



*Helping People,
Changing Lives*

Helping Hand

Welcome

Welcome to the tenth 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've added an **Announcements section**. Please check this section for timely comments or requests directed at our newsletter readers.

Announcements: COVID-19 Precautions for Volunteers

Concerns about the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in skilled nursing facilities is having an impact on volunteer programs. While volunteers may bring a lot to residents through their visits, they can also unintentionally carry infection to those living or working in a facility. Limiting visits from volunteers during this time can help to reduce the risk of possible transmission of the virus to residents. Elimination of potential exposure is our greatest intervention in the fight to keep COVID-19 and influenza-like viruses out of our buildings. At this time the CDC and the AHCA are recommending that any employee, visitor, or volunteer displaying flu like symptoms, fever, sore throat, etc. not enter the building. For anyone that is in the building, it is particularly important to practice proper cough etiquette and good hand hygiene even if they are not symptomatic.

While the aim of the Volunteer Engagement Project has always been to increase volunteerism in SNFs, resident safety must be the first priority. We encourage you to review your facility's policy on this matter and possibly limit or restrict volunteers from the community until the concerns from COVID-19 have faded. By limiting this exposure, you are supporting the safety and wellbeing of your residents, your volunteers, and your community at large.

If you have any additional questions about COVID-19 and the recommended response, please refer to the CAHF webpage listed here.

<https://www.cahf.org/Resources/Media-Center/Coronavirus>

Stories from your peers: Volunteers Speak Your Language

Tina Hand

Volunteer Engagement Project Manager

Communication is a fundamental part of providing quality care for our residents and this can be a struggle when skilled nursing facilities are serving an increasingly diverse population. Among all of the SNFs in the Volunteer Engagement Project, communication with limited English proficient (LEP) residents was listed among the top challenges. This as an opportunity for volunteers to help.



Some facilities are already utilizing volunteers to meet the needs of their LEP residents. For example, Sophia Basa, activity director at San Pablo Healthcare & Wellness Center, said that she has a volunteer that speaks Tagalog to residents and noticed the positive impact of her residents feeling "more comfortable speaking their first language."

Many of your residents may also speak English but their comfort is in speaking their first language. Multi-lingual volunteers may be more successful in engaging those that experience language barriers -- and this can have a significant impact across a resident's entire spectrum of care. They may be better able to express their dietary needs, they could be more responsive to social services--and [studies](#) show that clear communication through an interpreter improves health and safety outcomes.

Sourcing bi-lingual or multi-lingual volunteers to support all of your LEP patients can be intimidating. A single facility will often house residents of multiple native languages including Spanish and Tagalog as well as Vietnamese, Mandarin, and Russian. Focus on finding volunteers that speak the most common languages at your facility to provide the greatest overall impact. Volunteer interpreters of all languages can be found at local cultural community centers, in language learning courses, or even through an online service board like [VolunteerMatch.com](https://www.volunteermatch.com). Make it known in the community that your facility is seeking these types of volunteers. Like your residents, people with the right skills and interest will be grateful for the opportunity to connect with others in their language.

Handbook Highlight

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

Many of the facilities participating in the Volunteer Engagement Project have discussed individual interaction as an important aspect of raising the quality of life for their residents. Volunteers can be a perfect match for this activity – especially if they feel comfortable initiating and maintaining personal interaction. Sharing ideas for individual activities can be the key to helping your volunteers succeed in this very important work. Appendix P in the handbook includes **100 Things to Do While Visiting an Older Adult!** Make it available to all your volunteers and watch the fun begin.

Upcoming FREE webinars!

Voice of the Volunteer

Wednesday, April 8

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (PDT)

Registration is now open!

[Click Here to Register](#)

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

Volunteer Training and Orientation Techniques

Wednesday, June 10

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (PDT)

Registration will open soon.

Building an Intergenerational Volunteer Program

Wednesday, August 12

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (PDT)

Registration will open soon.

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

Create a Successful and Sustainable Volunteer Program!

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FREE 2020 Topic Webinars

One (1) CE available - NHAP, BRN and NCCAP (activity professionals)

Approved CE Education

For more information, contact
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VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

Meg's Messages

Meg Thayer, Ph.D.
Geriatric Psychologist

The Benefits of Animal-Assisted Therapy

As the elderly population in the United States increases, many older American adults may come to live in some type of assisted living or nursing care facility. Such facilities tend to restrict the extent of people's belongings, including pet ownership. Loneliness is, unfortunately, common in



these facilities and the negative impact of loneliness is well-documented (see previous editions of Helping Hand). How can loneliness be decreased for older adults who live in skilled nursing facilities?

We have all experienced it – the joy on people's faces when they see an animal, whether a cute dog in the park, a kitten playing with string, even the fish tank in a doctor's office. Studies have shown that pet-ownership has been a robust predictor of recovery and sustained

health among community-dwelling elders following surgery or acute illness. Based on these studies, and the popularity of pet-ownership in general, Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) has grown in use as an effective intervention in hospitals to combat loneliness and increase socialization.

In a study published in the Journal of Gerontology, Animal-Assisted Therapy was shown to significantly decrease loneliness in nursing home residents, especially in those who had reported a strong life-history of pet ownership. Some interesting additional benefits were found as well – namely that nursing home residents who regularly engaged in AAT described spontaneous recollection of past events with their own pets. They then shared these recollections with other residents and with volunteers who handled the pets, increasing positive human-to-human socialization as well. Pet “mascots” in skilled nursing facilities have also grown in popularity and have positively factored into resident satisfaction. We have met a few such mascots during our site visits to facilities participating in the Volunteer Engagement Project!

Animal-Assisted Therapy can be a strong antidote to loneliness and isolation among skilled nursing facility residents. Please consider recruiting volunteers to make this a regular part of your person-centered programming.

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