

# **Welcome to the LINKages Program!**

*We hope the materials contained in this training package will help you in your visits. We have included information on the LINKages program, the needs of seniors and a few things to help you build a relationship. If you need more information, please do not hesitate to ask your Program Coordinator.*

*Have a great year!!*

## **EXPECTATIONS OF VOLUNTEERS**

- A commitment to the program is from October to May. This includes the scheduled visits, training, orientation, occasional in-school meetings and special events.
- Appropriate behavior, attire, attitude and respect for care centre staff, seniors, teacher sponsor and LINKages Coordinator
- Every effort should be made to establish consistent and regular visit times.
- Volunteer protocol requires that you sign in, wear a nametag, sign out and return nametag to proper place when visit is over.
- Notify the LINKages Coordinator, if you anticipate missing more than two consecutive visits.
- If you and your peer partner are unable to attend a scheduled visit a courtesy call must be made to the care centre liaison or your senior's unit clerk at the care center.
- Transportation to and from the care center is your own responsibility.
- Report problems or frustration, joys and celebrations or any innovative ideas you may have to enhance the relationship with your senior to the LINKages Coordinator.
- Participation in an evaluation process for both you and the program.
- Have fun, laugh, talk, learn, ask questions and be creative.

# **LINKAGES COMMITMENT TO YOU**

- Management of the program for the benefit of both teens and seniors
- Selection, orientation and training of applicants
- Organization of visits and events
- On-going training, support, encouragement and mentoring
- Provision of resources on-site to enhance visits
- Facilitate feedback between school, care centre, volunteers and corporate sponsors
- Provide opportunity for evaluation of the program by students and care centres
- Maintain volunteer records, hours of service and provide reference letters recognizing students contribution
- Opportunity to attend year-end celebration
- Provide reporting as requested by the donors and the school

## **DISMISSAL POLICY**

In the rare and unfortunate situation when a student volunteer fails to conduct themselves in a respectful manner towards seniors, care center staff, LINKages staff and/or fellow students; the following procedures will take place:

1. Verbal discussion indicating what the problem is and how we will address it.
2. If the problem continues, a written warning will be given indicating expectations and consequences should the behavior not change.
3. If the problem still persists, you will be asked to leave the program.

Any behavior, which puts yourself, your senior or your peers at risk will result in immediate dismissal from the program.

# VISITING GUIDELINES

**LINKages** strives at all times to ensure that student visiting is carried out in a safe and comfortable environment. To help facilitate such an environment, student volunteers will adhere to the following visiting regulations.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY:**

The information you learn about the senior and the senior's family through your involvement with LINKages is to be kept confidential from your associates outside of the program.

## **VISIT PARAMETERS:**

- o Students will at all times strive to visit their senior partners in pairs. If one student partner is unable to attend a visit, the remaining partner must always visit in a public setting. Visiting one-on-one in private rooms or settings is not allowed.
- o Visiting will take place in an open manner. Doors to private rooms must remain open at all times.
- o If a student experiences any behavior that is inappropriate, they must contact the LINKages staff immediately.

## **SPECIAL OCCASIONS:**

It is acceptable to give small, modest gifts to celebrate special occasions (e.g. birthdays or significant holidays) Examples of small, modest gifts include:

- o Giving a card
- o Bringing in cupcakes, cookies, or snacks
- o Making a gift
- o Something inexpensive but thoughtful

Use the same discretion when accepting gifts. Gifts of any extravagance should not be accepted

## **APPROPRIATE TOUCHING:**

Any touching should be comfortable for both you and the senior, such as holding hands or giving hugs. However, refrain from any form of touching that could be interpreted as being inappropriate

## **EXCHANGE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION:**

Phone numbers can be exchanged in case one party can not make a scheduled visit. However, phone calls should only be made to re-schedule visits. It is up to you to discuss phone parameters with your senior if the level of phone contact becomes uncomfortable for you.

# **WHEN A SENIOR IS HARD OF HEARING**

- Talk clearly, naturally and perhaps a little slower than usual.  
**AVOID SHOUTING**
- Watch for signs that you are not being heard such as signs of confusion, inappropriate answers etc., and try to repeat yourself in another way slowly
- A patient attitude with yourself and your senior while trying to communicate will ease frustration.
- Emphasize key words and phrases so the person understands the subject of the conversation.

## **Seeing is Hearing**

- Move a little closer when you speak and face the person so they can be assisted by lip reading.
- Wait for them to look at you before speaking.
- Consider jotting important words down on paper
- Use facial expression and body language to help project meaning.

## **Planning Helps**

Choose activities that do not rely on sound or conversation.

## **Hearing Loss is invisible but real**

- While hearing aids can amplify sound but cannot restore lost frequencies, they can also amplify background noise that can produce frustration.

*Never ignore a hard of hearing person – they are still there!*



# **WHEN A SENIOR HAS LOSS OF VISION**

**As we grow older, our eyes grow weaker and vision may become impaired. There are things we can do to help!**

## **Let there be Light**

- Be sure that there is lots of light in order to assist people with the best possible chance to see.

## **Avoid Shock**

- Let them know you are addressing them by using their names.
- Always identify yourself.
- Always let blind or visually impaired people know when you are arriving or leaving or what you are going to do.

## **Words Work**

- Describe the surroundings like the layout of the room, the colors, the view, the landscape.
- Give directions clearly and accurately.
- Do not hesitate to use the words “see”, “look” or “read”.
- Ask your senior friend how they are most comfortable with you giving them guidance and assistance.

## **Going Places**

- If you go for a walk be sure to have your senior friend hold your arm just above the elbow. (Flex your arm at a 90-degree angle.)

## **Find the Fun**

- Visually impaired people can be an exciting challenge!
- They miss the opportunity to read so find something that interests them and read aloud.
- They may need to borrow your eyes and fingers to write letters or sew a button on for them.
- They still have lots of stories to tell and it helps if you ask questions and show interest in what they have to say.
- They love to hear your stories, so be open with what is happening in your life. Feel free to use humour, music or tactile stimulants to encourage interaction.

# COMMON PHYSICAL DISABILITIES OF SENIORS IN CARE CENTRES

- Arthritis** Crippled, stiff and twisted limbs  
May be unable to turn their head easily, pick up objects or use fine motor skills. They are often achy and in some discomfort especially if cold or in an uncomfortable position.
- Parkinson's Disease**  
Chronic shaking of the hands, feet or head.
- COPD** (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder)  
Have severe difficulty breathing without an oxygen supply. (Nose tubes attached to a tank). They move slowly and often have to have help moving their tank.
- Strokes** Blood clot in brain may have caused permanent or semi-permanent damage. May be partially paralyzed or have difficulty in speaking.
- Diabetes** Need insulin shots and will be on a special diet. May have limited vision and poor circulation.
- Balance** Will move slowly and carefully. Consideration needs to be given to being calm and quiet. May have dizzy spells
- Dementia** Dementia is a word used to describe a group of diseases of the brain. Many seniors do not develop dementia – it is not the norm. However, within nursing care facilities, some dementia is evident within approximately 50% of the population. Usually the dementia is mild and hardly noticeable. Seniors with more obvious cases of dementia are usually cared for in Alzheimer or Dementia Units.
- Symptoms of Dementia include:
- Gradually increasing memory impairment, short-term memory loss, progressive backwards-in-time degeneration
  - Confused thinking, scrambled thoughts, fixations, depth perception
  - Difficulty in learning, inability to understand new concepts or ideas
  - Changes in behavior, such as becoming uncommonly quiet and withdrawn or uncommonly frustrated and angry.

## COMMUNICATION TIPS

- Begin each conversation by first getting the person's attention. Touch gently on the arm or hand if necessary. Be careful not to startle your senior.
- Speak directly to the person by facing him/her at all times. Stand, sit or crouch to maintain face-to-face and eye contact. Do not move around when talking.
- Call the person by name and identify yourself. For example: "Good afternoon, Mrs. Smith, this is Jane." Rather than saying, "Do you remember me?"
- Speak naturally and clearly in a voice loud enough for the person to hear using familiar words and simple sentences. Talk slowly without rushing your story.
- Give one direction or ask one question at a time. Wait for a response before continuing the conversation. Sometimes you have to be patient by allowing a little bit more time for them to consider their response.
- Take turns in conversation being careful not to interrupt.
- Respond to the message, not to the word. Sometimes your senior may use words that are close to the meaning rather than the precise word they want. Help them find words through their associations with it or try to supply the word if they are unable.
- Restrict the number of questions that require long drawn-out answers. Simple questions requiring short answers are the best.
- Give immediate reassurance that you understand and are interested in what they are saying. Actions sometimes get through as well or better than words

# THINGS TO DO WITH YOUR SENIOR FRIEND

Brainstorm with your older friend the things they would like to do on your visits.

- Bring photos or souvenirs of your family, holidays, home or pets.
- Talk about what you are studying, your hopes and dreams.
- Ask your senior about their past (Perhaps they have photos to show you).
- Talk about what you have both been up to you since your last visit.
- Create a memory poster to hang up in your senior friend's room that contains pictures or items you have talked about.
- Share your own favorite moments and memories.
- Read newspaper and magazine articles aloud.
- Look together through the picture albums and use suggested conversation starters.
- Read inspirational poems, stories, articles and books. If your senior is religious you might read passages from the Bible or other religious sources).
- Look at and listen to a wind-up musical box.
- Make a "JOY BOX" by filling a decorated a shoe box with favorite items.
- Watch the seasons and weather change out the window.
- Take your senior for a walk (With permission).
- Keep a journal of interesting discussions you have had on your visits.
- Tell jokes to one another...bring a joke book if you need help.
- Exchange pictures of yourself.
- Celebrate important holidays together.
- Read the Farmers Almanac and keep track of which predictions come true.

# CONVERSATION STARTERS

The following are examples of questions you can use to initiate and stimulate conversation with your senior friend.

Remember to start your visits by introducing yourself. As you tell them about yourself, they will learn to recognize and trust you.

- What did you do before you retired?
- Do you like to read or be read to? What kind of things do you like to read?
- What kind of music do you enjoy?
- What is your favorite movie? food? animal?
- What kind of hobbies do you have or did you do when you were younger?
- Have you always lived in Calgary?
- Visit your senior partners room and inquire about the pictures they have on display and any other special treasures you see.
- If someone offered you a trip to any foreign country, where would you choose to visit?
- What bit of knowledge or advice do you have that you wish you could pass on to everyone else?
- What province or state would you most like to visit?
- Suppose you could have the ability to compete in any Olympic event. What event would it be?
- If you could take any job just for one day, what job would you like to have?