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Aging Matters: Aging is Living

Have you ever wondered what the key to happiness is at any age?

Studies at the University of California, Harvard University, the University of Warwick in England, and Dartmouth University all point to the relationships we develop and nurture with others at any age. When tasked with the question to find out at which age adults are happiest, researchers gathered participants in small and large groups of both young adults, 18-25, and older adults 50-100, and discovered the following...



Older adults are happy! Aging adults who are living beyond their mid-life years have stressors in their lives, but appear to live with the stressors with more ease than their younger counterparts. Some researchers believe it is due to living in our later years with less pressure than what we had during our earlier adulthood. Others agree that the goals and demands of everyday life change as we age. However, what stands out, even more, is how older adults process stressors differently and more positively, resulting in a calmer, positive, happier mindset.

Did you know that in one study, researchers gathered data to show that when given a series of negative visual images, older adults look away from the images quickly? Older adults do not spend much time and attention on the negative image. They turn away, unlike their younger adult participants in the study. By looking away quickly and sorting through the images, when asked about the images later, older adults have processed and stored in their memory the positive aspects of the visual image. The older adults remember the serene happy moments of the video such as a child, a smile, or a group of friends interacting .

Researchers contribute this ability to sort and compartmentalize the positive images more quickly than the negative ones to a deep connection that our older adults have in the relationships they develop across their lifetime and how those feelings of belonging to a group, along with acceptance of themselves and happiness in nurturing relationships with others to longevity and a feeling of wellness. The impact of a meaningful relationship with a friend, family member, or spouse helps to offer

dividends to all members of our aging population that translates to better physical and mental health, and even longevity!

This is why at Shepherd's Centers across the country, we focus on connecting older adults to the joys of friendship. When older adults bond in shared experiences, such as in lifelong learning and volunteer service, they feel happier and see these relationships as having a positive impact on their individual lives, as well as the surrounding community. So, enhance your circle of friends and increase your happiness by participating in the Shepherd's Centers of America Network!



More than Just a Volunteer

Our newest affiliate program, **Mississippi Baptist Seminary** in Jackson, has quickly demonstrated that a little ordinary help can make an extraordinary difference. Terrence, a new volunteer, described how with so much rain in the area the past month, Mrs. Harper, the older adult he calls several times a week as well as delivers groceries, was having an issue with flooding around her apartment. The management company was slow to respond, so Terrence jumped in to do what was needed to keep the water out of her apartment, preventing a potential mold problem and destruction of her property. With few options of affordable housing, this could have been a depressing hardship.

Terrence saw the need and didn't hesitate to help. He and Mrs. Harper have been matched for 3 months and already they see each other as "family." It's this type of flexibility of our caring volunteers to do what is needed that makes all the difference to so many older adults.

Also of importance, volunteers like Terrence say their service gives their lives meaning, too.



More than Just a Letter

Do you remember how it feels to receive a card or letter in the mail from a friend to share news or celebrate a holiday or birthday? When you received the letter, you felt special and cared for. **Shepherd's Centers of America** continues to bring joy and connect with older adults through a pen pal program as part of a national partnership with **Home Instead's Ready to Care** program.

This pen pal program offers new perspectives on life and brightens the day of an older adult so he or she doesn't feel so lonely and isolated. **Shepherd's Center of Webster-Kirkwood (MO)** delivered 500 letters to older adults across St. Louis community to help connect them to community.

One older adult was so touched by the letter she received from Shepherd's Center that she asked for three additional letters to pass along to others who were feeling lonely. The impact of isolation on the mental health of older adults is tremendous. Sometimes a simple note can create a meaningful connection to brighten the day and change the life of an older adult.



Share the Joys of Friendships

All across America, older adults are socially connected, growing and giving to their communities, and living happy, healthy lives through Shepherd's Centers of America.

Our focus is on aging well in the community with enriching opportunities for lifelong learning, volunteer service, healthy living,

community connections — all the things that give life meaning. It's what Shepherd's Centers have been all about for nearly 50 years!

Please consider sharing the gift of friendship with a donation to Shepherd's Centers of America. Every donation connects an older adult to the joys of friendship and community. With your help our services also support healthy aging and ensure access to medical care, safety at home, food security, assistance with tax preparation, help with yard work and minor household chores, educational classes, caregiver support, and so much more. The power of your gift extends further than you can imagine!

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