

One Senior Companion Program Director's Experience in Expanding Respite Care through Volunteer Service

I have integrated the **Family Caregiver Support Program** into the Senior Companion Program (SCP) in four out of the five counties served by the program. “The National Family Caregiver Support Program (**NFCSP**), established in 2000, provides grants to States and Territories, based on their share of the population aged 70 and over, to fund a range of supports that assist family and informal caregivers to care for their loved ones at home for as long as possible” (NFCSP: http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA_Programs/HCLTC/Caregiver/index.aspx). Our program requested funds from the Family Caregiver Support Program (through the Area Agency on Aging) to provide respite by Senior Companion Volunteers. The SCP can provide services at a fraction of the cost compared to a private provider. Most individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer’s do not meet the criteria to receive other services. The Family Caregiver Support Program focuses on scheduled respite for caregivers.

The care recipient’s situations are assessed by the Family Caregiver Resource Specialist and the SCP Program Director to make sure the SCP program is the appropriate service. The Volunteer, Program Director and/or Volunteer Station Supervisor meet with the caregiver and care recipient for a friendly visit, which is actually an on-site assessment to discuss need, whether the program can meet the need, and if so, come up with a plan of action.

Once a Plan of Service/Letter of Agreement is established, we ask the caregiver to be on site during the volunteer visits until the care recipient and volunteer become familiar with each other and, most important, the volunteer is comfortable. Outings are not only encouraged for the caregiver, the client service plan also encourages outings for the care recipient to promote peer socialization and a sense of independence that may have been lost through mental or physical deterioration.

The Family Caregiver Resource Specialist works closely with the SCP Program to keep the Project Director up to date on trainings, workshops and retreats for caregivers. The SCP project participates in the trainings as well as provides on-site respite at caregiver retreats.

When the Family Caregiver Support Program came to our region in 2001, the Senior Companion Program started providing respite through those funds in one county, then two counties. Due to the program success and our ability to provide more services on a smaller budget, we now receive funding for four out of the five counties served.

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