

## Groups: Stronger Memory Builds Community, Honors Participants



This April, Search and Care's Stronger Memory group came together for an awards ceremony to celebrate a successful semester of learning. The program—which is evidenced to slow down or delay the onset of cognitive decline—goes for twelve sessions, and provides clients with workbook exercises, resources, and community. It isn't necessary for participants to have a cognitive impairment to benefit from the group—think of it as a workout for your brain. Led by Marcie Gitlin, a Search and Care Social Worker and a Certified Dementia Practitioner, the program has quickly become one of Search and Care's most popular *Groups*, our larger initiative to provide in-person and virtual programming to combat social isolation, teach valuable skills, and forge community among older people.

In addition to Stronger Memory, our *Groups* program features 16 ongoing groups/workshop series addressing an array of needs. Among the most popular of these are Tea and Creativity, Medication Education, La Hora del Cafecito, and

Game Club. With assistance from our *Silver Circles* Team, which provides in-home tech help, this program is offered both in-person and virtually to homebound clients. Clients are grateful for this flexibility; after a home-visit, one mentioned that the Coordinator was "so terrific... a real gem." Another client recently thanked Marcie for all her efforts as well. "I can't thank you enough," she said. "It's just amazing how thoroughly you work... I'm so grateful."

As we better address our clients' needs, we are working to expand all of our *Groups* in order to serve more older adults facing social isolation, including more programs in our outdoor space. The effects of enhanced programming could be significant, as more older adults are experiencing social isolation and loneliness—which can have health effects on par with smoking 15 cigarettes per day! As we look to the future, we are committed to providing older adults with the support and community which makes *Groups* such a valuable resource.

## Search and Care Forms Partnership With Metropolitan Hospital

In March, Search and Care launched a new project with Metropolitan Hospital, titled "Improving Health Access Through Technology and Community Partnership." The project aims to address significant gaps in health access for older adults who are not comfortable with technology by offering *Silver Circles* Computer Coaching to clients at Metropolitan's Geriatric Clinic. Now credentialed to provide these services onsite at the hospital, in-home, or at the Search and Care office, our Coaches help clients become proficient in using Metropolitan's telehealth service, *MyChart*—now, an increasingly integral part of the healthcare

industry. They teach clients to schedule in-person and virtual appointments, message providers, have virtual sessions with doctors, manage medications, and more—essential so that older adults are not left behind as more of our healthcare system becomes tied to technology.

*Silver Circles* Coordinator, Jacob Gonzalez, believes the project will improve clients' access to health care services. "Dr. Lin [at Metropolitan Hospital] is very excited about the program," Jacob said. "Their doctors and social workers will play a huge role."

*Continued on Page 2*

## Mr. Peanut Celebrates 13 Years!

In early February, Search and Care wished a client's dog, Mr. Peanut, a happy birthday. He's now 13 years old, or 74 in human years! With assistance from our Pets + Elders Together (PET) Team, Mr. Peanut is living happily and healthily while providing much joy to Ms. G. PET helps older people care for their companion animals—often their main source of affection and responsibility. While at an annual outdoor senior health fair two years ago, Ms. G—and Mr. Peanut—met our PET Coordinator, Robin Strashun. After a friendly conversation, Robin gave her card to Ms. G. "If you ever need anything, give us a call."



Sometime afterwards, Ms. G's daughter moved to Oklahoma and couldn't take Mr. Peanut with her—leaving Ms. G alone to care for him. Ms. G—suffering from mobility issues and financial stressors—felt consumed by anxiety about how she would care for her beloved companion. Weeks passed as his nails began to curl under. Since Mr. Peanut didn't have the appropriate vaccinations, Ms. G was unable to bring him to a groomer. So, having saved Robin's card, Ms. G reached out for help.

PET sprang to action. With our Emergency PET Fund—made possible by the generosity of numerous funders—Robin arranged to defray the costs of Mr. Peanut's vet care and vaccinations. Since then, PET has also defrayed the cost of emergency dental surgery, as well as necessary medications. With Robin and The PET Team's care and attention, Mr. Peanut is a happy dog. Not simply a pet, but a member of Ms. G's family, Mr. Peanut is a tremendous source of joy, attention, and unconditional love.



SUMMER 2024

MAKING CONNECTIONS, ENRICHING LIVES

Metropolitan Hospital Partnership (Continued from Page 1)



“Right now,” he said, “[Search and Care clients] are dealing with cognition issues, vision problems, and audible impairments, which we’re well-equipped for. Now, we’ll be seeing folks with more serious chronic ailments.”

The Team is working on specialized materials to prep volunteers before helping clients with *MyChart*, which can be a challenge for both younger and older people alike. Successful Computer Coaching will be essential for clients to understand the various elements of the telehealth service and reap its benefits. As the project progresses, The Team is making great strides to meet the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Clinic’s participants. “We are working to gather bilingual volunteers before the big rush [of clients],” Jacob said. “It will take a ton of prep, but we are on it.”

Social Work Interns Reflect on Their Year of Service

In Autumn of 2023, three outstanding Social Work graduate students started internships at Search and Care—a unique opportunity to work with our Care Management Team in providing empathetic, comprehensive services to older people. Our interns, Jalin, Eleanor, and Lexi reflected on their time with us in making a difference in the lives of older New Yorkers.

Hailing from Fordham and Columbia University, they joined us to pursue their passion in helping vulnerable older people. Eleanor said she was inspired by her grandparents: “Seeing what they went through and the help they received made me want to help others.” For Jalin, the decision came after working as a public school teacher for four years. “I wanted to work with a new population,” she said, “and there’s some things which are really similar between the two, especially in terms of navigating barriers.” By working with Search and Care, she has not only found an opportunity to help older people, she said, but also to learn

about the broader challenges older people face.

Throughout the year, the Social Work Interns provided individualized services and found new ways to address their clients’ needs. Seeing how isolated many older people are, Lexi introduced Game Club as a fun socialization opportunity. “We have so much fun playing games, sharing stories, and just chatting about life,” she said.

Reflecting on the year, Eleanor said, “Staff members have been so welcoming and helpful, in giving advice and guidance. I cannot say enough amazing things.” Jalin appreciates how much she’s learned about issues like health access and housing: “It’s so cool to sit down with all the program heads and see everything you can do... we all care about the same thing but can attack these issues in so many different ways.” Lexi expressed how grateful she was for clients themselves: “Seeing the joy on clients’ faces and hearing about how much they appreciate what we help them accomplish is extremely rewarding. I am really happy that I was able to contribute to their lives in some way.”

Bridging Generations: Stories From Volunteers

Claire grew up in California and, after graduating from college, she moved to New York to start a career in tech. She thought a good way to explore the city would be to volunteer, and found Search and Care. For more than a year, she’s been volunteering as a Computer Coach: providing one-on-one help to older people in their homes, participating in tech education workshops and, generally, teaching them how to safely navigate online resources.

Since Claire started, she’s already helped ten older adults use smart phones to connect with friends and family, arrange for transportation, avoid online scammers, and more. “I like helping empower older adults to really take control of their technology and use it as a tool,” said Claire. “I feel more in touch with the community... It feels so good to know I am making a difference.” Perhaps the greatest reward, however, has been the wisdom of the people she’s helping. Claire fondly recalled her experience working with Mr. W, 99-years-old, in setting up a tablet to create digital art among other things. “It’s inspiring at the age of 99 that he can live [independently] and is very much in love and is happy. Even at that age, to be seeking out help to keep learning—that’s the sort of life I want to lead.”

Robin, our Volunteer Coordinator, recently met with our dynamic group of Regis High School students to reflect on their volunteer experiences over the past semester. They helped with a range of things: from technology support, to changing cat litter for frail older pet guardians, and even hand-delivering dog food to a homebound client whose orders repeatedly went missing. Just like Claire, they all expressed getting so much out of the experience. When asked about why he chose Search and Care, a former Regis student said, “At the time, my grandfather just passed away... My first instinct was I needed to do something because I had such a relationship with my grandfather.” Another said, “Older people are willing to talk to us. They want to talk the whole time... share their stories and what they’ve learned and it’s always interesting. I think you could see how grateful people are and that really gives such a special feeling.”

