

## **Bannockburn Neighbors Assisting Neighbors Guidance for Volunteers**

Bannockburn Neighbors Assisting Neighbors (NAN) is a non-profit non-membership organization that supports residents who choose to continue to live in their own homes and remain connected to their community as they age. Part of a nationwide Village movement, NAN helps Bannockburnians live independent lives in their own neighborhood. However, NAN reaches out not only to our seniors, but also to anyone in our community who might be in need. Our organization is all volunteer. There are no fees for services.

Currently there are more than 30 aging-in-place organizations, commonly known as villages, in the greater Washington, D.C. area. The reasons for this growth are obvious: more of us are living longer, most of us want to stay in our own homes and neighborhoods as we age, and more of us do not have family close by who can help take care of us.

Volunteers are essential to NAN. It is volunteers who share their strengths, skills, time and friendship and by doing so help build community. Volunteers provide neighbors with such basic services as transportation, friendly visits, social activities and simple home maintenance and household chores. Volunteers may also choose to be Block Coordinators, the first point of contact for neighbors on your block who ask for assistance.

### **VOLUNTEERS' ROLE**

Volunteers are NAN's core service providers. Our service model is 'volunteers first.' However, when the services needed exceed what volunteers provide, we serve as a resource for referral to professional service providers.

### **Volunteers Have the Responsibility to:**

- Meet your volunteer commitments or provide advance notice so alternative arrangements can be made.
- Perform the service you volunteer for to the best of your ability.
- Maintain confidentiality and respect for the neighbor you are helping.
- Ask your Block Coordinator (BC) or a Board member for advice or assistance if you have questions and/or are unsure how to handle a situation.
- Notify your BC if you choose to terminate your volunteer service.
- Accept the guidance of the Block Coordinator if you request it.

### **Volunteers Have the Right to:**

- Be informed about relevant information regarding a person that may impact your service.
- Find opportunities for meaningful volunteer service that is a good match for your skills and interests.
- Receive the orientation, training and supervision necessary to do the service.
- Receive constructive feedback on the service you perform.
- Say "No" to an assignment that you are not comfortable performing.

### **How to Make Your Visits Welcome**

#### **When You Visit:**

- Confirm your visit the previous day, set a convenient time for both of you.
- Be on time.
- Notify your neighbor and BC if you are unable to keep a scheduled visit.
- Explain who you are, where you live (if you don't know one another) and why you are there.
- Ask how you can be of assistance. Do only what you are asked to do so that you do not convey a sense that you are taking over.
- Abstain from smoking, wearing perfume and making personal phone calls.
- Do not share your own frustrations. Listen, but do not add your worries to theirs.
- Be patient.
- Respect Privacy. You may see and learn things when you visit that should stay confidential. Do not share information about changes in your neighbor's physical or behavioral condition with friends or other volunteers. However, such information should be shared with your Block Coordinator or a NAN Board member if you are concerned about these changes.
- For repeat visits: Establish a schedule that is convenient for both of you. Telephone before each visit. Your neighbor may be reluctant to open the door without knowing who is there.

#### **Listening:**

- It may be easier for neighbors to speak to volunteers than it is to share troubles with their family. Even in a caring family one can be reluctant to impose troubles on children or relatives.
- Be an Active Listener. A neighbor who finds it difficult to get around may have few

opportunities to socialize. Show a positive attitude and a lively interest in any conversation that takes place.

- Listen respectfully when people talk about their religious or political beliefs. Never argue with them, rather show respect for their views. Ask questions that indicate you want to understand them.
- Let the person you are assisting talk, but do not feel you have to come up with solutions to their complaints or problems--unless of course you think there is some danger.
- Be prepared to listen and help the person feel understood. Patiently wait for your turn to express your thoughts. Repeating what you have heard may make your neighbor feel understood.
- Talk about what interests the neighbor you are assisting--it may not be what interests you. If a person talks about a particular interest, don't change the subject.
- Try not to cut off communication with a dismissive gesture or expression, or communicate disapproval.
- If you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn until your neighbor finishes talking.

### **Maintain Boundaries:**

Boundaries are what make volunteers different from best friends or family. It is important to be compassionate and concerned, but not at the cost of your own psychological health. As a volunteer, you care about a neighbor's welfare and safety but you are not as emotionally attached or involved as you would be with your own mother, father, or children. You can be sympathetic but should have enough distance to be objective and realistic.

## **WHEN THERE ARE PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS**

### **How to Assist the Visually Impaired:**

- Always make your presence known and identify yourself when you visit;
- politely inform your neighbor when others enter the room.
- Don't be afraid to talk about what s/he is able and not able to see.
- Be sure to ask what kind of assistance you can provide. For instance, would it be helpful if you read aloud, or identified medicines or held an arm to assist in walking?
- Pay attention to light sources in the area; avoid standing between a light source and your neighbor.
- Don't confuse being visually impaired with being hearing-impaired; some people inadvertently raise their voices when speaking to the visually impaired.
- Don't avoid words such as "see" or "look".

- Identify any changes in ground level or steps.
- Just as you make yourself known when you enter, make sure your neighbor knows when you leave the room or end your visit.

### **How to Assist the Hearing Impaired:**

- Be sure that you have the attention of a hearing-impaired member before speaking.
- Politely ask if there is something you can do that will enable the member to hear you better.
- Speak slowly, loudly and clearly. Allow the person enough time to understand your message and to respond. If s/he does not understand you, try expressing the idea in other words.
- Individuals with hearing impairments rely on facial expressions, tone of voice and simple lip reading to understand what you are saying.
- Be sure your face and lips can be seen clearly. Keep your hands away from your face, but use body language and hand gestures.
- Face the person you are speaking to and be on their same level. If a person is sitting, kneel or sit next to them.
- Most people with hearing impairments have an ear with which they hear better. Direct your voice to this ear.
- If there is a great deal of background noise, move to another location or turn off the distracting sound such as television, or radio.
- Don't assume that people can hear you because they wear a hearing aid. Hearing aids make sounds louder, but do not always make words clearer. If you suspect that a hearing aid is not working, ask about this and whether a new battery is needed.

### **How to Assist With Walking:**

- Always ask exactly what to do to assist. Don't assume you know what would be best .
- Make sure that walking aids are within reach.
- When escorting someone, ask how you can best assist them. For instance, "Can I take your arm?" If you do, stand slightly ahead rather than in back of the person you are assisting.
- Be familiar with the features of a persons' wheelchair or walker, as well as his/her capacity to manage without assistance.
- Remember to lock a wheelchair in place before moving someone from the wheelchair to another sitting or standing position.

### **How to Shop *With* a Neighbor:**

- Set a specific day for shopping. Call the day before your date to confirm your plans: both

time and destination.

- Have a clear plan, including the number of errands you are willing to complete and stick to it.
- When you return from shopping, ask if you can assist with unpacking and storing purchases. Your companionship may be just as valuable as the transportation and the items purchased.

### **How to Shop *for* a Neighbor:**

- Make a shopping list that includes brand names, quantities and sizes. Review the list, anticipate problems and ask questions before you leave.
- Ask what you should do if the preferred item is not in stock. Should you get another brand or omit the purchase? Expect to make occasional mistakes. Don't blame yourself—remember you have done your best.
- Find out if price is important. For instance, if you notice a less expensive brand than the one specified, should you buy it instead?
- For your protection, write out a receipt for any cash you receive prior to shopping. Note the amount of the purchase and the amount of change on the receipt. Upon your return, present the receipt along with any change.

### **How to Assist With Transportation:**

- Telephone the day before the scheduled visit to confirm the time of the appointment.
- Make sure you have allowed enough time to arrive at your destination promptly.
- Always make sure your neighbor's seat belt is fastened. Do not use your cell phone while driving.
- If the appointment will not last too long (in your judgment) please wait so that you can drive your neighbor home. If the appointment will take too much of your time, make arrangements to return later; or make sure that an alternative arrangement is made.
- If your neighbor requests an additional stop on the way home (to a pharmacy for instance), you may make the additional stop if it is convenient; if it is not convenient, don't hesitate to say no.
- If you wish to drive your neighbor to another appointment at another time, notify your BC, or if appropriate, ask your neighbor to do that. If you are unable to keep an appointment, please let your BC know as soon as possible.

### **Some things to avoid:**

- Never administer medication or treatment or medical care unless you are licensed to do that.

- Do not bathe or dress a neighbor.
- Do not accept gifts, other than cookies, coffee or tea.
- Do not share confidential information or gossip. You may, however, discuss a neighbor with your BC or a Board member when seeking guidance.

### **Warning Signs:**

As a volunteer, you may be the first to notice a neighbor's uncharacteristic behavior, unkempt appearance or bizarre expressions. These may indicate serious underlying problems. In the elderly population, extreme anger, hostility and agitation could indicate emotional, mental or physical ailments. Marked personality changes are not a normal part of aging and are likely to be indicative of a problem.

These are some of the changes in behavior that may indicate a need for additional help:

- Changes in mood
- Confusion or disorientation
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Changes in physical health
- Neglect of environment
- Neglect of personal hygiene
- Suicidal thoughts or wishes

We anticipate that these situations will occur infrequently. If they do, consult the Block Coordinator or a NAN Board member about referring someone for additional professional help.

### **In an EMERGENCY:**

- If an emergency occurs when you are visiting, focus on helping the person and on notifying the proper authorities for assistance.
- Do not attempt to handle an emergency situation on your own. Always telephone 911 immediately.

*This guidance is adapted from the Volunteer Training Manual produced by Chevy Chase at Home, 2012. Thanks to Naomi Kaminsky and Catherine McCallum for making their Manual available.*