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Letter to the Editor: Groups rising to the challenge

By Letter to the Editor

The year 2020 has been and continues to be filled with challenges – especially for older adults, caregivers and people with disabilities.

Even the most robust have been cut off from volunteer work, families and friends. As the project manager for the Napa/Solano Area Agency on Aging, I am privileged to partner with incredible, caring organizations and individuals who are turning challenges into opportunities.

Recognizing the toll social isolation, falls, emergencies and nutrition impact the health of older adults, Meals on Wheels Solano added case managers, fall prevention services, information and assistance programs and emergency preparedness “go-bags” to their service model. The Napa/Solano Area Agency on Aging is helping support these efforts.

Witnessing firsthand that older adults living in skilled nursing facilities and assisted living programs can feel isolated, the Ombudsman Services of Contra Costa and Solano expanded its program to include friendly visiting and calling. Volunteers have regular phone visits and, once safe, regular in-person visits with residents, creating bonds of friendship and connectedness.

Although community exercise programs were discontinued because of Covid-19, Innovative Health Solutions transformed its programs to virtual communities. Norma Lisenko and her team partnered with other agencies and low-income housing entities to invite older adults into weekly nutrition workshops and tai chi classes. The activities continue.

Older adults caring for spouses and grandchildren have become even more stressed during the pandemic. Federal CARES Act funding allowed the Napa/Solano Area Agency on Aging to support family caregiver respite hours. Redwood Caregivers expanded its program for older adults, allowing caregivers to take a break. A few hours of respite can be life-changing for both the caregiver and the care recipient.

Community members are also making a difference. Advisory Council on Aging members are actively engaged in supporting the work of the Napa/Solano Area Agency on Aging, our partners and additional causes. Richard White, Verneal Brumfield, Brenda Crawford, Deanna Dupont, Donna Harris, Cheryl Johnson, Robert Padilla and Tony Provine continue to volunteer, advocate for senior programs and be community resources themselves.

Although we live in challenging times, the spark of creativity and service shine brilliantly in Solano County. For that, I am grateful and humbled.

Elaine Clark

Fairfield

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