



*Helping People,  
Changing Lives*

# Helping Hand

## Welcome

Welcome to the ninth issue of the Helping Hand! You are receiving this newsletter because you are either a participant in CAHF's Volunteer Engagement Project or you have expressed interest in it. Every month, we share ideas and best practices, updates from the project, and examples of volunteer programs making a difference across California.

And new for 2020, we are adding an **Announcements section**. Please check this section for timely comments or requests directed at our newsletter readers.

## **Announcements: We need you to tell your story**

2020 is the year that we are finally gathering our insights from this project into a video to be shared with all California skilled nursing facilities. The VE Project team plans to travel to a few SNFs over the next six months to record your stories of success, challenges and inspiration.

This is not a project of vanity or glory but of service. We need to gather individuals who can speak about the value of a volunteer program so all other SNFs understand the impact of this undertaking. Your contributions to the video will go a long way towards improving resident quality of life all over the state.

If you or anyone at your facility is interested in this opportunity, please contact Tina Hand at [thand@cahf.org](mailto:thand@cahf.org).

## **Stories from your peers: Residents love pets in SNFs**

**Tina Hand**

**Volunteer Engagement Project Manager**

Can you imagine a world without dogs or cats or pets of any kind? Our homes would feel empty. We would be missing out on the sweetness, the silliness and the companionship that pets offer.

For many residents in skilled nursing facilities this is the world they live in. They are fortunate to live in an environment with caring support from staff, other residents, visitors and volunteers but they may be missing out on the joys of loving a pet. This is why pet volunteer programs can have such an impact.

February 20 is **National Love Your Pet Day**. This month we are thinking about the value of pets in skilled nursing facilities. Windsor Gardens Healthcare Center of the Valley has maintained an



active pet volunteering program for years. Every month, three dogs and their owners visit the facility to socialize with the residents. There is such excitement in the facility when this day arrives. Staff often hear resident exclamations from down the hallway, "The dogs are here! The dogs are here!" Lulu, activity director, sees a difference in the residents when the pets are around; they are calmer and happier. They benefit when they are able to give love and receive love from pets.

[Pet ownership has been proven to lower blood pressure, increase socialization, and decrease feelings of loneliness.](#) SNFs can emulate these positive effects by allowing pet volunteers into their facility on a regular basis. You could even adopt a pet to live permanently in your facility as Windsor Gardens has done. Their live-in cat, Mr. Windsor, has been a feature of the facility for years. He acts as a mascot for the building while also contributing to a loving and healing environment for the residents. As we approach Valentine's Day, you can show love to your residents by supporting a pet volunteer or live-in pet in your skilled nursing facility. To learn more about how your facility can find success with pet volunteer programs, contact Tina.

## Handbook Highlight

From [How to Create a Robust Volunteer Program in Your Skilled Nursing Facility](#)

One of the best ways to promote volunteerism in your skilled nursing facility is to assess your community for potential volunteers. Volunteers who live or work locally will have a vested interest in getting involved and will have an easier time keeping their commitments. Some potential community volunteer resources include schools, churches, colleges & universities, service organizations and companies with employer-supported volunteer programs. Not sure how to approach such organizations? Refer to the handbook sections entitled **Community Assessment** and **Script for Recruiting Volunteers!**

## Upcoming FREE webinars!

***How Volunteers Can Support  
Emergency Operations***



**Create a Successful  
and Sustainable  
Volunteer Program!**

**Wednesday, February 12**  
**2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (PST)**

**Registration is now open!**

[Click Here to Register](#)

Applied for one (1) CEU for NHAP, BRN and NCCAP (activity professionals).

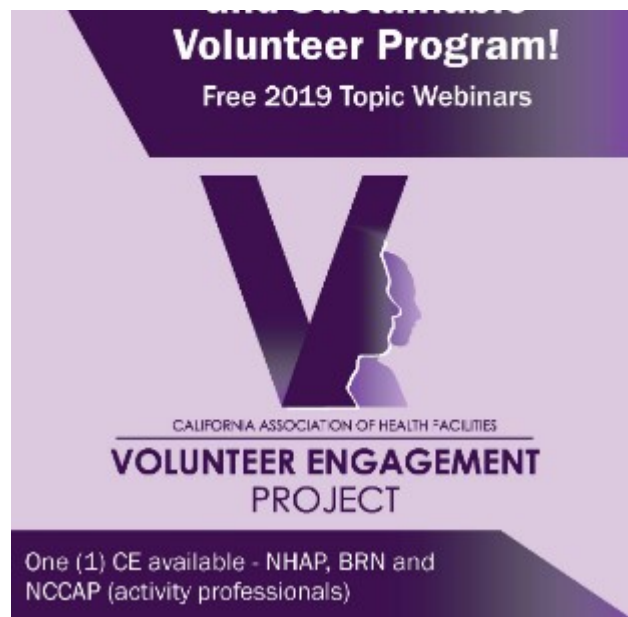
### ***Voice of the Volunteer***

**Wednesday, April 8**  
**2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (PDT)**  
**Registration is will open soon.**

### ***Volunteer Training and Orientation Techniques***

**Wednesday, June 10**  
**2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (PDT)**  
**Registration is will open soon.**

Click [here](#) to register for upcoming live webinars or watch previously recorded webinars on demand.



## **Meg's Messages**

**Meg Thayer, Ph.D.**  
**Geriatric Psychologist**

### **Volunteering May Protect Against Heart Disease**

Here at the CAHF Volunteer Engagement Project we have gathered and shared information about the myriad benefits volunteers provide to the residents of skilled nursing facilities. We have also shared some of the potential benefits to those who choose to volunteer. In this month that celebrates both love and the hearts that experience it, there is some interesting information about how doing good for others may improve the health of your heart.

Heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States, and the first signs of heart disease can begin to appear as early as adolescence. Negative lifestyle factors such as poor diet, lack of exercise and stress can increase the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease. But what about positive lifestyle factors? Can they help to reduce the risk of heart disease?



Research out of Carnegie Mellon University looked at the effects of volunteering on heart health and revealed some compelling information. In a group of 1,164 adults between the ages of 51-91 studied over a four-year period, those who reported at least 200 hours of volunteer work per year (four hours per week) were 40 percent less likely to develop hypertension than those who did not volunteer. The specific type of volunteer activity was not a factor, only the amount of time spent volunteering led to increased protection from hypertension. Tenth-grade students were also included in the study, and over a ten-week period 106 adolescents who participated in a volunteer program just one hour per week had lower levels of inflammation and cholesterol and lower body mass indices than students who had been wait-listed.

Compiling a list of reasons people should volunteer in your skilled nursing facility? Maybe you should add heart health to your list. Couples could volunteer together and gain both increased heart health and shared altruism.

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2201 K Street, Sacramento, CA 95816