

Creating Connections



"My friend is here." - Pg. 3

For over 40 years, FriendshipWorks has been bringing joy and companionship into the lives of older adults in Greater Boston through our five core programs.

Here's an update on the work we're doing together to create connections and reduce elder isolation.

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After 41 Years, FriendshipWorks' Executive Director Says Farewell

"Do not reject me when I am old; do not leave me when my strength is gone."
— Psalms 71:9



Dear Friend,

How blessed I've been to know many of you — and to have your friendship over the past 41 years. And how lucky we all are to be part of something greater than ourselves: a community built on love, kindness, and human connection.

From our early days as "Match-Up Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers" through current-day FriendshipWorks, I've learned that it takes a village, but it also takes just one person to make a difference in someone's life. Time and again, I've witnessed the power of kindness — a volunteer accompanying an elder to a medical appointment, a Friendly Visitor becoming like family, a PetPals visit bringing laughter and joy. People do extraordinary things for one another.

This past year, I've spent time reflecting on these moments, and I've been deeply moved by the stories, memories, and messages many of you have shared. Together, we've faced challenges, celebrated triumphs, and shown that interfaith collaboration and bridging health and social services is not only possible — it's essential. And because of that, we've built something extraordinary.

At its heart, FriendshipWorks is about people — our volunteers, donors, board members, community partners, and most of all, the elders we serve. I think of the beautiful connections formed over the years — like the volunteer who walked alongside an older couple for 18 years, helping them navigate life without sight. And how the joy of music or the love of a pet can connect people to their own spirit and soul.

Through Friendly Visiting, Medical Escort, PetPals, MusicWorks, and more, our work is rooted in the simple, powerful act of showing up. FriendshipWorks has always been interfaith, multicultural, intergenerational — and at its heart, a little radical. Because forging friendships across divides doesn't just change lives — it changes the world.

Being an Executive Director is like conducting a symphony. You hear the music in your heart — the way you hope people will feel when they're part of something special. You find the right instruments, the right musicians, and you bring it all together in harmony. And when it works, it's remarkable.

That's how I feel about the staff, board, volunteers, and all of you — our wonderful community of supporters.

As I step away, I ask you to carry this work forward. Build on what we've created together. Volunteer, share our story, advocate, donate. Keep giving of yourself — your time, your love, your resources. And always look out for those who need you. When we each give what we can, we create something powerful.

FriendshipWorks' mission will always matter. No matter how much technology changes, nothing replaces human connection — to talk with, to walk with, to hug, to remind us that we matter. Thank you for your friendship, your trust, and your dedication to this mission.

Friendship works — because of you.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

FriendshipWorks' Friendly Visiting program connects older adults with caring volunteers through shared interests, hobbies, culture, and language – always honoring each person's unique identity. Visits happen weekly, in the elder's home or wherever they feel most comfortable. Sometimes, like with Nilma and Isaura, the match begins with a common language and blossoms into a lasting friendship.

"My friend is here."

These are the first words Nilma Dominique hears whenever she walks through the door to visit Isaura, an older adult originally from Cape Verde.

In 2021, a FriendshipWorks staff member reached out to Nilma in search of someone who spoke Portuguese. At the time, Nilma was teaching language classes at MIT. When asked if she would consider volunteering as a Friendly Visitor, she happily agreed.

"She is part of my life. I wake up wondering how she is doing."

*- Nilma Dominique,
Friendly Visiting Volunteer*

Nilma says, "I know firsthand how hard life can be as an immigrant, especially when you're in a foreign country and don't speak the language. That feeling of being disconnected from everyone around you."

Quiet at first, Isaura gradually became more comfortable talking with Nilma. They talk often, discussing everyday topics including Isaura's recent experience with physical therapy. And though their conversation feels simple and routine, they have reached that important connection – friendship. "She is part of my life. I wake up wondering how she's doing," Nilma says. "I think the idea of learning from each other, the exchange of experiences, and breaking down those walls of isolation is very powerful."

Nilma's schedule fills up quickly and she often wishes she could spend more time with Isaura. "The moments we do share are still so enriching, and I know she also enjoys it," Nilma says.



Friendly Visiting Volunteer Nilma Dominique (L) with her friend Isaura.

Nilma felt deeply connected to her grandparents and other elders in her life and is now more aware of the unique challenges older adults face. She sees the importance of human connection – not just for older adults but for everyone.

"FriendshipWorks has been especially meaningful to me because it's not just about helping someone – it's about forming a lasting, genuine friendship." The experience has taught Nilma that the gifts of time and presence are powerful.

"We feel like we are not giving – we are receiving. The friendship is working all by itself," she says. "Isaura is a very special part of my life." And Isaura's simple words, "My friend is here," tells Nilma that the feeling is mutual.

The kindness of our supporters brought this friendship to life. Help us match more older adults with caring volunteers like Nilma – and create bonds that ease isolation and spark joy by donating today:
fw4elders.org/donate



Beyond the Appointment: When a Medical Escort Becomes a True Friend

Russ Colton began volunteering as a Medical Escort with FriendshipWorks, in part to take a break from his desk and his work as an editor and writer. But that wasn't the only reason. "I wanted to do something that was directly, concretely helpful," he says.

With several members of his extended family in the medical field, Russ understands the importance of regular healthcare. "Routine appointments are so important, because they help to prevent bigger issues," he says. He volunteers as a Medical Escort two to three times a month, which fits in well with his work schedule.

For about two years, Russ has been helping an elder named Joe. They clicked immediately, and Russ enjoys Joe's sense of humor. After accompanying him on just a few trips, Russ was surprised and honored that

Joe invited him to the holiday party at his residence. He says he had a wonderful time and enjoyed the opportunity to meet Joe's sister and a few of his friends.

"It's not often that you're a part of someone's life beyond doctor's appointments, but there is more of a connection here," says Russ.

You can be the reason someone gets the care they need. Many older adults across Greater Boston need a kind companion to get to vital medical appointments. Contact our Medical Escort Coordinator at (617) 482-1510, x126.



Joe (L) with Russ Colton, Medical Escort Volunteer



PetPals Opens Doors - Literally!

Why are the pets in our PetPals program so loveable and well-behaved? Well, we think it's due in part to Karen Plescia, FriendshipWorks' new animal behaviorist, and her keen ability to assess the temperament of all pets that "try out" for our PetPals team. Karen has the important role of determining which furry friends are best suited to be a calming presence and bring joy to older adults in nursing homes and assisted living residences in Greater Boston – including facilities specializing in memory care.

It's also the gentle loving nature of the pets and their human volunteers that, Coordinator

Emily Lewis will tell you, make our PetPals visits nothing short of magical. During a recent visit she shadowed with volunteer Diane Leonard and Lucky, Emily witnessed a remarkable encounter.

"An older adult who had not spoken in months, said 'Good dog'," Emily recalls. "And when Lucky nudged open the door to a resident's room – someone who usually doesn't let anyone in – her face lit up. She loved meeting Lucky and chatted with us for 20 minutes."

Love pets? Want to make a difference?

We're forming a PetPals Event Committee to help plan fun activities and a fundraising event for 2026! Event planning experience is a plus but not required. Contact Patty Catalano: pcatalano@fw4elders.org, (617) 482-1510, x124



Karen Plescia, FriendshipWorks' Animal Behaviorist with her furry friends.

Moving to the Music - Making Fitness Fun!

MusicWorks Manager Safiya Leslie is always exploring new ways to engage residents — like “Music & Mobility,” a fun, movement-based class that blends music with gentle exercise. Residents stretch, lift light weights, and move to the rhythm — often asking for more sessions (and heavier weights!). Already popular in two residential buildings in Roslindale, the program promotes health, connection, and joy. It’s one more way MusicWorks is helping older adults stay active, connected, and uplifted. [Scan here or visit: fw4elders.org/musicworks](https://fw4elders.org/musicworks)



Foundations & Partners: Investing in Connection

FriendshipWorks is honored to be supported by a diverse community of foundations and institutional partners — large and small — whose generosity fuels our mission to end elder isolation. Here’s what a few of our valued supporters have to say about why they choose to invest in friendship:



Cummings Foundation

In 2023, FriendshipWorks was awarded a multi-year grant from the Cummings Foundation, helping to ensure the long-term sustainability of our work. We recently had the pleasure of welcoming several of their volunteers to our offices where we answered questions and provided deeper insight into our programs and impact.

“Thank you and your team for taking the time to meet with us. We learned so much about the great work of FriendshipWorks and appreciate the impact you are making with seniors. The programs you have developed are reaching a population of people in creative and innovative ways. Again, it was wonderful hearing about your success.”

- Dr. Joyya P. Smith - Cummings Foundation Volunteer & Vice President, Diversity, Access, and Inclusion at Suffolk University

Ferrara Family Foundation

“We have had the pleasure of working with FriendshipWorks and love their commitment to making a difference in the lives of others in Greater Boston. We have seen firsthand the impact that FriendshipWorks has. Their volunteers are dedicated and compassionate, and they provide invaluable companionship and support to those who may be feeling lonely or isolated.

We are grateful for the opportunity to support FriendshipWorks, and confident that they will continue to make a positive impact in our community for many years to come.” - Claudia Ferrara



Paine Senior Services

“FriendshipWorks’ mission to reduce social isolation, enhance quality of life, and preserve the dignity of older adults aligns beautifully with Paine Senior Services’ goal to connect Cambridge seniors with the resources they need to thrive. The pandemic highlighted just how vital human connection is. For older adults who may be more isolated due to mobility or health challenges, FriendshipWorks can be a lifeline — offering both meaningful companionship and a bridge to essential resources. We’re excited about our partnership with FriendshipWorks.” - Elizabeth Aguilo, LICSW, Executive Director, Paine Senior Services

Your support — no matter the size — helps bring friendship, dignity, and connection to older adults. Thank you for partnering with us!

A Legacy of Friendship - Janet's Retirement Celebration

On March 23, a wonderful celebration honoring the legacy of FriendshipWorks' Founder and Executive Director of over 40 years, Janet Seckel-Cerrotti, took place at Old South Church in Boston. The location was selected as a nod to the early days when Match-Up Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers (later FriendshipWorks) met in this space.

Past and current board members, staff, program participants, volunteers, long-time supporters, and friends all gathered to wish Janet well on the next step of her journey. Boston's Mayor Michelle Wu issued a Proclamation declaring March 23 as *Janet Seckel-Cerrotti Day*, which was presented by Emily Shea, Age Strong Commissioner at the City of Boston. The event culminated in the sanctuary with music, singing, and guest speakers who reflected on Janet's dedication over the years and the impact of FriendshipWorks.



Photo Key (Left to Right) 1. A few of the people at the historic root of Match-Up Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers. 2. Long-time colleagues, friends and partners. 3. Janet's family. 4. Past and present Board Members. 5. Commemorative plaque. 6. Janet with Christine Rose. 7. Past and present Staff. 8. Service in the Old South Church Sanctuary. 9. Janet being awarded Proclamation. 10. Edie Churchill, Master of Ceremonies. 11. Gaby Cotter, Musical Performance and Singalong. 12. Susan Foster, FriendshipWorks' Board President. 13. Dean Denniston. 14. Guest Book Tree. 15. Janet giving her farewell speech.

Note: Not all board and staff were able to attend the celebration on March 23, but they are all part of the story.



Elderbration & Walk To End Elder Isolation

10th Annual

Come Elderbrate with us on Sunday, May 18!

This family and pet-friendly event provides critical funding which allows us to bring joy and companionship to isolated elders all over Greater Boston - FREE OF CHARGE!

Location: Rogerson House
434 Jamaica Way, Jamaica Plain

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Food, Music, Zumba, and Lots of Fun!

Can't be there? No worries!

You can participate by creating your own fundraising campaign for FriendshipWorks right from the convenience of your own computer, phone, or tablet!

Need help? Contact Cody Smith at (617) 482-1510 X121.

Scan here for details or visit:
fw4elders.org/walk



Thank you to our Sponsors:

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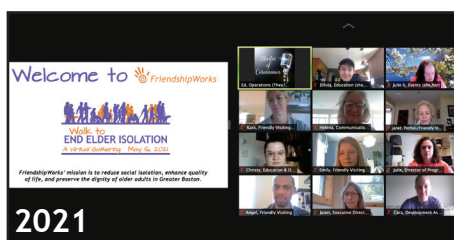
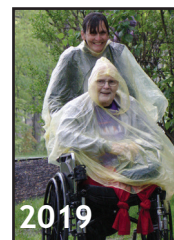
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A Walk Down Memory Lane:





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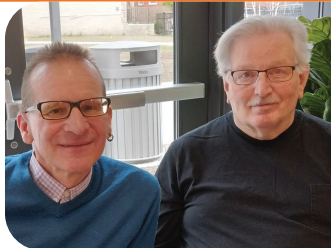
Creating connections to end elder isolation.

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Boston, MA 02111

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[Mailing Street 1]
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Insights on Connection

Hebrew SeniorLife and the Brookline Housing Authority recently asked FriendshipWorks to participate in a Health Fair. Friendly Visiting participant Phillip Rouillard (R) joined Coordinator Michael Mullins (L) to share his experience in the program.



Phillip says, *"I spent too much time alone. I am happy to tell others how FriendshipWorks brought me a nice visitor to talk to and do things with."*

Stay in-the-Know

Receive updates on the latest news and happenings at FriendshipWorks delivered right to your in-box!



Go to:

fw4elders.org/be-informed

Are you a FriendshipWorks Volunteer?

We've launched a new web portal with helpful tips and information to support you. To request access, email **friend@fw4elders.org** and put "Volunteer Portal" in the subject line.



Be remembered for the friends you bring together.

By including FriendshipWorks in your will or estate plan, you can help ensure no elder has to age alone.

Join FriendshipWorks' Legacy Society today: fw4elders.org/legacy

