

Services the village may choose to offer:

When deciding to affiliate with a village, most people think of providing services that neighbors/village members ask for. This is, for most people, the reason for establishing a Village in the first place.

The needs of your community will determine which services your village will provide. You can determine community needs in findings from a community survey and/or community meetings, and by a number of other factors, such as the abilities and availability of volunteer, paid staff, third-party, or other services providers. Needs of older residents often fall into the following areas.

1. Transportation

Experience has shown that transportation is the most widely requested resident service. Your Village governance, in conjunction with your community, must decide whether your village will provide transportation for residents, and if so, if it will be provided:

- By volunteers only;
- By volunteers whenever possible;
- Through professional transportation services if no volunteer is available;
- Through volunteer transport to a site outside the boundary area, if any; and
- For groups of residents attending an activity such as a concert or theatre performance who cannot be accommodated in a personal vehicle.

2. Social Engagement

Most residents who use village transportation services think of getting to where they need or want to go when they want to get there. Few think of transportation provided by villages as a social interaction. However, for residents who rarely leave home and have few visitors, social engagement with a volunteer driver and/or another passenger can be an important unintended benefit.

Research has consistently demonstrated that intellectual, social and physical activity are critical to healthy aging. Villages foster social engagement by: volunteer making friendly visits with village members who request such a service; group discussions; exercise classes; speakers, coffees, teas and happy hours; and outings to restaurants, museums, parks, concerts, theatre performances, etc. Villages experiences show that group social/recreation activities may be the most popular and well attended types of activities.

3. Household Chores

There are a variety of household chores that older residents find challenging or unsafe, and that easily can be done by more agile volunteers. Among them are yard work, such as raking leaves, cleaning gutters, shoveling snow, minor plumbing, electrical repairs and other small repairs such as changing lightbulbs, checking/resetting circuit breakers, changing washers, unclogging a sink or toilet, and nailing or screwing in something that has become loose.

Some Washington area villages vet providers whom they recommend, often with negotiated discounts. Others rely on less formal recommendations from residents who have been pleased with specific providers. Still others adhere to a “volunteer first” model and suggest an outside service provider only if there is no volunteer to provide the help needed or if a knowledgeable volunteer judges that a professional company is most appropriate.

4. Computer/IT Help

Montgomery County data (2012) indicate that 74 per cent of older residents use computers. These figures probably are similar for nearby jurisdictions. However, many older residents feel they are unable to learn programs and deal with software changes and updates. Becoming accustomed to a new computer and setting it up also may be frustrating for older residents. Yet, those who do use computers—either their own or computers in public places such as libraries—understand that computers allow easy communication with children and grandchildren, and facilitate finding information, shopping, confirming appointments, and other necessities.

In addition, older adults appreciate help learning to master use of smart phones and other electronic devices. These devices can be important not only for basic information and communication, but also for medical and safety issues. For example, older people can use many small electronic devices to monitor medical issues such as blood pressure, cardiac function, activity level, sugar levels. Helping residents learn to use the devices properly is an important service. In villages that are intergenerational, teenagers often provide computer and other IT help. The interaction between younger and older generations can be a rewarding social interaction. Some villages offer group classes in use of IT devices. In others, volunteers provide individual help and troubleshooting as needed.

5. Organizing Mail, Bills, Medical Records, Financial Records, Photo Albums, and Other Items of Importance.

People who feel that they have too much to handle appreciate assistance with organizing things. Volunteers may help organize important papers, organize and help pay bills, balance a checkbook, reconcile credit card accounts, go through mail, etc. Organizational chores may be especially challenging for people who have visual impairment or mild cognitive impairment or for those who have been away or just let things pile up. Setting up a filing system in a way that makes sense to the person being served can help them feel more organized and in control.

Hoarding is a problem for many older people. Too much “stuff” can be a safety hazard and can make the home unpleasant. Volunteers who help older people organize their things can also help prevent or discourage hoarding by advising them and helping them to get rid of old newspapers and magazines, spoiled food, and all kinds of junk that has accumulated.

6. Health Related or Other Physical Services

Health-related services range from helping people identify public and private resources to giving direct assistance with exercises, changing dressings, medication management, accessing electronic medical information or records, and supporting goals of physical, occupational, and

other therapies. Villages often have health provider professionals who are willing to volunteer in assisting with older residents' health needs. The type of health-related work available depends on the comfort level of the volunteer and resident, training, and the level of need. For example, a frail person may bathe on his/her own but feel most comfortable if another individual is in the home to get appropriate help should the older person fall. Some volunteers and village governance may feel such an activity is appropriate, while others may decide it is not.

Village volunteers often assist visually impaired neighbors or those with hearing or mobility impairments. Neighbors may read mail or read literature to persons with visual impairment or assist with other paperwork. Village volunteers or staff also may recommend resources and equipment designed to help visually impaired people function independently. People with hearing impairments or even cognitive impairments may appreciate conversation with another individual. They may be able to hear or follow an individual but have trouble in a social setting in which multiple conversations are going on simultaneously.

7. Equipment Loans

Family members who are out of town and visit from time to time may need car seats, high chairs, folding beds or air mattresses, children's books or toys, cribs etc. Family or older residents may need a wheel chair, crutches, or canes or other medical supplies for temporary use. Several villages lend equipment as a service. Some villages have a loan closet while others use a listserv to locate items on an as-needed basis. Borrowers greatly appreciate these loans.

8. Check-in Program

Many villages offer telephone check-ins to confirm that residents are okay. Residents can be greatly reassured by knowing that neighbors care about them and that if there is a problem, they have someone to contact to tell them about it. Village members indicate to the volunteer coordinator that they would like to receive such calls and they are matched with someone who is interesting making check in calls.

9. Security Watch

Volunteers may check homes, pick up mail and newspapers, water plants, etc. when a resident is away from home for a few days, a more extended time, or when somebody is hospitalized or in rehabilitation.

10. Social/Educational Programs

Social/educational programs help build community. Many Villages start such programs in their village development stage and recruit future volunteers and services users from these programs. Programs may range from topics germane to older persons, e.g. money management, difficult conversations with adult children, estate planning, on being a widow or widower, etc. to topics that appeal to the community more broadly, e.g. robust walking, digital photography workshops, backyard gardening, local birds, political topics, trips to museums, theater, or local senior centers.