

Friendly Visiting Programs in Villages

Best Practices Workshop Summary

June 21, 2018

Section I: What is the difference between friendly visiting and other village services?

1. This is a more personal service, one on one
2. It has a potential for more complications, especially around personal boundaries
3. It has the potential for high impact – friendships creation, isolation prevention
4. Long term relationship – open ended rather than a onetime opportunity
5. Difficult to define success

Section II: What is the difference between villages' friendly visiting programs and other nonprofits who offer this service?

1. Villages are driven by different vision and goals
2. Villages have on non-transactional mindset, which means that the person visited is not seen as the needy person but as a neighbor who has the ability to contribute to the village.
3. Villages are more local
4. Perception of a neighbor who is visiting, more personal (for some villages, it is less so)
5. Less rule driven
6. Offers less supervision
7. Need to balance professional standards with flexibility
8. Village have less formal ways to evaluate the service
9. Confidentially can be more difficult to maintain
10. Villages may have different expectation from the volunteer in terms of what they are allowed to do while visiting

Section III: How have villages manages friendly visiting locally so far? Two examples:

1. Bradly Hills Village process:

When a person makes a request for a friendly visit, the volunteer coordinator sends out a call to the volunteers who can either accept or ignore the request. When a volunteer comes forward, the coordinator obtains permission from both sides to share their contact info and makes the introduction.

All BHV volunteers are vetted and trained, but there is not special training for friendly visiting.

2. Olney Home for Life process:

OHFL does intake with the person seeking a visitor and interviews the volunteers. They match by availability and by what people look for in a visit. They are very specific with what the visitor can and cannot do. OHFL provider informal check ins with the two parties and address issues as they arise.

Section IV: What specific processes should be put in place for villages' friendly visiting?

Tips and tidbits of ideas

- **Expectations and Boundary setting:**

1. Each village needs to know its limitations and only offer what they are comfortable with.
2. The village should communicate clearly the expectations from both parties.
3. It may be helpful to offer tips on dos and don'ts (do not talk politics, religion, for example)
4. It is important to check in with both parties to make sure things are going smoothly.
5. Pay attention to over-involvement and boundary breaches that can happen on both sides of the relationship.

- What should villages do in situations that involve cognitive decline?

Villages should check in with the volunteers to see if they are comfortable with visiting a person who may not remember them from one time to the next or who may have behavioral issues. Some volunteers, especially people who have had experience caring for a person with dementia, are interested in this type of a visit.

It is important to offer extra training and support for visits with people with dementia. Meet with the caregivers or the family members and have a good sense of how "deep is the pool" before the match.

- Visiting at assisted living facilities and nursing homes?

Villages have different perspectives on this issue. Some offer services to facilities in their area, others not. Villages who do, often offer rides to residents of the facility. People in facilities may be more isolated than usual and a visit can be highly impactful.

- What if the person who could use a visit does not want it?

Try to find a visitor that shares the same interests. Consider creating mentoring relationships with younger visitors, where the person who is visited is not the "needy" but there is a reciprocal relationship. For example, a psychology professor emeritus who is homebound can be match up with a grand student or a young professional in the field of psychology. When people are called to help others, they are more likely to engage.

Think of the match as a dating service, where people who share interests, passions and personality traits can connect through you. This means that before you offer visits, you will need to collect and document people's hobbies, interests, languages, professional careers etc. Most villages do not currently do that, but for this program it would be very useful.

Despite what was said in the previous paragraph, allow room for the "secret sauce" in matches.

Reframe the visits as a opportunity for the villages to get to know their members and that the visited people are needed to help build the community. They may have lived in the neighborhood for many years and can serve as local historians. Maybe the visitor can document their oral history. This will add depth to the village's understanding of its own community.

Consider calling this something different: "home visits", "Village Friends" for example.

- Take care of your volunteers

Emphasize the importance of self-care. Be mindful of the needs of the volunteer and do not burn them out. Some villages offer self-care workshops. Check in often to see how things are going and let the visitors know that they can turn to you if they have a question.

Consider talking with volunteers about grief and loss when someone they have been visiting for a while has moved away or passed. Your villages are likely to witness and experience plenty of losses and you can be the place where people can come together to process.