

Two years ago this week, my family's life was turned upside down after my 88 year old father had a stroke. For a number of years Dad had dealt with several chronic health conditions but each time something happened, he would rebound quickly and continue on. This time was different. The stroke made his caretaking of my mom who has Alzheimer's much more difficult. Dad needed help if they were to remain in their home.

Many adjustments were made, some more successful than others. Dad's course was rather clear with the needs for rehab and various therapies. Mom's course was much more difficult, especially given the limited resources available in rural northern Michigan. So we were thrilled when we learned about the Senior Companion Program, an opportunity for Dad to have respite and for Mom to have companionship.

For two years now, Mom has come to enjoy and count on her time with Verna. From attending the weekly Red Hat Society luncheons, to getting a ride to get her hair done, Verna has become a trusted companion and friend. Although Mom tends to shy away from social interactions outside of the home, she eagerly looks forward to the time she spends out of the home with Verna as her companion and driver. And with Mom out and about, my Dad has the opportunity for quiet.

Learning that Our Family Services had a Senior Companion Program was exciting for me, knowing what a positive impact it can have on both an individual and a family. The Senior Companion Program is an unsung hero of the Tucson community!

Here at Our Family, we engage 44 seniors to provide in-home services to housebound elders and adults with disabilities. Services such as playing games or cards, looking at photos, reading books, helping to fill out forms, sharing a light meal together, taking a walk, putting a puzzle together – simple things that make such a difference in the life of someone who is housebound and often alone.

As much as our Senior Companions give to those individuals they serve, the Companion also reaps many benefits. As our Senior Companion BB explains, "Becoming a Senior Companion saved my life!" Here is another story that illustrates the impactful work being done by our Companions:

Ermelinda Salazar has been a Senior Companion for more than seven years. She provides in-home friendship to a feisty 85 year old named "Elizabeth". Initially, Elizabeth was mean when Erme came to visit – perhaps because she had been without a visitor for so long. Because Elizabeth is losing her eyesight, Erme connected her with the Talking Book Library and Elizabeth is now able to maintain her love of reading! Erme and Elizabeth now share special moments together talking about books and sharing meals – and both enjoy their deep friendship and pleasant conversation. Now when Elizabeth's family visits her, they are amazed at her level of happiness!

Last year our Senior Companions provided nearly 46,000 hours of service to Elizabeth and so many other elders in our community. But the truth is, we can and need to supply much more, and we need more seniors to do it. Would you like to join Ermelinda and other volunteer Companions in service to your local community?

- Are you a senior age 55 or older?
- Do you enjoy connecting with others?
- Do you have spare time and want to make a difference in others' lives?
- You can even receive a tax-free stipend per service hour if you meet income eligibility!

Seniors interested in becoming a Senior Companion can set up an interview by calling Our Family at 323-1708 ext. 248.

Unable to volunteer but still want to be involved? Consider making a donation to Our Family at <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/OurFamilyServices>.

**Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in.**

~Author Unknown