

## Search and Care and Mt. Sinai Partner to Expand Access to Healthcare



Mr. B couldn't get into myChart. For his own medical needs and the needs of his wife, who has Alzheimer's and for whom he is the caregiver, this represented a significant challenge as he tried to manage their medical needs. Learning about his situation, Jacob, Search and Care's *Silver Circles* Coordinator and Lead, quickly stepped in, helping Mr. B access his and his wife's accounts to manage their care.

Jacob's work with Mr. B is a part of a larger partnership began this summer with the Martha Stewart Center for Living, Mount Sinai's East Harlem center for older adult healthcare. The partnership brings *Silver Circles* staff into the center for one-on-one telehealth coaching, coordination of care with doctors and hospital staff, and referrals with the most in-need older adults in our community.

For many older New Yorker's, telehealth presents an opportunity to increase access to healthcare and prevent unnecessary visits to the doctor, especially for those with mobility challenges and other obstacles to healthcare. Despite this, a growing digital divide and low digital literacy can prevent many from making use of telehealth, resulting in increased isolation from needed care.

The new partnership aims to change

that. Since 2023, Search and Care has provided telehealth training to clients, after an initial pilot project with Metropolitan Hospital to bring increased access to healthcare, and better health outcomes, to patients at their Geriatric Clinic. After expanding the program to all Search and Care clients, Search and Care began working directly with the Martha Stewart Center.

"There's really good communication between us, we really have become a part of the care team," said Jacob, who has been working in the center alongside doctors and nurses since the start of the program in June. "For many clients, even scheduling an appointment from the comfort of their home rather than coming in to the clinic can be a great comfort and convenience."

Students from Pace University are also participating in the program, assisting in telehealth events at the clinic and providing one-on-one coaching at Search and Care's office and in clients' homes. "They will be able to dip their toes into client interactions, talk to new people, and begin to understand folks' perspectives in a new way," said Jacob. Part of a larger Intergenerational Connections initiative at Search and Care, the program will also help foster intergenerational em-

pathy, connection, and community between two populations that are often separated.

Looking to the future, Jacob has high hopes. "Ultimately, this is an important step towards finding more ways to engage clients," he said, ultimately increasing access to healthcare for many more older adults. "It's rewarding knowing that someone is now cared for," he said. "That they won't be in the dark about what's ahead."

## Program Spotlight: Occupational Therapy

This Fall, Search and Care is joined by our yearly Occupational Therapy Interns from Columbia University, an innovative program that connects students pursuing a graduate degree in occupational therapy with older adults for valuable professional experience, while providing clients with therapy and care from passionate young people excited to jump into their field.

Occupational therapy takes an evidence-based approach to care, improving health and wellbeing by focusing on performing daily activities. It can be especially useful for Search and Care clients as they age in place and tasks become more difficult, often requiring new strategies to perform activities that were once taken for granted.



Search and Care client celebrating the end of summer during our outdoors garden party

Krystal, Search and Care's Projects Manager, took over the program this year, and has worked to ensure clients and interns reap all the benefits of the service. "I believe in a hands-on approach," she said. "Clients have responded well." This means providing one-on-one care to clients, addressing their unique needs, as well as hosting group workshops—this year utilizing mindfulness to promote gratitude, integrate movement, and use hobbies to improve daily life. As the program continues, it will remain an important opportunity for the interns as they pursue a career helping others, and a powerful support for clients so that they can age safely in their homes.

## Search and Care Groups Flourish in Our Revitalized Garden Space



**H**ere Comes the Sun! Search and Care’s clients are coming together as part of an active schedule for events like music, gardening, art, meditation, reading, and exercise in our new outdoor garden space—recently renovated into an accessible greenspace to bring our *Groups* programming outdoors, thanks to a generous gift from the Carte Blanche Foundation. With the improvements in place, Search and Care’s backyard is now filled with trees, sunlight, flowerbeds, gardening and exercise equipment, an accessible ramp, WiFi, comfortable furniture, decorations, and more.

For many of the approximately 360 annual participants in Search and Care’s *Groups* programming, the community-building and support offered can be an essential opportunity for socialization. The renovated backyard will not only

expand opportunities for groups and increase capacity for more participants, it is bringing clients the many proven benefits of spending time outdoors, providing many with an accessible greenspace. Potential benefits include reduced stress and anxiety, improved sleep, reduced risk of chronic illness, improved cognitive function, elevated mood, and more.

As we enter the new year, we are preparing to phase many of our *Groups* outside, while maintaining a hybrid format so everybody can participate. We are planning to introduce new groups to our regular programming, encouraging movement and exercise, while continuing our tried and tested groups like Art for Health, Board Game Club, and Tea and Creativity—just with a little more sunshine.

## Decluttering Group Creates Space for Friendship and Support

Ms. L’s apartment was cluttered, and the problem was overwhelming and getting worse. With the summer coming and a broken air conditioner, Search and Care stepped in, clearing a path to fix her AC so that her apartment would be safe for the summer.

Ms. L is one of many older adults struggling with clutter in their homes. For a long time, Search and Care Social Worker Millie had wanted to address this issue, and over the beginning of

COVID an idea struck her. With accumulating paper clutter of her own, and the transition to online Search and Care Groups, Millie realized she had a unique opportunity to help clients, and formed “Decluttering,” an innovative, evidence-based group that brings older adults who want to declutter together by video-conferencing in their homes.

Split into two sessions per month, the group aims to foster a welcoming, supportive community for older people for

whom clutter has become an issue. In the first session, clients share stories, challenges, successes, advice, and offer each other support and friendship. The second monthly meet up is a live session, decluttering together.

The group has become a place for support and friendship. “Clients are so supportive of each other,” said Millie. “They feel safe bringing what they’re struggling with to the group and then discussing what to do with those things... even though it started as a place to deal with challenges, it really became a community.”

The group has had a significant impact on clients. In addition to greater peace of mind, easier mobility, and comfort in their homes, Millie says the work can improve other aspects of aging. “Clients have found bills, checks that were sent that they never knew about,” Millie said. “For recertifying benefits, this can be really beneficial.”

While clutter remains a challenge for many older New Yorkers, Millie and Search and Care will continue fighting stigma, building community, and helping clients live happily, independently, and connectedly as they age.



*Clients and their companion animals are joining Search and Care for a new series of outdoor Pets + Elders Together events, learning skills, building community, and making friends!*