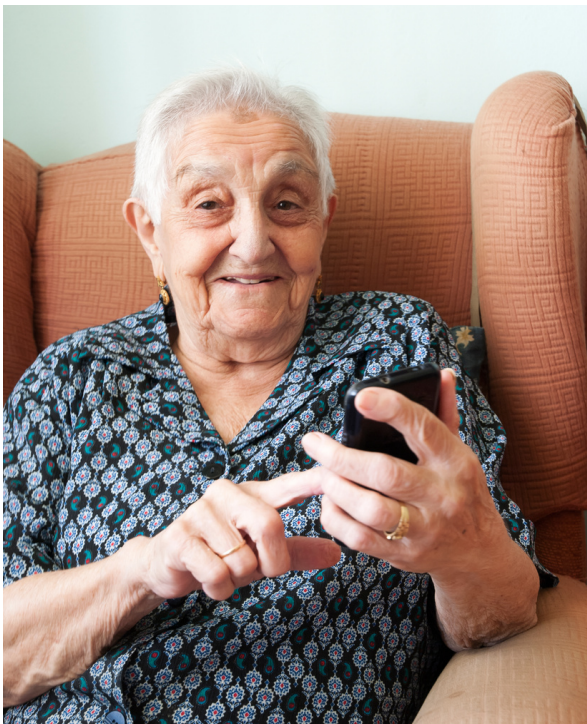


# AGING **best**

Area Agency on Aging



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## STAYING CONNECTED

A year ago the words “pandemic” and “quarantine” rarely entered our conversations. We never imagined how quickly our daily lives, routines and interaction with others could change. Many of us found ourselves socially isolated for the first time in our lives. Unfortunately, for many older adults social isolation was and will continue to affect them.

Upon learning they are in an at-risk category, most older adults decided to follow recommendations and stay at home. The result is an increase in an already alarming number of isolated, homebound older adults. Though social distancing is helping them avoid the COVID-19 virus, the lack of social interaction often causes feelings of anxiety and extreme loneliness. The impact can lead to serious health concerns.

“Mary,” age 85, lives alone. Before the pandemic she attended church each Sunday and volunteered at a local thrift shop once a week. She looked forward

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to her daughter Veronica and grandchildren coming to town for a visit at least once a month.

Shortly after the onset of the pandemic the thrift shop closed. The church also decided it was best to switch to online services. Veronica works in a hospital cafeteria. For Mary's safety, she decided it was best to stop visiting for a while. Within a month, Mary's interaction with the outside world ceased. As the months went by Mary found herself becoming more and more depressed. Most days she read books, rarely left her chair and slept a lot.

After months with no interaction, Mary was excited to learn the church and thrift shop were reopening for those willing to wear a mask. The church even reserved a special area for older adults. Mary wanted to attend, but the lack of movement over the past few months had caused her balance problems to worsen. She felt self-conscious using her walker in front of everyone at church and decided to stop going. The thrift shop did reopen but only needed volunteers for the heavy lifting jobs. Several children at her granddaughter's school tested positive for COVID-19, so Veronica

decided for safety's sake to continue distancing. Between her job at the hospital and home schooling the kids, Veronica had become so busy her calls to Mary had dwindled to once a month or less. Mary's loneliness increased. She found herself becoming breathless just walking around the house. She began to notice she was forgetting simple tasks. She felt completely alone.

Things began to turn around for Mary when "Helen," a volunteer, began calling once a week.



Mary marked the day and time of the expected calls on her calendar and made notes of all the things she wanted to tell Helen about. It was nice to see something written on the calendar that had been blank for months. Helen also looked forward to the weekly calls. As a volunteer, she had been trained to ask certain questions to help ensure

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Mary's health and living situation were good. She found Mary to be a wealth of knowledge on many topics and appreciated the advice.

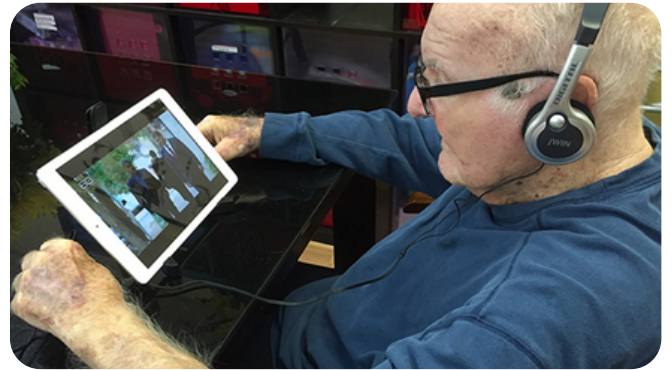
Taking the Telephonic Reassurance and Friendly Visitor programs a step further, Aging Best has created the Virtual Visitor Program. The program equips volunteer visitors with computer tablets to better connect homebound seniors with the outside world.

"Bob" lives in a rural area. Unlike Mary, he has a very big family. However, everyone lives in a different state. When his wife passed away Bob's daughter and son-in-law wanted him to move in with them, but he chose to stay in Mid-Missouri on his beloved farm. Though the kids do call, Bob only sees them every other Christmas or so. The Virtual Visitor Program makes it possible for individuals like Bob to have video calls with relatives living in other areas.

The volunteer can help Bob with the tablet as he has never used that type of technology. The visitor can even set the call up from outside the screen door completely free of contact.

Being able to actually see distant family and friends has an amazing

effect on both the emotional and physical health of individuals who are isolated. The fact that Bob lives on a farm has little to do with his loneliness. Many seniors living in apartments in heavily populated areas are just as isolated. They do not leave home or have visitors.



Though we do not know the full effect the COVID-19 pandemic will have on homebound seniors, recent studies have found that:

- Social isolation significantly increased a person's risk of premature death from all causes, a risk that may rival those of smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.
- Social isolation was associated with about a 50% percent increased risk of dementia.
- Loneliness was associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.

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- Poor social relationships (characterized by social isolation or loneliness) was associated with a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke.
  - Loneliness among heart failure patients was associated with a nearly four times increased risk of death, 68% increased risk of hospitalization, and 57% increased risk of emergency room visits.

Aging Best's programs rely heavily on volunteers. "What makes them more volunteer friendly than many other programs is the flexible schedule," said Marissa Peterson, Director of Community Options & Services at Aging Best. "The visits or calls can take place over the weekend or after hours. This makes it possible for individuals with a Monday - Friday work schedule to participate in a volunteering activity. That opens the window for volunteers of all age groups."

Those receiving the calls and visits enjoy the different ideas the volunteers have come up with. One of the most creative is the classroom style. The teacher sets up the screen and does a group visit with the senior. The class can sing, read or take turns asking

questions. Many of the seniors have great information to share with the students as well.

It is important to remember that not everyone living alone is lonely. Equally important is that individuals living with someone else can still be lonely. Social isolation should never be more than temporary. It is temporary in that it can easily be changed by phone calls, letters, visits and virtual programs. Part of addressing the problem is identifying individuals who may be dealing with social isolation as they are often unlikely to reach out for help.

Aging Best's network of Senior Center Administrators, Ombudsman and Community Options & Services professionals is well-connected to the senior community and the need within.

If you know of someone who would enjoy receiving calls or visits Aging Best can arrange it. If you would like to volunteer a little time each week speaking with an older adult by phone or helping as a Virtual Visitor we are excited to hear from you.

**For more information on receiving or volunteering for calls or visits please call: 800-369-5211.**





Aging Best is excited to be included in the CoMoGives campaign this year. CoMoGives is an annual online fundraiser that supports 142 high-impact nonprofits in Columbia and Mid-Missouri.



The campaign kicks off on Tuesday, December 1st. "Giving Tuesday" is a global movement unleashing the power of people and organizations to transform their communities and the world. The giving will then continue throughout the month of December.

Aging Best will use the donations received to further the expansion of our programs aimed at social isolation. Our service area covers 19 counties throughout Mid-Missouri. The number of homebound older adults in many of our counties has greatly increased due to the present pandemic.

With people ages 60 and over being at a higher risk many will likely remain at a

a more distanced style of living for a much longer period of time. Without assistance they will continue to have little social interaction. We know the need for social connections will continue to exist, and Aging Best will continue to address it.

**Join us on Tuesday, December 1st.  
Together we can make a difference!  
Support Aging Best at:**

<https://comogives.com/product/aging-best>

## How Can I Volunteer?

Aging Best has many volunteering opportunities available such as:

- Making Telephonic Reassurance calls to older adults.
- Becoming a part of our Virtual Visitor Program and helping someone connect with others.
- Making cards or writing letters.
- Helping deliver homebound meals and/or pet supplies.
- Helping with meals and curbside service at one of our senior centers and much, much more!

For more information on volunteering:

800-369-5211

<https://agingbest.org/make-a-difference>

## Aging Best Activities



Eldon Senior Center had some special curbside servers for the holiday meal.



California Nutrition Site's volunteer/board member, Carol Mesey, painted some holiday cheer for curbside guests to enjoy.



Boonslick Senior Center held a curbside book giveaway in honor of National Book Lover's Day.



Hughes Senior Center in Lebanon holds a "Thankful Thursday" drawing each week. Lots of great prizes!



Dixon Senior Center held a drawing for a great cooking basket with everything a baker could need.

For more pictures, announcements and activities visit/like/follow us at:  
<https://www.facebook.com/agingbest.org>  
<https://www.instagram.com/agingbest/>