

VISITING VOLUNTEERS

The Brookline Senior Center's newly launched "Visiting Volunteer" program connects seniors with volunteers for weekly social visits. After completing training with social worker Sharon Sandalow, the first group of five volunteers began visiting their assigned seniors this past fall. Each month, they reconvene at the Senior Center to share experiences, discuss articles on aging, and learn from one another. Thoughtfully guided by Sharon, they have not only built meaningful connections with their seniors but also have formed bonds within the group. Their experiences highlight the depth and benefits of the Visiting Volunteer program.



Anjana, one of the volunteers, shares that meeting with her senior is the "highlight of my week." She finds their conversations genuine, engaging, and full of insight. She also appreciates her senior's continued curiosity, like learning new technology. Moving to a new area for work left Anjana without close friends or family, but through this program, she has formed a meaningful friendship. "It goes both ways," she notes. "We've formed the kind of relationship where we check in on each other. It's a warm feeling."

The friendship that volunteer Vanessa has formed with her senior has provided valuable lessons, as she reflects on what qualities she hopes to cultivate in herself decades from now. "Seniors in our lives can be models of who we want to be," she says, emphasizing how these thought-provoking encounters challenge and inspire her. Vanessa discovered that her senior thrives when spoken to as an individual woman, rather than just in her role as a mother or grandmother. "She laughs easily and still looks forward to things. There's no age limit on that."

Cecilia, who visits with two different seniors, describes the bond with her seniors as one of shared stories and histories. Both having connections to New York City, conversations often trigger fond memories. She notes the relationships are not only wonderful, but mutually beneficial. "Just being present and listening, that's the gift itself," Cecilia says. She also appreciates her senior's constant curiosity and intellect, noting that age is not a barrier to learning and uncovering new things.

For Emily, consistency has been important in building a relationship with her senior living with dementia. Over time, her senior has begun to recognize and trust her, something that would not be possible with sporadic visits. "Routine is really good for him," Emily explains. Their time together includes chatting, playing games, and going on walks. Having lost her own grandparents, Emily especially appreciates this opportunity to interact with a senior again.

Each volunteer's experience shows that these relationships are not one-sided. Through conversations, sharing memories, or moments of learning, both senior and volunteer benefit profoundly. These volunteers and seniors remind us of the impact of kindness and companionship, proving that friendship connects all ages.

