Artists Connecting with Clients to Create Memorable Connections

Weekly telephone calls to 100 Faith in Action clients are a bit different this fall. Instead of discussing what they are doing, their families or what they had for breakfast, conversations are focusing on “Beautiful Questions” designed to tickle the client’s storytelling impulse. These questions are open-ended and are asked by 10 Milwaukee artists trained in this method of conversation. The artists telephone each client once a week for 12 weeks for a 30-minute call.

“Beautiful Questions” are focused on addressing isolation, which has greatly affected older adults during the COVID-19 crisis, and are intended to spark conversation. An example of a Beautiful Question is “What is the most pleasant sound to you?” Since there are no right or wrong answers, the questions are not challenging for those with memory difficulties.

“We're really thankful and excited to be working with Eras Senior Network on this project,” says Anne Basting, Founder of TimeSlips, which offers the Tele-Stories program for Eras clients through a grant from MKE Responds. “These conversations help build connections with older adults that we hope offers a sense of growth and purpose. This only works if there is already an established relationship and Eras provided that.”

Tele-Stories had been geared to be done remotely over the telephone to help seniors with isolation and loneliness challenges. But when COVID-19 struck, the need for this program took on more importance. “It was our chance to provide something to people who are more isolated than ever before,” says Sammy Goodrich, TimeSlips program manager. “The goal of these questions is not to create a real-life story but rather to capture creativity.”

TimeSlips received a $100,000 grant from MKE Responds, a coalition of funders administered by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. Once support was confirmed, TimeSlips formed a partnership with Eras, a perfect fit for the project.

When the 12 weeks are over in late fall, the artists, who range from poets, songwriters and writers to singers, sculptors, and muralists, will have each developed a legacy gift. These gifts, based on the weekly conversations they have with their seniors, could be for each individual senior or could be a larger gift displayed in the community. The gift is matched with each artist’s specialty: a songwriter would write a song; a painter would paint a picture. Eras clients are not only benefitting from this; artists are as well since they are being paid for their work.

“Partnerships are central to achieving the goals of our programs – engaging and supporting our clients. We are excited to begin a new partnership with TimeSlips and hope to increase our work together to bring the impact of Beautiful Questions to even more seniors and adults with disabilities.” –Kathy Gale, Eras Senior Network, Executive Director

This isn’t the first time TimeSlips engaged Milwaukee seniors. In 2017, it did a similar program with Interfaith Older Adult Programs and previously, it spearheaded the “Islands of Milwaukee” program.

TimeSlips has already helped one Eras staff member. “It gives me a different perspective on how to talk to the client and make the conversation more creative and interesting,” explains Program Coordinator Betty Smith. “TimeSlips training allows me to better communicate with our clients, especially those who may be experiencing slight changes in their memory.”
Wellness Calls Create Meaningful Connections

What began as a way to earn volunteer hours while applying for UWM’s nursing program turned into three meaningful friendships for one local college student. Olivia Swanson, a junior at UWM, signed on as a wellness call volunteer with Eras during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. On a weekly basis, Olivia called three local seniors to ensure they had enough groceries and medication, were aware of coronavirus scams, and were able to find ways to stay cool during the warmer weather. “The main reason for wanting to volunteer was for my nursing application, but I really started enjoying doing it and it was no longer just for volunteer hours,” shared Olivia.

“What some of my favorite parts of my week was calling these ladies and hearing how their day was, what they were baking or reading.”

While Olivia would like to continue volunteering, she will begin her nursing program in the fall and knows she will not have the same amount of time to dedicate to her clients. Olivia encourages others to volunteer for this opportunity stating that “it makes you feel good to know that you’re helping someone out, even if it is just a weekly phone call. You somehow made their life a little bit better, and that alone is something that everyone should experience.” Eras is grateful for Olivia and our other wellness call volunteers who have placed over 10,000 calls since the creation of the program in March. As volunteers are heading back to school and work, we encourage community members who have some extra time to volunteer placing wellness calls.

Fall Yard Clean Up Volunteers Needed

Through modifications and adhering to CDC requirements, we are still able to engage volunteer groups in our seasonal yard work opportunities – which is extremely helpful for our local seniors! Fall Yard Clean Up help is needed which includes raking leaves, cleaning first floor gutters, washing outdoor windows, and clearing flowerbeds. Gather your family or a group of four or fewer people and we’ll match you with a yard in the location and on the date of your choice. We are happy to provide your volunteer group with face masks.

Interested in these programs? Contact Marisa at (262) 522-2402 or Marisa.Strothenke@Eras.org
Support the Holiday Giving Program

Eras Senior Network is excited to work with the community to fill up to 1,100 self-sufficiency gifts for seniors and adults with disabilities living on a fixed income. This is our highest number of recipients ever! Recipients living in Waukesha and Milwaukee counties must be current clients of Eras and have a demonstrated need for the gifts.

Due to COVID-19, we are mailing all of our gifts in a holiday card and focusing on the most basic needs. While our wish list has fewer items, we aim to serve more than double the number of clients we served in 2020. Please help us give $50 in gift cards and postage stamps to each of our recipients.

2020 Wish List:
- Books of Forever Stamps
- $10 Walgreens Gift Cards*
- $10 Pick n’ Save Gift Cards*
- $10 Walmart Gift Cards*

* Please include receipt with gift cards

Details:
Items and money collected to purchase gifts are due December 14, 2020

Unwrapped donations can be dropped off/mailed to:
Eras Senior Network
Attn: Becca Snow
2607 N Grandview Blvd, Suite 150
Waukesha, WI 53188

Questions?
Contact Becca at Becca.Snow@Eras.org or (262) 522-2409.

Silent Auction
Items Needed

We’re gathering items for our silent auction to help raise funds during our Virtual Tapestry Event on September 24th. All funds raised will support our programs in Milwaukee and Waukesha counties. Will you consider making a donation? Items we are looking for:

- Certificates for outdoor activities (pumpkin picking, ice skating, ski hill passes, etc.)
- Gift cards for fast food pick up/delivery, restaurants, spas, etc.
- Virtual experiences (Zoom yoga, video chat with an author, etc)
- Autographed sports memorabilia
- Condo and cabin vacation rentals
- One-of-a-kind craft and art items
- Power tools, electronic equipment, outdoor recreation equipment

Contact Becca if you have any questions or an item to donate: (262) 522-2409 or Becca.Snow@Eras.org
Virtual Tapestry Event
Honoring Pat Knuth with the 2020 Edmond J. Vaklyes Jr. Memorial Award

Join us for a virtual event that supports services and programs for older adults in Milwaukee County and Waukesha County!

Thursday, September 24, 2020
Live Stream Event from 6:00 - 7:00 PM
Silent Auction, Live Music, Wine Pull, Call to Care, and Entertaining Breakout Activities appropriate for all ages.

Please visit Eras.org to register and for more information

Save the Date!
Join us on December 6th, 2020 for our Virtual Santa 5K Run & Walk Fundraiser benefitting Eras Senior Network

2020 VIRTUAL SANTA 5K RUN & WALK

REGISTER NOW AT Eras.org

Thank you to our funders: