VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

Honoring Communicare





with dignity. Today, we have important news to share regarding the evolution of Communicare, which we hope brings clarity to all involved-including you. Communicare came under the umbrella of Episcopal Community Services in 2016—and perfectly complemented an existing senior support program called Dolphin Companions. Both Communicare and Dolphin Companions share a mission to provide companionship and support to the elderly community. While Communicare is committed to providing the service to people in their Center City homes, Dolphin Companions are visiting people in residential facilities throughout the five county region.

Since its inception by Community Outreach

Partnership in 1985, Communicare has made a

significant impact in Philadelphia. Because of

support and care they needed to age in place

your dedication, vulnerable elders received the

To better promote these services to both seniors and volunteers, ECS has decided to merge the two into one single offering by the name of Dolphin Companions. While the name is changing, it is important to honor the impact Communicare has helped

us reach in Center City. In this special edition of Be Generous and Do Good, interviews, stories, and pieces written by volunteers celebrate the work of this program.

We want to thank you for your continued support—and for the energy and the friendships you have and will create with seniors across the region. In your service, you have shown that friendship truly has no age.

Thank you for all that you do. "Because of In Faith, your dedication,

vulnerable elders received the support and care they needed **David Griffith** John Randolph

to age in place with **Executive Director** CORP co-founder **ECS Board of Trustee** dignity."

HISTORY Have you ever wondered how the Communicare

program got started?

We spoke with Maris Krasnegor, the co-

insight as to how it all began.

founder of Communicare, to get a little more

Decades ago, Maris and Susan Hale lived

in the Philadelphia community and were members of Trinity Memorial Church (TMC).

She would visit elders in the community to find out what they needed and worked to find a suitable volunteer that had a similar personality and interests.

While many of the early volunteers came

from TMC, the program continued to grow to include those in the surrounding community. The goal was to not only provide one-on-

one support, but to have intergenerational

"There are all kinds of people in this world—

many of them are simply wonderful—and it will be a pleasure on both sides," Maris said.

"This program offers the opportunity to get to know an interesting person with a lot to

We thank Maris and the team for creating

relationships form between pairs.

share and learn from.'

this meaningful program.

As Maris recalls, Susan felt something needed to be done to provide more support for the elderly in the Fitler Square neighborhood as many did not have nearby family support. They asked themselves: "What can we do?" Louis Temme, the director at TMC at the

time, was a great proponent of community health. He was a perfect addition to their

team of three, and they worked to create the

beginning of the program that we now refer

Maris was the head of the senior center in Roxborough and had previously taught textile classes to seniors. She figured it would be a natural fit to take on the part-

to as Communicare.

time role of volunteer coordinator.

SPOTLIGHT

Helene Barr was

a volunteer with

its beginning.

Communicare since

She was a mental health therapist and

Despite being hesitant at first, she ended up

Helene's journey with Communicare, and similar programs, has come full circle.

the community.

[her] because it meant something that did not feel good". "It made life not only easier, but richer!"

of a woman

resting on red velvet, wrapped in a jeweled vest, dark glasses cloaking sightless eyes now open to the light.

She determined her life by large and small leaps. Opinions stone clad,

views narrow but

strength her will

to make her world.

insure a breath in

her irritated joy, the way with

her darkness.

us all.

We agreed to disagree

She swallowed hard to

Family was her comfort,

about politics and religion.

heartfelt.

A tiny force,

Volunteer Helene Barr has a passion for writing and poetry. She wrote a few pieces during her time as a Communicare volunteer, drawing inspiration from the relationships she formed. Here are two of her works. **LAST RESPECTS** by Helene Barr Seven dark haired heads

and lived in a boarding house.

"CAN I SAY IT IN FRENCH?"

When Mrs. S. moved

to Philadelphia, she

near her bed where she hangs a sheet over the bookshelves to prevent fading. Every book she has is treasured. She periodically brings a volume out for me to examine and wants to know if I have anything similar. I frequently do. It took at least six months before she would accept small offerings from me. Things like

the rhythm any longer.

biography of Nijinsky in the small bookcase

interest.

discoveries. She prefers descriptive poems

She surprisingly liked some contemporary

women writers but nothing abstract. At her

request, I read one of my own poems and she made no comment. I guess that was a "don't

like" or perhaps a "don't understand" and she

that have a rhythm but not necessarily a rhyme, and has asked that I not bring anything romantic or sad, though she enjoys

the Brownings and Emily Dickinson.

She now accepts small food gifts from me with appreciation. I believe the turnabout came after I scrubbed her toilet. Someone had told her it was disgusting and Mrs. S. asked me to check it. "Yep," I agreed, and cleaned the bathroom From her voice and expressions, it is clear with her permission. that dance was the love of her life. There are photos of her in a variety of costumes and She visibly opened after this. she appears so happy, so attractive, vibrant, and graceful. One of the reasons she will not She gave me a music box, a gift from her son, listen to music now is that she can't dance to and offered it saying "I was going to throw this away, do you want it?" When I accepted it, she said that "maybe you could put my She speaks enthusiastically of Isadora ashes in it." Duncan, Pavlova, and Nijinsky, in fact has a

It is a joyous task to choose poems that might appeal to her and I've visited many forgotten poems as well as making new

personality and sent her a letter after the visit which she filed with her important papers. At each visit she asks if I am returning, "rain or shine." Responding to my buzz from the intercom, she replies, "Are you really there?" and I usually answer "C'est moi, and I am really here!" And I hear her quivery sigh, a hum of uncertainty clinging to it. When I enter her apartment, she is usually half turned towards me, a questioning look on her face, as though she is not fully convinced of my

younger years traveling the world with her best friend Ethel, whom she met at her West Philly parish. Oh, the things they must have They did plenty of exploring right here in our fair city, too; she paints me a vivid picture of

Spanish flu of 1918 but she was raised by a strong father and aunt who taught her to take life by the horns. I had the pleasure of celebrating her 100th birthday with her family and friends, plus

I try to remember that she is just me in an older body, me from another generation, and I am humbled at the chance to hear her life My only mission, beyond making sure she has the basic things she needs, is to make her smile that beautiful smile.

for your commitment. We look forward to having you

HANK GOLDRING

MR. AND MRS. JEFF MECKLER

NANCY MIDDLEBROOK

KATHLEEN POLISKI

KAREN SCHOENEWALDT

HEATHER ALLEVA

MR. AND MRS. DAVID **CASTRO-DIEPHOUSE**

KELSEY MALONE

BRIAN PITTS

join our Dolphins.

THANK YOU

It has been so hard for her to give and receive and now I was in the same place, unable to respond to her awkwardly offered gift. My throat had constricted; my words pushed down to silence. An emotional exchange had taken place. We are now less tentative about

She then faces me and struggles to come up with a novel greeting that she thinks I will enjoy. We exchange salutations, do some small talk, and then settle down to poetry. Often, she asks me to stop reading so she can discuss her reactions and we exchange interpretations. When a poem is finished, I wait, see her fingering her watch, checking the hour, to make sure I do not overstay my allotted time. I don't know if this is for her sake or mine. As I prepare to leave, she walks me halfway to the door, anticipating our goodbye hug and kiss. I do not embrace her, for fear of giving her

My favorite experience thus far was accompanying Cecilia to this year's annual Mayor's Centenarian Luncheon at the Sugar House Casino. What fun to see so many local residents who've made it to 100.

Cecilia even had the chance to play some

slots in the casino after the lunch. I can't

remember a more satisfying day in my life.

ELAINE M. ALLEN

That seemed to comfort Mrs. S. She is delighted when we discover beliefs or philosophies we have in common. us to come by. Poetry is our main shared them the paintings and furniture in her neat apartment and describing which ones she had I read poems to her and often have to made and their history. stop after each line so she can comment, question, or connect the lines to a memory. They, in turn, were impressed by her exuberant

our dance, our rhythm smooth. Now we can almost complete one another's sentences. Recently, after reading a nature poem to her and discussing the images and the feelings they evoked, I confessed that I liked the smell of horse manure. muffins, fruit, cheese, she'd decline softly She clapped her hands, grinning, "I can't believe it, but I guess I'll have to since you said it first. I love that smell too. My father used to collect the manure to put in our garden and I would sniff the full buckets." She has met my son and daughter-in-law after initially refusing to see them but then inviting She and they enjoyed their visit immensely. Mrs. S. became animated when showing

She is intrigued and annoyed by the oddities of the English language, cites homonyms and words with silent first letters, such as the letter K, as in knife or known - the bane of many new speakers and writers of English. Transposing the letters of a word, spelling them backwards and getting a new or opposite meaning seems to delight her, in a low wattage way. my cold, and she takes a few backward steps murmuring through narrowed lips "Do you Another diversion for Mrs. S. is thinking think you'll be better next time?" about my family members. She asks about them with interest and curiosity. I am careful "Sure," I say, as I close her door and stand there not to sound too happy when I describe their silently, imagining her face without my kiss, lives. patiently waiting for our next visit. 🔻

> learned that every person has significance and deserves respect, no matter their age. And that preserving an elder's dignity is paramount.

Through volunteering I've

compassionate Communicare volunteers. Thank you

SALLIE L. VAN MERKENSTEIJN

SAMANTHA J. TALLMAN **STAY CONNECTED**

JANIS KETCHESON

@ecsphilly

"I volunteer because it helps me to feel connected to the community I live within. It makes me feel good to help someone who is in need. While I can't give as much financially to causes that I value, I can still feel like I'm doing my part by giving my time." - JACLYN ROSEN, COMMUNICARE VOLUNTEER

MICHAEL PLUMPTON AND **DERRICK FOURNIER** LISA KILHEFNER **COURTNEY MCGEE JULIA ROVERA**

LESLIE WEILER

Learn about our latest news, events, program updates, and successes.

215.351.1400 ecsphilly.org

being paired up with an incredible volunteer figured that the skills from her professional life would translate well to helping others in who became one of her very good friends. "[It] made life not only easier, but richer!" She became friends with Maris, the co-Helene enthusiastically recalled. founder of Communicare, and praises her to this day. "Her incredible ability to match Just as she struggled when first asking for a client with a volunteer was uncanny!" she help, many other seniors feel similarly when their independence is compromised. Her main point of advice is that even if a client asks for help, they may still resent it, and these feelings may come out negatively Later in her life, she recognized that she in the way they approach the volunteer, but needed some assistance with a few of her she emphasizes that volunteers "shouldn't weekly errands. Reluctantly, she requested take it personally!" needing a volunteer but "it was very hard for Given Helene's position of having served as a Communicare volunteer, and now having a companion of her own, she has a unique perspective to offer those interested in volunteering with this program.

> **VOLUNTEERS PAIRED WITH** SENIORS THROUGHOUT THE PHILADELPHIA REGION.

Minute, groomed, sparkling,

and she whispered "please,

no nursing home, it is time."

Seven dark heads bowed,

their tears her reward,

my last goodbye, a

past and future.

final clouded gaze at

clear on who she was,

was her last,

sensed the hospital rush

got job as a bookkeeper During this period or perhaps after her first marriage, she became involved in dance, drama classes, painting, poetry, furniture, and clothes making. She still wears colorcoordinated slacks and blouses that she

made.

saying, "oh no, dear, I can't take this," or "I can't use this," or "I have nothing to give you

When Mrs. S. retires for the evening, she spends much of her time mentally playing with letters, words, and phrases.

was too polite to question me.

good support network. But there's something disheartening about how our society disregards people as they age. I am lucky to have more free time on my hands than I need so I like to spend it with the elderly. When I lived in DC I visited an eighty-five year old man with dementia - I adored him and our weekly visits (even if he didn't always remember who I was).

When I moved to Philly in 2017, I knew I

needed to connect with another elderly

from someone with all that life experience, but I also wanted to help with simple tasks

that are often just out of reach for someone

independently in Center City. She's born and

raised Philadelphia proud and was a lively

99 years young when I first met her. Having

never married or had children, she relies on volunteers and various friends to get by, as

well as some family who live in the suburbs.

Cecilia has filled my ears with stories of her

with physical limitations that age brings.

I was matched with Cecilia who lives

Life can be challenging,

even for young, able-

bodied people with a

REFLECTION by Lisa Kilhefner

the golden days of the Automat, Lit Brothers department store and the days of eating Breyers ice cream when it was made here in town. Her mother died at childhirth from the

I had the chance to meet her former ECS volunteers. They all shared my sentiment that she is a special lady with a fierce spirit. person. Selfishly, I craved the joy of learning

We acknowledge the continued service of our