



Sharon cools Anna's fresh-baked cranberry orange loaf

The moment Governor Walz locked down older adult living communities a year ago in March, Sharon Proskin became very worried. The long-time LBFE visiting volunteer's thoughts immediately went to her 102-year old companion Anna. "Anna is such a social person that I knew being cut off from others

Bridging the COVID Distance with *Loaves of Love*

would be very difficult for her," Sharon said.

Sharon describes Anna as a character with a sharp wit and playful sense of humor, qualities that have gained her many friends and admirers. She loves reading and writing Bible stories and recently was thrilled to learn that her church's priests will be using some of her stories in their services.

The longer the lockdown went on, Sharon could tell the isolation really took a toll on Anna. "When we talked on the phone, she cried and told me how lonely she was."

Anna and Sharon share a love for baking, so when Anna mentioned how much she missed the quality of home-baked bread, Sharon knew a warm loaf could bring comfort. "I thought, well, if I can't see Anna, then I'm going to bake for her and



Anna loves all of Sharon's bread flavors have it delivered to her room."

The first delivery was banana bread, which was met with rave reviews. "Anna was so excited when she got it, the next day on the phone she said 'It was so good!', it really made me happy to hear that." Other bread flavors followed, including rhubarb, apple sauce nut, and cranberry orange.

Sharon recalls one conversation with Anna trying to keep her spirits up, and she told Anna there would be many people coming to see her when this is all over. Anna laughed and said, "Yeah, the nurses

INSIDE

A Gift for Gab



Liz Smith
 Charms MyTalk
 107.1 Listeners

COMMUNITY IMPACT

All Programs

476

Older Adults Served

544

Volunteers Engaged

INSIDE

New!



Drop-in
 Phone Chat
 Service Launches

LBFE Launches Drop-in Phone Chat Line for Older Adults



LBFE recently launched our new statewide phone service called Coffee Talk, a drop-in chat line that connects older adults with caring volunteers for friendly conversation and access to resources to support their overall wellbeing. Callers to the free drop-in line can remain anonymous, and there is no need to register or make an appointment.

Users may call as often as they'd like during the line's hours of operation, weekdays between 8 am and Noon. As the program expands throughout the

state, these hours will be adjusted to accommodate increased call volume.

Coffee Talk is staffed by volunteers who understand the older adult population's unique needs and challenges. In addition to warm, engaging conversation, callers will have access to crucial information, support re-

sources, and opportunities to connect with others through our other programs.

"We are excited to provide at-risk older adults across the state with another phone-based option for social connection, one that is convenient and with fewer barriers," said James Falvey, executive director for Little Brothers – Friends of the Elderly. "Shame and stigma often accompany lone-

liness, and Coffee Talk provides an anonymous way for older adults to take active steps in improving their overall wellbeing."

"I can drop in anytime and I feel like I'm talking to someone fun."

Coffee Talk is funded in part by a Live Well at Home grant from the Minnesota Department of Health & Human Services.

Twin Cities resident and LBFE member Tiergan Caley put the phone line through its paces during the initial test phase. "When I call and talk with a volunteer, we share ideas, talk about movies, reminisce, and laugh a lot," Caley said. "I really appreciate that I can drop in anytime and I feel like I'm talking to someone fun."

Coffee Talk Program:
Monday-Friday 8 am-Noon
Toll-free (877) 238-2282
Twin Cities (612) 746-0728

Thanks to You, We Thrived in an Unprecedented Year

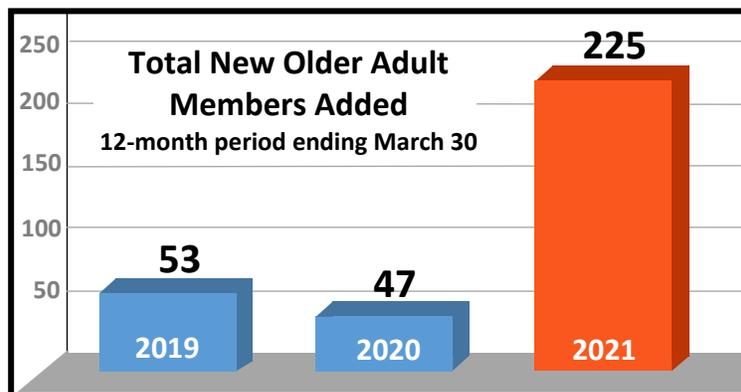


By James Falvey
Executive Director

As we look with hope toward the end of this pandemic, it's a wonderful time to reflect on what we accomplished together over this very odd year.

As our lives were turned upside down one year ago March, our staff sprang into action, immediately developing and launching our highly successful *Elder Friends Phone Companions* program. With all of our in-person programming suspended, this Phone Companions program provided a vital link of friendship to our growing membership base. We also earned our first major government grant, the MN Department of Health and Human Services Live Well at Home grant, for our second phone program called *Coffee Talk* (see story above).

All of this hard work resulted in a more than 300% increase in the number of new older adults brought into our programs in a 12-month period, the most significant expansion in LBFE's 50-year history. And none of this would have been possible if it weren't



for people like you who believe so passionately in the LBFE mission. Because of your support, we've been able to employ new methods for connecting socially isolated older adults with caring volunteers and expand our services statewide.

Because of you and your support, we are in a great position to take everything we learned and every new member we gained into a new era of friendship with refreshed programs and a renewed sense of commitment to relieving isolation and loneliness among older adults throughout Minnesota.



myTalk 107.1
**Tuesdays
 with Liz!**



**JASON
 & ALEXIS**

Weekdays 6 - 9am

Little did Liz Smith know when she first spoke with LBFE Elder Advocacy Director Sandy O’Donnell about enrolling in the **Elder Friends Phone Companions** program that she would be paired with the hosts of a popular Twin Cities radio show and go on to win the hearts of thousands of listeners.

Shortly after Sandy’s conversation with Liz, the MyTalk 107.1 morning show Jason & Alexis expressed interest in promoting the Phone Companions program by having an LBFE elder come on the air for an interview. “I just had a hunch Liz would be a good fit for Jason and Alexis,” said Sandy. “She was so intelligent and engaging in that first call, that I just knew they would click.” Indeed, Liz’s warm, maternal wisdom and charming laugh struck a chord with the entire morning show crew, and soon the audience took notice.

The MyTalk Twitter account lit up with praise for Liz’s conversations with the Jason and Alexis team, so much so that they decided to make her a weekly guest in a segment called Tuesday’s with Liz.

“The Liz segment in the last 2 weeks has become my absolute favorite. She’s amazing,”

Twitter fan @photogirl1983

Over the past 11 months, Liz and the morning show crew have bonded over various topics on the air. “Liz has shared her bipolar diagnosis with a no-shame message,” said MyTalk host Alexis Thompson. “She’s talked about her thoughts on the pandemic, shared her experiences traveling, loving her animatronic angel Christmas decorations, listening to books, and making pot roast for her bestie. Liz brings realness, warmth, wisdom, and fun to our show every Tuesday morning,”

The opportunity to connect with Jason and Alexis has been a positive experience for Liz. “Being on MyTalk is the highlight of my week, and it’s a lot of fun,” said Liz. “Since I don’t have any family around, I really see them as the next thing to it.”

Catch Tuesdays with Liz every Tuesday morning at 7:45 am on MyTalk 107.1 FM

LGBTQ+ Group Beats Zoom Meeting Fatigue



Let's Do Lunch Café is an LBFE group of older LGBTQ+ adults who typically gather in person for lunchtime presentations and discussions of timely topics relevant to their community.

Challenged by COVID, the group reinvented the *Let's Do Lunch Café* concept using Zoom video conferencing. Using volunteers from LBFE and JustUs Health, lunchboxes from local delis are delivered to group members' homes just prior to the Café meetings' start time.

Now meeting twice monthly, the Zoom version of *Let's Do Lunch Café* has been attracting 16-18 participants, and those without Zoom access join by telephone. The most recent Café event featured a discussion with The East Side Neighborhood organization on expanding the pro-

“Being able to connect with my local people right here at home has been the highlight of my year”



gram to their members using funds they received from the DHS, Live Well at Home grant.

Past *Let's Do Lunch Café* presenters include Ramsey County, Out in the Backyard (OITB), and Marty Fleischhacker, Senior



AMONG friends

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For Allianz Employee, Volunteering to Write LBFE Elders During COVID is a Family Affair

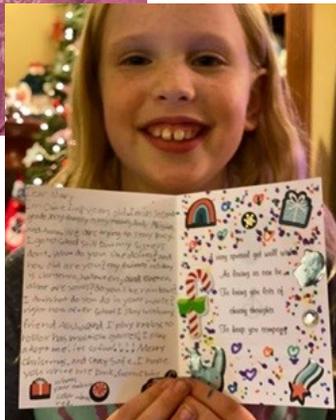


Sarah Hlusak and family

Allianz Life employee Sarah Hlusak was looking for an activity she could do with her kids during the COVID lockdown when she came across a card writing effort to LBFE elders sponsored by Allianz's Growth and Marketing division. She jumped at the opportunity.

Sarah's daughter Claire took to the project with a passion, creating colorful

cards adorned with stickers, well wishes, and thoughts about what she wanted for Christmas. Hoping to get a reply, Claire also included questions for isolated elders.



Claire shows off her card creation

To the family's delight, Claire received responses from two of the card recipients named Mary and Marlene. Months later, the correspondence between Claire and the women continues.

Sarah summed up the experience:

"The biggest gift of this volunteer opportunity was that Mary and Marlene's letters made it possible for Claire to think of something bigger than herself and her little world."

AMONG friends

Spring 2021

Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly is a national network of non-profit volunteer-based organizations committed to relieving isolation and loneliness among older adults. We offer people the opportunity to join us in friendship and celebration of life.

To learn more about LBFE's programs, staff, board of directors, or to make a donation, visit

littlebrothersmn.org

If you have questions about this publication, or to be removed from our mailing list, contact Mike Weiner at

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