



Faith in Action of Macon County  
& Dove, Inc.'s  
“Connecting Community”

Reducing Social Isolation in Older Adults through Friendly Phone Calls and Friendly Visits

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# HISTORY OF FAITH IN ACTION OF MACON COUNTY

- Faith in Action is a nationwide ministry. It started as a pilot project in the 1980s through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. A need was seen for helping homebound older adults and adults with disabilities have transportation to medical appointments, grocery shopping help, errand running, phone calls, visits, and more. The pilot project was a success and grant money was given to those who wished to start up a Faith in Action ministry in their community.
- Decatur Catholic Charities brought Faith in Action of Macon County, an accredited program through the COA, to life in 1998. For almost 25 years, Faith in Action of Macon County has been serving homebound older adults and adults with disabilities within Macon County. Friendly Phone Calls and Friendly Visits were seen as important services to offer in order to reduce social isolation and loneliness, so joining the Macon County Reducing Social Isolation Committee was a natural fit.

# “CONNECTING COMMUNITY” MISSION STATEMENT

- Our mission is to reduce social isolation by making purposeful matches of volunteers and clients to engage in meaningful relationships, conversation, and activities.

# FRIENDLY PHONE CALLS

- The purpose of a Friendly Phone Call is more than just telephone reassurance. Friendship typically forms between the participant and the volunteer. The volunteer calls the participant as often as requested, and they learn more about each other by using interest-guided questions given to the volunteer to help spark conversations. The volunteer also encourages the participant to conduct in social, physical, and pleasurable activities in between each call. These activities are meant to guide the participant into a more active and healthier lifestyle, which can help reduce social isolation and loneliness and help improve physical and mental health.
- Currently we have 23 participants and 18 volunteers. When given the UCLA 3-Item Loneliness Scale Survey, one of the participants said about her volunteer, “She makes me feel good to be alive.”

# FRIENDLY VISITS

- Friendly Visits are more than just a wellness check. Volunteers spend a minimum of 2 hours a week engaging in conversation and pleasurable activities with the participants. They both can even go on outings together, such as out to lunch, if desired. Because of the meaningful time spent together, both the participants and the volunteers typically form a deep bond.
- A recent addition to Friendly Visits is the incorporation of Activity Boxes. These boxes are filled with a variety of activities for the participants and volunteers to enjoy together.
- Currently we have 3 participants and 1 volunteer. A volunteer has said that she doesn't feel like she's doing volunteer work, but instead feels like she has gained a best friend.

# ACTIVITY BOXES

- Friendly Visit participants receive an activity box from their volunteers every other month.
- Each box has a different theme – Nostalgia, Winter, Inspiration, Mystery, Animals, and Around the World.
- Activity box contents include themed activity books, adult coloring books, games, puzzles, learning books, arts & crafts projects, keepsakes, word searches, exercise sheets, supplies, and participant surveys.
- Activity boxes meet both companionship and intellectual needs for both the participant and the volunteer as they do intellectually stimulating activities together.

# LAST QUARTER'S STATS

	July 2021 Hours	July 2021 Interactions	August 2021 Hours	August 2021 Interactions	September 2021 Hours	September 2021 Interactions
<b>Friendly Phone Calls</b>	27	60	16.5	32	18.5	33
<b>Friendly Visits</b>	67	37	70	33	43.75	34



# THE UCLA 3-ITEM LONELINESS SCALE SURVEY

- The UCLA 3-Item Loneliness Scale comprises 3 questions that measure three dimensions of loneliness: relational connectedness, social connectedness, and self-perceived isolation. The questions are:

*1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?*

*2. How often do you feel left out?*

*3. How often do you feel isolated from others?*

- The scale generally uses three response categories: **Hardly ever/Some of the time/Often**. **Hardly ever** responses are scored at a **1**, **Some of the time** responses are scored at a **2**, and **Often** responses are scored at a **3**.
- The scores for each individual question can be added together to give you a possible range of scores from 3 to 9. Researchers in the past have grouped people who score 3-5 as “not lonely” and people with the score 6-9 as “lonely.”

# THE UCLA 3-ITEM LONELINESS SCALE SURVEY RESULTS

- The average score BEFORE participants received calls and/or visits was 6.22.
- The average score AFTER participants received calls and/or visits for three months was 4.41.
- That means in just three months, there was a 30% reduction in social isolation after receiving calls and/or visits.

# LESSONS LEARNED

- Because we are still in a Covid Pandemic, many potential volunteers and participants are hesitant to have face-to-face visits. I have learned to be flexible and pause volunteers who are not comfortable volunteering at this time. Typically, a Friendly Visit becomes a Friendly Phone Call if either person is uncomfortable with the visits.
- Currently we have 10 people interested in receiving Friendly Visits. They are patiently waiting until we have more Friendly Visit volunteers. I have learned to look for help recruiting more volunteers. One of our volunteers has a background in marketing and training and has done a marvelous job reaching out to churches in Macon County to recruit more volunteers.
- Some people are not interested in participating in our calls or visits, though they were referred to us for just that, because they feel that admitting they are socially isolated or lonely is a weakness. I have learned to describe in detail the process, benefits, and friendships that come from Friendly Phone Calls and Friendly Visits to help bring understanding to the purpose for the calls and visits.

# FRIENDLY PHONE CALL SUCCESS STORY

- “The Friendly Phone Calls fill in an emptiness when you’re alone.” Hazel is in her seventies, visually impaired, and lives alone. She receives Friendly Phone Calls from a 92-year-old volunteer who used to be a minister. He loves volunteering as a Friendly Phone Caller because, though he can no longer drive, it allows him the opportunity to still volunteer in a meaningful way, without even leaving home. Hazel speaks fondly of her Friendly Phone Caller. “He is such a kind man. If everyone could have a friend like him, that’d be an amazing thing. We sometimes talk on the phone for over an hour!” Hazel has said that what she enjoys most about receiving these calls is the laughter. She said they both laugh together often. “He is so encouraging. I can take comfort in knowing that someone cares about me. He’s become a dear and true friend.”

## FRIENDLY VISIT SUCCESS STORY

- “When I’m lonely, having somebody come be with me and sit with me helps.” Peggy is wheelchair bound and lives alone. She receives Friendly Visits from one of Dove’s Senior Companions who was interested in volunteering with Faith in Action because she wanted to enhance the quality of life for homebound seniors through visits. Peggy is one of our first Care Receivers to receive an Activity Box through our “Connecting Community” pilot project. She said that the games and activities in the box have helped her to not feel as lonely either. Even her family is happy that she receives Friendly Visits. Peggy said that her daughter takes comfort in knowing that Peggy has someone to be with her so she’s not always all by herself.

# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS