTS:** 63% Low-income; 36% Black/African-American; 58% White; 6% Other; 76% Female/24% Male.


**HEALTH-BUDDIES-VOLUNTEERS:** 33% Black/African-American; 35% White; 28% Asian; 4% American-Indian/Alaskan-Native; 21% Hispanic/79% Non-Hispanic; 75% Female; 25% Male.

**PROGRAM-STAFF:** 66% Hispanic; 34% White; 100% Female.

The Florida-Department-of-Elder-Affairs 2021-Profiles-of-Older-Floridians describe Hillsborough/Pinellas as a fragile population on the edge of crisis. Our community has a large aged-60+ population: Hillsborough 291,953 (20%), Pinellas 335,442 (34%). Of those aged-60+, many live alone: Hillsborough 62,030 (22%); Pinellas 86,535 (26%). Most live at/below Poverty-Level: Hillsborough 233,310 (80%) Pinellas 264,995 (79%). Many are minorities who face systemic disparities in health-equity in addition to ageism: Hillsborough 109,961 (38%), Pinellas 41,846 (12%). 38% of seniors in both counties live with 1 or more disabilities. 37% in Hillsborough, 35% in Pinellas are Medically-Underserved.

Tampa-Bay's older-adults who face chronic-conditions and social-isolation are at-risk. Hillsborough and Pinellas Consolidated Plans, based on surveys/focus groups, identify helping seniors age-in-place as High-Priority. Florida's-Department-of-Elder-Affairs reports over 148,000 of our community's older-adults live alone. Research shows loneliness has devastating health consequences. Friendships dramatically reduce those risks. Pinellas Sheriff reports seniors calling often just because they're lonely cost taxpayers \$300,000+/YEAR! RRF-Foundation-for-Aging 2021-Issue-Brief on Social-and-Intergenerational-Connectedness says social connections are critical to overall health/well-being, especially as we age. Also, lack of connection between generations can contribute to ageism and isolation. Studies show meaningful intergenerational programming may reduce social-isolation and enhance physical/mental well-being for both generations.

Many older-adults return to hospitals/health-providers because they feel anxious/lonely; others with chronic-conditions struggle to understand how to manage their health. Both result in recurring symptoms/unnecessary costs. Preventable hospital-readmissions cost Medicare \$17-billion/year. Before COVID-19, 94% of Florida hospitals were penalized by Medicare for readmissions linked to chronic-conditions. Readmissions can indicate patients don't understand how to take care of themselves or don't have family-support. And research shows chronic-disease is worsened by isolation. In addition to helping seniors self-manage their health,



younger generations benefit from older-adults' wisdom/perspectives. Both generations feel valued.

Our active participation in advocacy groups like Suncoast-Credit-Union's Senior Advisory Council and community events like City-of-Tampa's "Senior-Day-in-the-Park" offer insights into the needs of our community's seniors. Health-Buddies also incorporates input from Tampa-General-Hospital and local physicians who help shape volunteer training, messaging to health-providers for referrals, and online intake. Adult-Living partners share input that updates our messaging to say "Adults" NOT Seniors; Adult-living "Communities" NOT Facilities). Ongoing monitoring of participants through check-in's by program-staff as well as formal surveys provide input for program evaluation and continuous improvement.

We launched Health-Buddies in 2020, originally planning to serve older-adults in their homes after being discharged from hospitals with chronic-conditions. We intended to receive client-referrals from hospital-discharge-staff and to provide Health-Buddies training in-person. But COVID-19 meant we couldn't rely on client-referrals from hospitals inundated with COVID-cases, and although the need was great, we learned seniors were hesitant to self-identify as needing help. We shifted our client-referral-process to utilize referral-partners from decades implementing our existing senior-services (e.g. HUD-Senior-Housing; Churches) while aggressively seeking new referral-partners (Doctor-offices, Assisted-Living-Communities). We shifted to virtual-trainings and service-delivery by phone. University-of-South-Florida saw opportunity to enrich health-curriculum with remote "hands-on" opportunities for students, facilitating volunteer-recruitment. Advice from Tampa-General-Hospital resulted in 12-week-cohorts, then client reassessments for Next Steps.

We initiated **Innovative Special Projects** to build intergenerational relationships and continue the pathway to wellness, post-Health Buddies:

- Providing FitBits stimulated interaction between clients and their Health Buddies to promote physical/emotional well-being for them both. Ongoing support even after clients complete the program encouraged movement and provided an interactive-platform to connect to others (both younger & older) in the FitBit-community. Feedback: "I already feel more energized to exercise every day."

- Remote "dinner-dates" over healthy meals influenced nutrition and deeper bond between participants. In collaboration with registered, licensed dietary-nutritionist, Health-Buddies learn importance of adhering to doctor-prescribed dietary limitations/restrictions; effects of high-sodium; sugar addiction. Local meal-delivery-service Fit-Life-Foods delivers nutritionally-balanced GMO-free meals; no artificial-sweeteners/flavors/colors/preservatives. Participants discuss meal-preferences and select a week of meals. Feedback: "Discovering my client's food likes/dislikes was a great conversation starter!"; "We had a dinner-date phone-call! Our meals were so flavorful; we couldn't believe they were so healthy!"; "After speaking with my Health-Buddy, I couldn't believe how much sodium was in bread!"





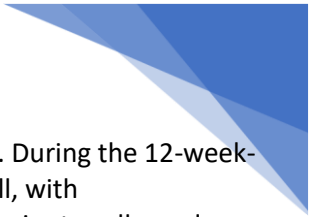
Health Buddies volunteers must be at least 18-years-old, pass a background check, and commit to participate in a 12-week cohort. All races, ethnicities, abilities, and genders are welcomed.

Health Buddies clients are underserved adults whose chronic conditions combined with social isolation and/or lack of family support jeopardize their ability to age-in-place. Clients must have a phone and want to receive phone calls. Our clients reflect our community's diversity, and all races, ethnicities, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds are welcomed, including but not limited to: persons of color; persons with disabilities; persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality. Studies show those who lack social connection are more likely to be Low-Income, indicating their need for services that address other social determinants of health (food, housing, transportation, financial stability, technology access, etc.) They need help navigating the complex maze of resources needed for overall wellness yet are often hesitant to seek help. Their perception is they'll just be added to long waitlists or given a phone number with little to no guidance or follow-up. Our client referrals come from community partners that seniors know and trust. Health Buddies build strong bonds with clients who are more willing to share unmet needs with a trusted friend.

### **Training:**

We prepare Health-Buddies to understand that their role is to provide “companionship as medicine”, offering friendship/compassion and information to help their older-adult client increase knowledge about their chronic-condition so they can build confidence to self-manage their wellness. Health-Buddies Orientation covers organization/program policies like our commitment to Diversity-Equity-Inclusion, Client-Confidentiality, Mandated Reporting, Call-Logs, Active-Listening/Conversation-Starters and “Do’s-and-Don’ts” such as never exchanging personal information with their client (social security number, banking information, etc.) Health Buddies attend bi-weekly virtual trainings led by experts in topics relevant to health and aging such as HIPAA, Nutrition, Fitness; Safety; Diabetes, Alzheimer’s, Chronic-Disease-Management, Elder-Fraud/Elder-Abuse, Mindfulness/Holistic Wellness, Community-Resources, and “Red Flags” to immediately communicate to our staff. Trainings are recorded for those unable to attend. Each cohort serves as a Collaborative Learning Community for students to share information, stories, generational differences and intergenerational experiences with each other and our program team. Ongoing volunteer appreciation activities include our exclusive annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon to honor 400+ attendees that include volunteers from all of our programs and community stakeholders.

We prepare clients to participate in Health Buddies during intake when we assess their needs, culture, skills. We set expectations and provide them with information about organizational/program policies to guide their involvement, including “Do’s-and-Don’ts” like never sharing information like social-security-number. When we match clients with a Health Buddy, we share the student’s name/phone-number and schedule the initial call. We prepare clients for interim follow-ups from program-staff to ensure good-fit with their Health-Buddy and for formal surveys used to evaluate/improve our services. During their regularly-scheduled phone calls, Health-Buddies share information from their bi-weekly training with clients that build their knowledge to successfully self-manage their wellness.



The Health Buddies and clients are matched based on interests, culture and skills. During the 12-week-cohort they converse by phone 2-3 times per week for at least 15-minutes per call, with frequency/dosage based on client preference/need. A typical schedule is two 15-minute calls, and one 30-minute call per week, for at least one hour of companionship weekly.

Health-Buddies build rapport, asking about clients' life experiences/interests. They share health-related information and ask: How have you been feeling? What have you been eating? How do you get food/groceries? Are you eating three meals/day? Do you exercise? Have you had any doctor-appointments lately? Have you taken your medication? How are you self-managing your condition?

**TRUE-STORY:** Bill struggled to manage his diabetes, sharing, "I forgot to check my blood-sugar or take my medicine. My Health-Buddy helped me stay on track. He made me laugh; we became friends. My lab-work improved! My doctor said, 'Whatever you're doing, keep doing it!'"

## Evaluation

We conduct Pre-Tests, Mid-Tests & Post-Tests during the 12-week-cohort using Kessler-6 Scale to measure program progress, outcomes, and impact on participants. Data includes number/percent of clients who report increased social-connection; increased ability to self-manage wellness; and no hospital-readmission/Emergency-Room-visit for the same medical-condition. Participant demographics and progress is also collected from Client In-take Assessments; Volunteer Call Logs, Testimonials. Impact on students is measured by volunteer satisfaction surveys. Community impact is communicated based on readily available data that quantifies the savings associated with enabling older-adults in Florida to age-in-place vs. the costs of \$54,000/year for assisted-living; \$108,408/year for private-nursing-homes (Genworth-2021)

**Instrument:** Kessler-6-Scale, a 6-item self-report measure widely used to quickly assess mental-wellness/life satisfaction of the general population. Developed with support from U.S. National-Center-for-Health-Statistics [Kessler et al., 2003], the questions include how often during the past 30-days individuals felt nervous, hopeless, restless/fidgety, so depressed that nothing could cheer you up, that everything was an effort, worthless. Responses range from "none-of-the-time" to "all-of-the-time".


The National-Institute-of-Mental-Health-(NIH) reports strong relationship between physical and mental health. People with chronic physical illnesses are twice as likely to suffer from anxiety/depression. Treating mental and chronic illness together through increased social-support can help people better manage both.

TRIPLE impact: 1)Clients age-in-place; 2)Volunteers build skills; 3)Reduced burden on healthcare-system.

Bill's Health-Buddy reminded him to check blood-sugar/take medicine. "He made me laugh; we became friends. My lab-work improved! My doctor said, 'Whatever you're doing, keep doing it!'"

Ann told her Health-Buddy she'd missed FOUR doctor-appointments due to unreliable transportation. Program-staff got her door-to-door-rides through Sunshine-Line.

"Speaking with my Health-Buddy, I couldn't believe how much sodium was in bread! I have high-blood-pressure; he helped me find healthy meals."



Grace told her Health-Buddy she couldn't afford food for herself AND her dog. Connecting her with Humane-Society-AniMeals reduced her stress.

### **Future of Health Buddies:**

We launched Health-Buddies in 2020 with a 3-year Florida-Blue-Foundation Innovation-Grant. Our successful implementation shows how training college-students as Health-Buddies volunteers can improve social connection, health knowledge, and independence for older-adults while reducing the burden on our healthcare system. The increasing number of seniors in need due to COVID-19 population migration to Tampa Bay and baby-boomers aging creates urgent need to continue and expand Health Buddies as an integral part of our Senior Services. We've already received funding commitments to continue Health-Buddies from Pinellas Community Foundation's Senior Citizens Services and Suncoast Credit Union, and we are aggressively pursuing support from other funders who share our affinity for intergenerational efforts to improve life for older-adults and our entire community.

### **What makes Health Buddies innovative:**

1. Partnership with University-of-South-Florida Colleges of Pharmacy, Aging-Studies, Medicine, Nursing, Health-Sciences adds Health Buddies as integral-part of their hands-on-curriculums.
2. 12-week-cohorts give participants intensive/customized attention from program-staff. Some Health-Buddies serve in multiple cohorts, using their experience as a Health Buddy in a previous session to serve additional client(s) and to help new Health Buddy volunteers.
3. After 12-weeks, clients who still need support get referred for our ongoing Senior-Companion-Services and/or other community-resources.
4. Health Buddies connect clients to resources essential to social-determinants-of-health (Food/Housing/etc.) and FOLLOW-UP to ensure benefits are received.
5. Participants receive FitBits, encouraging healthy movement and opportunity to participate in interactive-platform connecting to others in the FitBit-community, giving them a tool to continue to self-manage.
6. Nutrition-component includes licensed-nutritionist and Fit-Life-Foods local-meal-delivery, inspiring healthy choices. Participants share nutritional advice, bonding over menu-selection and "dinner-date" phone-calls.
7. Best practices from decades serving older-adults: 30+ years implementing evidence-based AmeriCorps Senior-Companion-Program.
8. Volunteer Engagement: training, appreciation activities, opportunities to connect with each other and those they serve. (State-wide recognition for "Excellence in Intergenerational Civic-Engagement" from Florida-Civic-Advance)
9. Collaboration: Partners provide Participant Referrals, Volunteer Trainings

## 10. Evidence-based Kessler-6 measurement tool

Health-Buddies utilizes our organization's 38-years of experience in engaging volunteers to help our community. As the local sponsor for AmeriCorps Foster-Grandparent; Senior-Companion; Retired-Senior-Volunteer-Programs, our track-record managing federal grants demonstrates rigorous compliance/reporting. We were proud to be selected by Volunteer-Florida and Points-of-Light for Service-Enterprise certification as expert in volunteer engagement. We use best practices to serve through an equity lens: Engaging culturally-relevant staff/volunteers; Serving diverse clients with equitable outcomes; Combatting ageism thru intergenerational bonds; and Offering services/volunteer opportunities to people with disabilities. We were proud to be selected for Inclusivity's inaugural Tampa-Bay-Equity-Incubator promoting inclusive/data-driven policies/practices.

### **Organization Background/History**

Our mission is to provide solutions to community challenges by engaging volunteers aged 55+. We help at-risk children, isolated seniors, adults with disabilities, overwhelmed caregivers, struggling veterans, hungry families and more. Plus our volunteers benefit from staying active and purposeful. Founded in 1984 as a Florida nonprofit 501(c)3, we engage over 1300 volunteers annually in collaboration with 150+ community partners to meet the needs of 7500 underserved individuals in Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco counties. During 38 years of service, we have provided over 5 million hours of community assistance with a fair market value exceeding \$131,600,000. Each year independent audits show over 94% of each dollar goes to program services – a great return on investment for our community! Intergenerational Programs that connect younger and older people is integral to our mission and culture. Our Foster Grandparent Program engages highly trained culturally relevant volunteers aged 55+ to provide tutoring and mentoring to the MOST challenged children with the MOST urgent needs. Operation: Veteran Connect engages volunteers aged 18+ who are Veterans or military family members and feel a special calling to serve others who have served our nation. Health Buddies engages volunteers aged 18+ to serve older adults or adults with disabilities who struggle with chronic conditions. Getting diagnosed with a chronic-condition can feel lonely without a trusted family-member or friend by your side. And studies show loneliness can exacerbate symptoms. Health Buddies offer “companionship as medicine” through supportive phone calls that empower chronic disease self-management. We also have EXCITING Cogenerational opportunities for younger and older people to volunteer TOGETHER! Check out this brief video about how we are Uniting Generations to improve life for ALL!

<https://youtu.be/le59wUTIMkE>

We don't merely manage volunteers; we actively engage them with background checks, trainings, appreciation, and opportunities to connect with each other and those they serve. Many serve with us for 5, 10, even 20+ years. After receiving state-wide recognition from Florida Civic Advance just prior to COVID-19 for “Excellence in Intergenerational Civic Engagement”, we were invited to present to attendees at their inaugural summit, sharing our “magic ingredients” for engaging volunteers. For us, it's not just a tagline. At Seniors in Service, we are GEARED UP TO SERVE!

Links to Website, Social Media, News Media, Newsletters

Visit our website here: <https://www.seniorsinservice.org/>

Check out this brief video about how we are Uniting Generations to improve life for ALL! <https://youtu.be/le59wUTIMkE>



Visit us on Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/seniorsinservice>

Recent News Media Features here:

Fox 13 Apr2022 Tampa Mayor Supports Intergenerational Volunteer Grandma's Initiative with Seniors in Service <https://www.fox13news.com/news/a-look-inside-volunteergrandma>

St. Pete Catalyst: Healthy St. Pete Showcases Seniors in Service as Partner in Health <https://stpetecatalyst.com/healthy-st-pete-showcases-the-citys-partners-in-health/>

Health & Wellness Magazine Jan 2021 Page 16 Seniors in Service helps isolated seniors:

[https://healthandwellnessfl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Health\\_WellnessPascoTampa\\_Jan21.pdf](https://healthandwellnessfl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Health_WellnessPascoTampa_Jan21.pdf)

Recent Seniors in Service Newsletters here:


Aug 2022 <https://seniorsinservice.org/wp-content/uploads/Geared-Up-News-August-2022.pdf>

May 2022 <https://seniorsinservice.org/wp-content/uploads/May-2022-Newsletter-2.pdf>

Feb 2022 <https://seniorsinservice.org/wp-content/uploads/February-2022-Newsletter-1.pdf>

### **Recent Honors and Awards**

- 2022 Selected for Tampa Bay Equity Incubator's inaugural cohort hosted by the Pinellas Community Foundation
- 2022 University of South Florida Aging Studies Community Partner of the Year
- 2022 City of St. Petersburg's Healthier Together Certified Gold Partner
- 2022 Volunteer Florida AmeriCorps Member of the Year statewide recognition
- 2022 Selected to serve on Hillsborough County Council on Aging
- 2022 Selected for Points of Light - Volunteer Florida inaugural certification as a Service Enterprise, joining the top 11% of nonprofits nationwide in strategic volunteer management to increase impact and better achieve their mission.
- 2022 & 2021 Selected for Nonprofit Leadership Center Certificate in Leadership Class
- 2021 One Tampa Bay: Tampa Bay Business Journal award for nonprofits recognized for financial stewardship & impact they make with limited staff & diminished volunteerism, especially during the pandemic.
- 2021 & 2019 Juvenile Welfare Board Cooperman-Bogue KidsFirst Award
- 2021 Senior Connection Center Salt & Pepper Award
- 2021 Selected by Volunteer Florida for AmeriCorps Innovation Award
- 2021 Selected to serve on TRIBE Board of Directors
- 2021 Selected to serve on BEST Academy Advisory Board
- 2021 Tampa Bay Lightning Community Hero Award to Seniors in Service & Saving Our Seniors
- 2021 Tampa Bay Lightning Community Hero Award to Seniors in Service & TRIBE
- 2020 University of South Florida "Status of Latinos Hispanic Heritage Award"
- 2020 Invited to present "COVID-19 Response: Virtual Tutoring and Mentoring" at National virtual meeting of AmeriCorps Seniors grantees.
- 2020 CVS Health Scholarship Award to participate in American Society on Aging's Leadership Institute
- 2020 Finalist: WEDU Be More Unstoppable Award (Nonprofit of the Year), Finalist:

- 
- WEDU Be More Knowledgeable Award; and Finalist: WEDU Be More Informed Award
- 2019 Excellence in Intergenerational Civic Engagement - statewide recognition with invitation to present at Florida Civic Advance 2019 Summit.
  - 2019 Invited to present “Innovations to Empower Children’s/Family Literacy” at Regional Convening of Senior Corps grantees in Denver.
  - 2019 Invited to participate in Educate Hillsborough Inaugural Class

## Health Buddies Testimonials

Intergenerational Advice from a Health Buddy: Often when we think of a senior adult and a college aged student, we think of wisdom and advice going from the senior to the student. One of our USF Health Buddies discovered that her client did not have teeth and found solid foods very uncomfortable to chew, even painful. This left the client with little variety in her diet which she had been complaining about. The volunteer recalled that she had a similar sensitivity to solid food when she had braces recently and she suggested to her client that she could try shredding her meats, for example shredding some chicken and mixing in some ketchup or barbeque sauce sloppy-joe style, to make them easier to eat. The client reported back that she tried it out and it worked! She told her that she had some brown rice, shredded chicken, and lima beans for lunch and was planning on boiling some chicken to prepare a similar meal the following day! She was so happy and told her it was the first solid food she’s had in a while. Our volunteer felt so proud to be able to help in this way. The client is still waiting on her dentures to be able to eat solid foods, but until then our volunteer was able to offer advice and immediately impact her client’s health with a healthy variety of food choices. All thanks to the recollection of recently having braces!

### Clients Appreciate Their Health Buddy

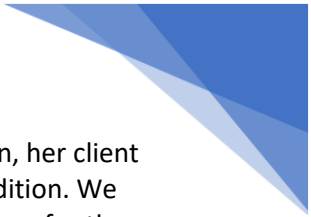
- “My volunteer and I listened to each other, practiced kindness, & educated each other.”
- “I loved talking to my buddy. It shows that someone cares, it helped me with loneliness, encouraged me, and it was nice to have someone to share stories with. It felt good to laugh with someone.”

### Health Buddies Feel Valued

- “It’s good to get a real perspective on what older people actually want to hear from the younger generations.”
- “My favorite part was feeling like the client appreciated talking to me and when I was able to directly help her by answering a question or giving my opinion.”

Health Buddy Helps Client With Diabetes Stay on Track: After being diagnosed with diabetes, Bill struggled to keep track of everything he needed to do. “I forgot to check my bloodsugar or take my medicine. My Health-Buddy helped me stay on track. He made me laugh; we became friends. My lab-work improved! My doctor said, ‘I don’t know what you’re doing, but keep doing it.’”

Reliable Transportation Means No More Missed Doctor Appointments A Health Buddies’ client was telling their Health Buddy that they had been unable to get to their past FOUR doctor appointments due to a lack of reliable transportation. Her client had even scheduled pickups through her insurance company, and the contracted transportation service would cancel at the



last minute. The Health Buddy was concerned that without reliable transportation, her client would not be able to get the ongoing treatments she needed for her chronic condition. We reached out to our partner, the Resource Empowerment Center to sign the client up for the Sunshine Line - a low-income transportation service provided by Hillsborough County. Now any time the client needs a ride, they have reliable transportation.

Client Credits Nutrition & Social Connection with Improving Her Chronic Condition: We received a call from a senior who was in tears because she had been undergoing dialysis and was in a lot of pain and hungry. She explained that she formerly drove her golf cart to the nearby gas station to get her daily meals, but her treatments left her groggy and unable to drive. While her meals weren't nutritious, now she didn't have a way to get food at all. We connected her to our volunteers at the Resource Empowerment Centre who immediately banded together and brought the senior some groceries to help her immediate need. They also sent an application to Meals on Wheels and followed up the next day to enroll the senior as a Health Buddies client. Once paired with a Health Buddy, the senior and the volunteer had an immediate connection. When the senior was going through the toughest of times with treatments for her chronic condition, her Health Buddy was the caring voice that helped calm her. The senior said that she knows that her Health Buddy is always there for her, whenever she needs a friend. Most recently, the senior let us know that she has been able to stop dialysis! She said she credits her Health Buddy's reassurance and the nutritious food for major improvements to her lifestyle and management of her chronic condition.

FitBit Helps Client Feel More Energized to Exercise "I greatly appreciate that you went to such lengths to make sure we received our Fitbit and allowed us to have one. I really love mine and already feel much more energized to exercise every day, especially with the weather getting cooler. Thank you for thinking about us."

Health Buddies Participants Bond Over Nutritious Meals

- "After speaking with my Health Buddy, I couldn't believe how much sodium was in bread! I have high blood pressure, and we worked together to find meals that were healthy for me."
- "My client and I had a dinner date phone call! We loved our meals. They were so flavorful we couldn't believe they were so healthy!"

Health Buddy Makes Sure Client AND Her Dog Get Healthy Meals: Victoria had always been able to provide healthy, consistent meals to her beloved dog. When her Health Buddy heard that Victoria was having difficulty making ends meet and needing to choose between meals for herself or her pet, the Health Buddy sprung into action! Victoria was already receiving food benefits, so the Health Buddy started looking for resources for pets. The Health Buddy found that the Humane Society of Tampa Bay provides a pet food delivery service to individuals with limited mobility and/or income. Victoria was signed up and approved right away! Now Victoria no longer needs to decide who gets to have a nutritious meal. Thanks to the AniMeals program from the Humane Society, both Victoria and her dog are able to have healthy, consistent meals once again.

## Milestones

Modified Milestones:	Date Completed:
Health Buddies staff will begin identifying potential clients for enrollment into the program.	Full-time recruiting
Volunteers will be trained to become Health Buddies.	Cohort 2: 15 Cohort 3: 21 Cohort 4: 30 Total: 66
Health Buddies staff will perform an intake survey with all new clients.	Cohort 2: Prior to 2/22/2021 Cohort 3: Prior to 6/14/2021 Cohort 4: Prior to 9/15/2021
Health Buddies volunteers will begin providing services to enrolled clients.	Cohort 2: 2/22/2021-5/14/2021 Cohort 3: 6/14/2021-9/3/2021 Cohort 4: 9/15/2021-12/5/2021

## Outcomes

Modified Outcomes:	Number of Clients:
100% of interested potential participants will receive an initial phone call with information about the program	37/37 Cohort 2 & 3 29/29 Cohort 4 66/66 Total  Out of all the clients that requested to be part of the program, 100% of them were called and assessed over the phone due to COVID-19 limitations.
50% of participants will show improvement in their knowledge of their health condition by performing a follow-up survey by the end of the 6 <sup>th</sup> week of the program.	8/16 Cohort 2 8/16 Cohort 3 6/15 Cohort 4 22/47 Total 46.8%  22 out of 47 interviewed reported improvements in their knowledge of their health condition by the end of the 6 <sup>th</sup> week of the program.
60% of participants will show improvement in their knowledge of their health condition by performing a final survey by the end of the 12 <sup>th</sup> week of the program.	10/16 (Cohort 2 Only) 8/14 Cohort 3 10/14 Cohort 4 28/44 Total 63.6%



	28 out of 44 interviewed showed improvement in their knowledge of their health condition by the end of the 12 <sup>th</sup> week of the program.
50% of participants will successfully complete the program reporting they feel more capable of self-managing their condition from home.	<p>14/16 (Cohort 2 Only)  18/21 Cohort 3  15/18 Cohort 4  47/55 Total  87%</p> <p>47/55 interviewed successfully completed the program reporting they feel more capable of self-managing their condition from home.</p>
55% of participants will not have hospital readmission for in-patient services for the same medical condition within the duration of the 12-week program.	<p>13/16 Cohort 2  16/16 Cohort 3  15/15 Cohort 4  44/47 Total  93.62%</p> <p>44 out of 47 did not have hospital readmission for in-patient services for the same medical condition within the duration of the 12-week program.</p>
50% of participants will not have an Emergency Room visit for the same medical condition within the duration of the 12-week program.	<p>16/16 Cohort 2  16/16 Cohort 3  15/15 Cohort 4  47/47 Total  100%</p> <p>47 out of 47 did not have an Emergency Room visit for the same medical condition within the duration of the 12-week program.</p>

**Persons Engaged:**



	Modified Persons Engaged	Target Number	Number Achieved
1	# of participants enrolled in the Health Buddies Program	45	55
2	# of participants referred to any additional non-medical support services (Example: in-home services, home-delivered meals)		11 (Cohort 2) 7 (Cohort 3) 13 (Cohort 4) Total: 31
3	# of participants with diabetes		8 (Cohort 2) 14 (Cohort 3) 4 (Cohort 4) Total: 26
4	# of participants that have had a stroke		1 (Cohort 2) 4 (Cohort 3) 1 (Cohort 4) Total: 6
5	# of participants with other medical diagnoses		16 (Cohort 2) 19 (Cohort 3) 18 (Cohort 4) Total: 53
6	# of participants referred for food insecurity		1 (Cohort 2) 1 (Cohort 3) 3 (Cohort 4) Total: 5
7	# of participants referred for transportation		2 (Cohort 2) 8 (Cohort 3) 4 (Cohort 4) Total: 14
8	# of support home visits provided		0 (Cohort 2) 0 (Cohort 3) 0 (Cohort 4) Total: 0 (COVID-19)
9	# of telephone calls conducted		Cohort 2 Call Log 1: 94 Cohort 2 Call Log 2: 120 Cohort 2 Call Log 3: 126 Cohort 2 Call Log 4: 74 Cohort 3 Call Log 1: 80 Cohort 3 Call Log 2: 129 Cohort 3 Call Log 3: 98 Cohort 3 Call Log 4: 102 Cohort 4 Call Log 1: 89 Cohort 4 Call Log 2: 119 Cohort 4 Call Log 3: 78 Cohort 4 Call Log 4: 84 Total: 1,193 reported

10	# of intake surveys conducted		16 (Cohort 2) 21 (Cohort 3) 22 (Cohort 4) Total: 59
11	# of follow-up surveys conducted		14 (Cohort 2) 14 (Cohort 3) 14 (Cohort 4) Total: 42
12	Eliminate question because it has been previously asked (2, 8 and 9)		
13	Eliminate question because it has been previously asked (6)		
14	Eliminate question because it has been previously asked (7)		

**Demographic Information:**

**Gender:**

- Male –  
5 (Cohort 2)  
6 (Cohort 3)  
2 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 13
- Female –  
11 (Cohort 2)  
15 (Cohort 3)  
16 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 42
- Other –  
Total: 55

**Age:**

- Adults (19 and 64) –  
2 (Cohort 2)  
7 (Cohort 3)  
3 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 12
- Adults (65+) –  
14 (Cohort 2)  
12 (Cohort 3)  
15 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 41
- Children (18 and under) –
- Refused to Answer –

2 (Cohort 3)  
Total: 2

**Insurance:**

- Insured:
  - Private –  
3 (Cohort 2)  
5 (Cohort 3)  
0 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 8
  - Public –  
11 (Cohort 2)  
10 (Cohort 3)  
13 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 34
  - Both –  
1 (Cohort 2)  
1 (Cohort 3)  
1 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 3
- Uninsured –  
1 (Cohort 2)  
3 (Cohort 3)  
1 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 5
- Underinsured –
- Not Reported  
2 (Cohort 3)  
3 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 2

**Low-income:**

Grantees may use the definition currently used within their program/organization.

- See document: FY 2020 Income Limits Tampa FL

Low-Income:

17 (Cohort 3)

18 (Cohort 4)

Refused to Answer:

1 (Cohort 3)

Didn't Know: 1 (Cohort 3)



Total Low-Income (Cohort 3 and 4): 35

Total Didn't Know (Cohort 3 and 4): 1

**Race:**

(Counts within race/ethnicity categories should be unduplicated.)

- **African American/Black –**  
2 (Cohort 2)  
9 (Cohort 3)  
9 (Cohort 4)  
Total:20
- **American Indian/Alaska Native –**
- **Asian –**
- **Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic –**
- **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander –**
- **White –**  
11 (Cohort 2)  
12 (Cohort 3)  
9 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 32
- **Other –**  
3 (Cohort 2)  
Total: 3
- **Undeclared –**


**Ethnicity:**

- Yes, Hispanic/Latino –  
3 (Cohort 2)  
3 (Cohort 3)  
1 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 7

No, Hispanic/Latino –  
13 (Cohort 2)  
18 (Cohort 3)  
17 (Cohort 4)  
Total:48

**Disabled:**

- Yes  
6 (Cohort 3)  
11 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 17

- 
- No  
13 (Cohort 3)  
7 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 20
  - Not Reported  
16 (Cohort 2)  
2 (Cohort 3)  
0 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 18


**Veteran:**

- Yes  
4 (Cohort 3)  
1 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 5
- No  
17 (Cohort 3)  
17 (Cohort 4)  
Total: 34
- Not Reported  
16 (Cohort 2)  
Total: 16

**Progress Narrative**

**1. What barriers have you encountered in implementing the project to date? How do you propose to address these barriers? Have you successfully overcome these barriers?**

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to create obstacles through the second year of Health Buddies. We have encountered barriers regarding client referrals in doctor's offices and hospital settings. Our community partners continue to feel overwhelmed adhering to perpetually evolving protocols. Even though our partners are invested in building a mutually beneficial partnership, they have not had time to make the referrals to Health Buddies. We continue to reach out to new sources for referrals such as adult daycares, independent/assisted living facilities, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and free clinics. When speaking with our community partners, we continue to focus on the benefits to the healthcare facilities and workers rather than solely of the benefits to their clients. While both are important, the facilities also need to be able to see how this will positively impact them. We have continued to recruit virtually and will do in-person recruiting in some of our partner's locations once the community is comfortable with more in-person interactions.



## What have you accomplished to date and how will these accomplishments further advance your outcomes?

While client feedback has indicated that phone call companionship is improving patient outcomes, many patients report they missed the ability to have face-to-face interactions. We worked with T-Mobile to offer Samsung Tablets, wireless coverage, and technology training specially designed for seniors and the disabled to bring clients and their Health Buddies a more interactive experience. The technology training has just recently commenced, and we will have updates regarding the impact of the face-to-face interaction in upcoming reports.


Continuing the pathway to wellness, post-Health Buddies, was an additional milestone we accomplished. First and foremost, we know the importance of companionship and the impact on physical and mental health. For those that want to continue interacting with their Health Buddy volunteers over the phone, they are able to do so. We also recognize the importance of movement, nutrition, and mindfulness and the impacts they have on overall well-being. We partnered with FitBit to provide Versa 2 FitBits to the clients. The technology training with the tablets mentioned above also provided FitBit training, and ongoing support even after the clients completed the Health Buddies program. The Versa 2 FitBits encourage users to move, take time to focus on mindfulness, and encourage healthy choices. It also provided an interactive platform for those that want to connect to others in the FitBit community. We have received a lot of positive feedback such as: “I greatly appreciate that you went to such lengths to make sure we received our Fitbit and allowed us to have one. I really love mine and already feel much more energized to exercise every day, especially with the weather getting cooler. Thank you for thinking about us.”

In addition to influencing the ongoing health of our clients through movement with the FitBits, we wanted to influence their nutrition and food choices. To achieve this, we collaborated with a registered and licensed dietary nutritionist and a local meal delivery service. During the nutrition training for our Health Buddy volunteers, they discuss the importance of adherence to Doctor’s orders regarding dietary limitations and restrictions. The volunteers learn the effects of high sodium, how taste buds can change over time, and how addictive sugar can be. We wanted to strengthen the impact of the nutrition training, as well as foster a deeper bond between the volunteers and clients. We partnered with a local meal delivery service, Fit Life Foods. They deliver nutritionally balanced meals with no artificial sweeteners, flavors, colors, or preservatives, and they are GMO-free. The volunteers worked with their clients to discover meal preferences, discussed the nutrition facts, and both selected a week of meals. Once the meals were delivered, we had responses such as: “I loved speaking with my client and discovering his likes and dislikes when it came to meals- it was a great conversation starter!”

“My client and I had a dinner date phone call! We loved our meals. They were so flavorful- we couldn’t believe they were so healthy!”

“After speaking with my Health Buddy, I couldn’t believe how much sodium was in bread! I have high blood pressure, and we worked together to find meals that were healthy for me. I loved the sauces. It was delicious! Thank you.”

The conversations that the meal choices invoked strengthened the bond and trust between the clients and their Health Buddies. The nutrition training along with Fit Life Foods meal delivery was another monumental step on the path to wellness for our clients.



One of our largest accomplishments includes the relationship we have built with University of South Florida students and faculty. Health Buddies is working with their College of Pharmacy, College of Aging Studies, College of Medicine, College of Nursing, and College of Health Sciences to recruit volunteers. In return, we give their students a safe opportunity to gain skills/knowledge in how to conduct wellness checks and rapport with clients through telephone reassurance. Their faculty has worked with the Program Coordinator to make our findings more scientific and proving the positive impact we are having on both the lives of our clients and students.

## **2. Share your success stories with us.**

### Resource Empowerment Centre & Senior Connection Center Partnership

A client was feeling anxious about paying her property taxes. This added stress was affecting her health. We connected her with our partners at the Resource Empowerment Centre. They work to pair community members in need with “Resource Advocate” volunteers to help them get the support they need in a variety of areas. In this case, the assigned Resource Advocate had undergone the same challenges with her mother. They worked together to find financial support to cover her property taxes. The Senior Connection Center offered to help cover her financial needs and, in turn, our client will be speaking on their webinar to share her story about how their generosity impacted her quality of life.

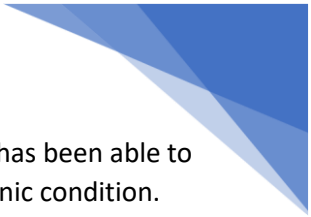
### Resource Empowerment Centre

A Health Buddy volunteer, Melannie, reported she was concerned her client had missed four doctor appointments. It turned out the missed appointments were due to a lack of reliable transportation. Her client had even scheduled pickups through her insurance company, and the contracted transportation service would cancel at the last minute. Melannie was concerned because without reliable transportation, her client would not be able to get the ongoing treatments she needed for her chronic condition. We immediately connected Melannie to the Resource Empowerment Centre. They assisted Melannie and her client with signing up for the Sunshine Line (a low-income transportation service provided by Hillsborough County). Within two days of reaching out to us, Melannie had helped her client apply for reliable transportation with the assistance of our community partners!

### An Inbound Call Turns into A Lifechanging Opportunity

We received a call from a senior who was in tears because she had been undergoing dialysis and was in a lot of pain and hungry. She explained that she formerly drove her golf cart to the nearby gas station to get her daily meals, but her treatments left her groggy and unable to drive. While her meals weren’t nutritious, now she didn't have a way to get food at all. We connected her to the Resource Empowerment Centre. The volunteers immediately banded together and brought the senior some groceries to help her immediate need. They also worked together to send an application to Meals on Wheels and submitted that application for food benefits. We followed up the next day and added the senior to Health Buddies as a client. Once paired with a Health Buddy, the senior and the volunteer had an immediate connection with one another. When the senior was going through the toughest of times with treatments for her chronic condition, her Health Buddy was the caring voice that helped calm her and feel at ease. The senior said that she knows that her Health Buddy is always there for her, whenever she needs a friend. Most recently, the senior let us know that she has been able to stop dialysis! She said





that she credits her Health Buddy's reassurance and the nutritious food that she has been able to receive for the major improvements to her lifestyle and management of her chronic condition.

#### AniMeals for the Pets of Isolated Individuals

Victoria had always been able to provide healthy, consistent meals to her beloved dog. When her Health Buddy heard that Victoria was having difficulty making ends meet and needing to choose between meals for herself or her pet, the Health Buddy sprung into action! Victoria was already receiving food benefits, so the Health Buddy started looking for resources for pets. The Health Buddy found that the Humane Society of Tampa Bay provides a pet food delivery service to individuals with limited mobility and/or income. Victoria was signed up and approved right away! Now Victoria no longer needs to decide who gets to have a nutritious meal. Thanks to the AniMeals program from the Humane Society, both Victoria and her dog are able to have healthy, consistent meals once again.

#### USF Partnership

We connected with the USF Health Sciences Volunteer Opportunity Expert. USF College of Pharmacy had happened to be looking for safe, "COVID-19 friendly" volunteer opportunities for their students to partake in.

Dear Chris, Ellen, and Staff at Seniors in Service,

I would also like to thank your team for offering the opportunity to our PharmD students. Your service is valued and provides a memorable experience for our students.

Sincerely,

**Tommy Rogers**

Senior Academic Program Specialist

Office of Experiential Education

Taneja College of Pharmacy

University of South Florida


813-974-6122

[tmroger3@usf.edu](mailto:tmroger3@usf.edu)

These students have been incredibly ambitious, responsive, and creative in solving their client's needs. We are so lucky to have them serving with this program.

#### USF Student Testimonial

"Hello Ms. Garling! I wanted to thank you for being such an organized and compassionate leader of Health Buddies! I really appreciate how helpful you were throughout this whole process, and how you even took time to make calls to us to ensure we were comfortable with our buddies! I really enjoyed getting to know Ms. Mary, and it was lovely to be a part of this program! I was hoping to continue to be a Health Buddy!"



-Sayona

### Intergenerational Advice

Often when we think of a senior adult and a college aged student, we think of wisdom and advice going from the senior to the student. One of our USF Health Buddies discovered that her client did not have teeth and found solid foods very uncomfortable to chew, even painful. This left the client with little variety in her diet which she had been complaining about. The volunteer recalled that she had a similar sensitivity to solid food when she had braces recently and she suggested to her client that she could try shredding her meats, for example shredding some chicken and mixing in some ketchup or barbeque sauce sloppy-joe style, to make them easier to eat. The client reported back that she tried it out and it worked! She told her that she had some brown rice, shredded chicken, and lima beans for lunch and was planning on boiling some chicken to prepare a similar meal the following day! She was so happy and told her it was the first solid food she's had in a while. Our volunteer felt so proud to be able to help in this way. The client is still waiting on her dentures to be able to eat solid foods, but until then our volunteer was able to offer advice and immediately impact her client's health with a healthy variety of food choices. All thanks to the recollection of recently having braces!

### Client Comments

"My volunteer and I listened to each other, practiced kindness, & educated each other."

"I loved talking to my buddy. It shows that someone cares, it helped me with loneliness, encouraged me, and it was nice to have someone to share stories with. It felt good to laugh with someone."

### Volunteer Comments


"I enjoyed getting to know my client better and represent a consistent aspect in their life/health journey."

"My favorite part was feeling like the client appreciated talking to me and when I was able to directly help her by answering a question or giving my opinion on a certain matter."

"It's good to get a real perspective on what older people actually want to hear from the younger generations."

### Chronic Conditions Can't Stop Connection!

Brian once had a life full of activity and independence until a diagnosis changed everything. His chronic condition caused exhaustion and forced Brian to remain indoors more often than he ever had. Brian's isolation became dire after the mandatory social distancing caused by COVID-19. Thankfully, a Seniors in Service staff member reached out to Brian to let him know that he's not alone. Instead of suffering through loneliness, Brian joined Health Buddies! Seniors in Service paired Brian up with a volunteer from Seniors in Service named Ben. With similar interests and friendly natures, Brian and Ben became fast friends. Brian describes their interactions warmly, stating, "I've had long chats with my volunteer. We're looking forward to meeting in person one day - we even have plans to shoot pool!" Ben equally enjoys



their chats, "Everything is going great! He is a lovely gentleman... I'm learning a lot about his life experiences."

### Breaking Down Barriers with Connection

One of our Health Buddy volunteers expressed that she was worried her Health Buddy client didn't want to be a part of the Health Buddies program. She said that every call she made with the client was extremely rushed and felt as though she was inconveniencing the client.

We reached out to the client immediately to investigate. The client reported that she felt uneducated in comparison to the volunteer, felt intimidated, and didn't feel like she was worth the volunteer's time. I let the client know that no matter what piece of paper she may or not have from a school says, that she IS important, and that she IS smart, and that we are here for her, and value her. It turns out that over her many years, she constantly had been put down to feel "not enough" and never heard someone tell her that she was valuable. She had a very difficult childhood, and she and her husband are now in their 70's, and she constantly feels like they are always treated poorly because of their age and lack of education.

After we talked through the difficulties she was experiencing, she was laughing and enjoying our conversation and said that she was looking forward to speaking with her Buddy again.

We got a follow up email from her Health Buddy on Monday that said : "I just had the nicest phone call with my client. She was very honest and talkative today. I think we found our balance. Thanks for following up with her last Friday."

### **3. How has the community benefited from this grant?**

Health Buddies has given our community a means to connect during a time of isolation. We have given the University of South Florida students, who are pursuing a career in the healthcare field, an opportunity to see the "behind the scenes" of the life of a caregiver. This real-life practice forces them to think about the way they communicate with their future patients and prepare them for their return home after a hospital stay or doctor's appointment. Additionally, we have given healthcare workers a glimpse into what companionship can do to help empower an individual to manage their health from home. The clients are less likely to unnecessarily reach out to doctors' offices or take up the valuable space in the emergency rooms. This gives the community the resources it needs to continue to treat the patients that are in dire need of medical care, rather than spending resources on patients that are seeking out companionship.

### **4. Without this grant how would the population you serve have received these services?**

The population we serve would have remained isolated and would not have connected to much-needed services. We work together to determine best "next steps" for each individual client based on their needs. With this one-on-one support of a Health Buddy, we can make their next steps WITH them as opposed to just giving them another phone number to call. We have other local community partners who help us offer the most we can to our clients. Our program uses companionship as medicine to empower those suffering with chronic illnesses from the safety of their own home and reduce unnecessary hospital readmissions due to social isolation/loneliness. That is what makes Health Buddies unlike any other.



SENIORS **in SERVICE**  
GEARED UP TO SERVE

*Florida*  
*Blue*   
Foundation



**SENIORS in SERVICE**  
*GEARED UP TO SERVE*

- ▶ For over 36 years, Seniors in Service has administered national programs in our local region, supporting seniors, children, veterans and adults, meeting them where they are at.



# Health Buddies Mission

- ▶ Our Health Buddies program reduces the number of adults who seek medical care due to social isolation, loneliness, and fear. We engage trained volunteers who provide support to isolated adults by telephone, which empowers patients to self-manage their health.

# Overview

- ▶ Completely Free!
  - ▶ 100% Grant Funded
- ▶ 12-week program
- ▶ Telephone Reassurance
  - ▶ Companionship as Medicine
- ▶ Pre-Test, Mid-Test & Post-Test conducted with clients to examine the following:
  - ▶ Show improvement of knowledge of chronic illness
  - ▶ Measurable change in behavior
    - ▶ Examples: diet, exercise



# Why Health Buddies?

- ▶ Reduce proportion of adults that unnecessarily seek emergency assistance or require hospital readmission due to social isolation
- ▶ Empower isolated adults to continue to age in place with improved quality of life
- ▶ Learning from non-authority figures can be less intimidating, more enriching for the client, and rewarding for the volunteers





## The **Health Buddies** volunteers encourage physician recommendations such as:

- ▶ COVID-19 compliant hygiene recommendations
- ▶ Diet and exercise
- ▶ Medication Adherence
- ▶ Medical appointments & treatment regimens
- ▶ When it is time to call a health care provider **BEFORE** there is an emergency

**Health Buddies** help the participants develop a ***new normal*** through supportive phone calls with the goal of chronic care self-management.

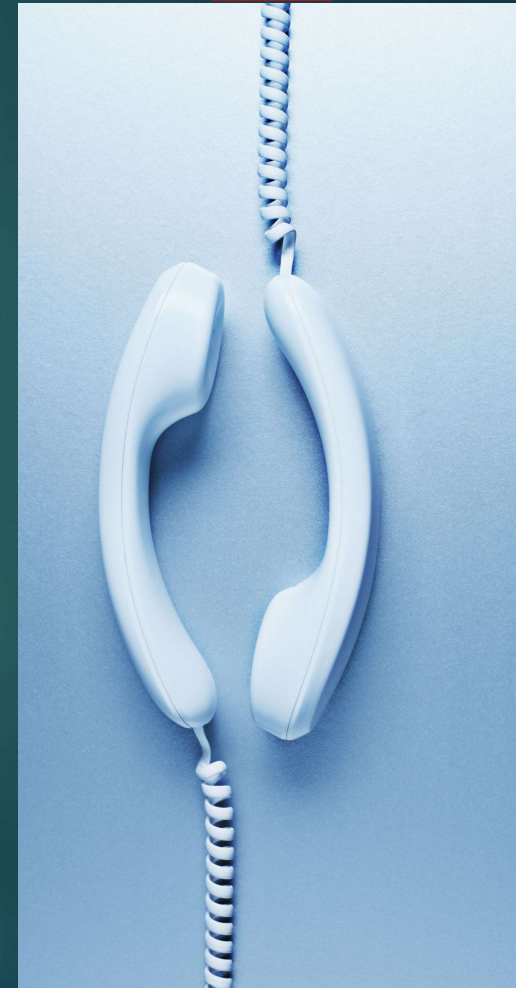
# Who Are Our Health Buddies **Volunteers?**

- ▶ Age 18+
- ▶ Background Checked
- ▶ Seniors in Service Volunteers
- ▶ USF College of Aging Studies
- ▶ USF College of Health Service Corps
- ▶ USF College of Psychology
- ▶ Referrals



# What is Expected of Volunteers?

- ▶ 12-week Commitment
- ▶ 2-3 Calls a week based on client requests
- ▶ Complete Call Logs to record conversation topics, times of calls, and attempted calls
- ▶ Participate in 6 Volunteer trainings via Zoom (will be recorded for those unable to attend)
- ▶ Complete Weekly Modules
- ▶ Communicate with Program Coordinator any concerns about the clients' mental or physical health.
- ▶ Work together to provide community resources to clients based on individual needs.



# What type of training do the volunteers receive?

- ▶ HIPPA training
- ▶ Weekly modules to complete
- ▶ Speakers bi-weekly include:
  - ▶ Medication, presented by a pharmacist
  - ▶ Nutrition, presented by a nutritionist
  - ▶ Financial Health and Schemes to be aware of presented by a banking community development specialist
  - ▶ Exercise and Safety, presented by a Physical Therapist
  - ▶ Mindfulness and wholistic approach to wellness presentation
  - ▶ Community Resources, presented by a community leader



## Who can be a Health Buddies **client**?

- ▶ Anyone 18+
- ▶ Chronic Condition(s)
- ▶ Lives in Pinellas, Pasco, or Hillsborough Counties
- ▶ Has a phone
- ▶ Wants to receive phone calls



# Training for Clients

<b>Lesson One: The Basics of Zoom</b>	
Wednesday, February 9 @ 10 AM	In our first lesson we will go over the basics of using Zoom and all in meeting buttons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● mute/unmute</li><li>● start/stop video</li><li>● Using the chat</li><li>● Using reactions</li><li>● Switching view</li><li>● Renaming in meeting</li></ul>

## Benefits to participants:

Support and companionship

Help make community connections

Help with their own understanding of their health

Reduced loneliness while remaining in home

Better understanding of disease management

Improved wellness and overall health

Enhanced quality of life

No costs or charges to patient, provider or insurance

# What is the Price of Loneliness to Taxpayers?



[Video Link](#)



## Benefits to medical providers:

- ▶ Reduced burden on healthcare providers due to increasing demand from older adults
- ▶ Mitigate unnecessary phone calls
- ▶ Reduced requests for hospital re-admissions
- ▶ Improved patient outcomes
- ▶ Creating a healthier community through patient self-management
- ▶ **No conflict with insurance**; No costs or charges to patient, provider or insurance



# Impact Stories

- ▶ A phone call that led to reliable transportation
- ▶ Even the client's pets can benefit from Health Buddies!
- ▶ "I loved talking to my buddy. It shows that someone cares, it helped me with loneliness, encouraged me, and it was nice to have someone to share stories with. It felt good to laugh with someone." –Health Buddies Client



# Health Buddies 2021-2022

- ▶ We enrolled **55 Clients**
  - ▶ (Target Number 45)
- ▶ We trained **66 Volunteer Health Buddies**
- ▶ Volunteers made a total of **1,193 phone calls**



The Kessler Scale is a  
**6-item self-report  
measure** intended to  
be used as a quick  
tool to assess the  
mental wellness of the  
general population.

#### KESSLER 6

During the past 30 days, about how often did you feel ...

**...nervous?**

1 All of the time   2 Most of the time   3 Some of the time   4 A little of the time   5 None of the time

**...hopeless?**

1 All of the time   2 Most of the time   3 Some of the time   4 A little of the time   5 None of the time

**...restless or fidgety?**

1 All of the time   2 Most of the time   3 Some of the time   4 A little of the time   5 None of the time

**...so depressed that nothing could cheer you up?**

1 All of the time   2 Most of the time   3 Some of the time   4 A little of the time   5 None of the time

**...that everything was an effort?**

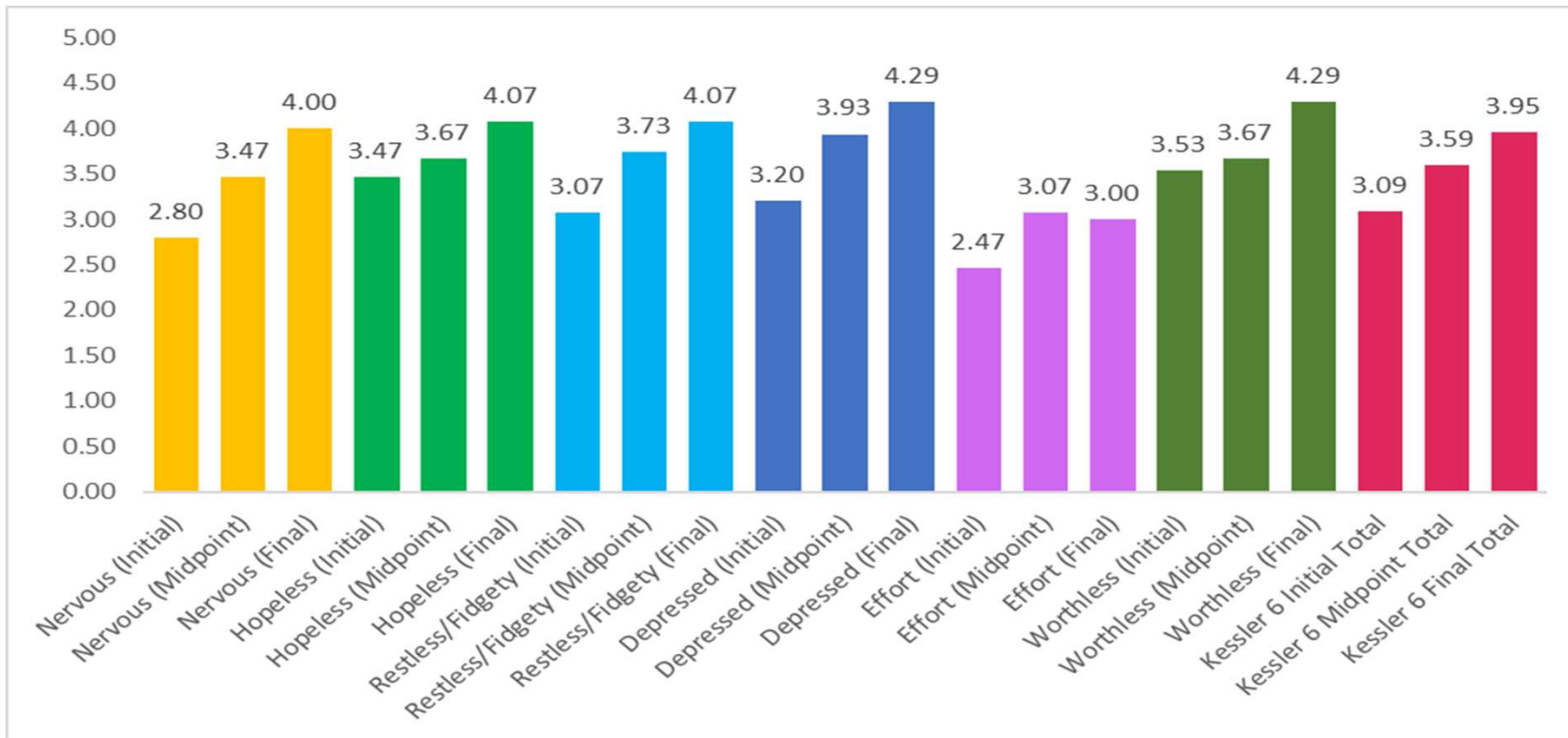
1 All of the time   2 Most of the time   3 Some of the time   4 A little of the time   5 None of the time

**...worthless?**

1 All of the time   2 Most of the time   3 Some of the time   4 A little of the time   5 None of the time

# Cohort 4: Kessler 6

Results from 15 Clients Surveyed August 2021, October 2021, and December 2021



- 1- All of the time
- 2- Most of the time
- 3- Some of the time
- 4- A little of the time
- 5- None of the time

# Health Buddies 2021 Outcomes

- ▶ At the end of the 12 weeks, 28 out of 44 (64%) clients reported improvement in their knowledge of their health condition
- ▶ 47 of the 55 (85%) clients reported that they feel more capable of self-managing their condition from home.
- ▶ 44 out of 47 (94%) clients did not have a hospital readmission for in-patient services for the same medical condition within the 12 weeks of Health Buddies
- ▶ 100% of the clients reported that they did not have an Emergency Room visit for the same medical condition within the 12 weeks of Health Buddies

# Impact Story from a Volunteer

- ▶ [Testimonial from a Health Buddy Volunteer](#)



# Post Health Buddies

- ▶ TelePals
- ▶ Volunteer Opportunities
- ▶ Senior Companion Program



# Senior Companions

- ▶ Volunteers visit home-bound Seniors to reduce isolation and offer a friendly face that is there regularly.
- ▶ “Seniors In Service is a wonderful organization. They provide companionship services for my dad, and he couldn't be happier. My father's companion checks in with me and my dad over the phone and in person and also helps with some errands. He is patient and kind, just an awesome person and this is an important service for the elderly. My dad considers Juan his friend! Two thumbs up for Seniors In Service.”



# Recap

- ▶ Health Buddies matches isolated and lonely adults that are suffering from anxiety due to their chronic illness with a Health Buddy that helps them better self-manage their care.
- ▶ We empower health minded volunteers 18+ to become Health Buddies to our clients with chronic conditions. It is a mutually beneficial partnership.
- ▶ At the end of the 12-week program, the clients feel less anxious and more empowered to self manage their chronic illness, and the volunteers gain life skills while both make a new friend! We also provide programs for participants to continue with Seniors in Service.
- ▶ If you know someone that may benefit from this program, please let me know and our Health Buddies team will reach out to them immediately: [healthbuddies@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:healthbuddies@seniorsinservice.org)

# Do you know someone that could use **Companionship as Medicine?**

- ▶ Send them my information or send me their information!

**Aria Garling**  
**(813) 492-8931**

[healthbuddies@seniorsinservice.org](mailto:healthbuddies@seniorsinservice.org)

<http://seniorsinservice.org/health-buddies/>

Together, we can help our community feel empowered to take control of their health!





SENIORS **in SERVICE**  
GEARED UP TO SERVE

*Florida*  
*Blue*   
Foundation