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Volunteer visits help seniors stay in their homes



Lafayette volunteer Leonara Holmes, left, enjoys time with Iris Timmerman. Photo provided

Iris Timmerman, a former nurse, has difficulty hearing, so socializing in groups is too difficult, but thanks to a program offered through John Muir Health, Lafayette volunteer Leonora Holmes, age 63, has been making a difference in Timmerman's life for nearly a year now.

Holmes signed up as a Caring Hands volunteer last October and says she gets as much out of the program than she puts into it - maybe more - noting how the 93-year-old Timmerman was teaching her painting and crafts.

"Iris taught me to paint today," Holmes wrote to the Caring Hands Volunteer Coordinator Stacy Appel after one visit. "She had smocks, paint and canvas all ready to go."

The Caring Hands Volunteer Caregivers Program serves seniors in Central, East, and South Contra Costa County, including all of Lamorinda. The program is a collaborative community outreach program which offers finely-tuned one-on-one matches between neighbors, always free of charge, to help aging adults in Contra Costa County remain independent in their own homes as long as safely possible.

The Caring Hands Volunteer Caregivers Program serves seniors in Central, East, and South Contra Costa County,

A collaboration between John Muir Health, social service agencies, faith communities and the community-at-large, the program helps break the cycle of isolation and despair that may make health problems worse.

Volunteers provide life-enhancing services such as friendly visits and companionship, social outings, transportation and escort to medical appointments, help with shopping and errands, respite care to give a break to a family caregiver, reading mail and letter-writing, but do not provide cleaning, bill-paying services, personal or medical care.

Services are generally provided once a week, for one to three hours to meet a senior's ongoing need, and are scheduled on the times and days that work best for the volunteer. Matches are created between volunteers and people over 60 years old who may be frail, isolated, or disabled. By providing free non-medical assistance, Caring Hands help seniors stay in their homes and remain independent as long as safely possible.

A former teacher, Holmes heard about Caring Hands through her church, and while her previous experience had been with children, not seniors, Leonora couldn't wait to begin the training.

"An attentive friend like Leonora has been an ongoing delight for both volunteer and care receiver," said Appel.

"Thank you for making her my match," Holmes wrote to Appel after a recent visit. "It has been an immense blessing! Today we went to the Ruth Bancroft Garden, lunch, and stopped at Ace Hardware to pick up a few art supplies for Iris. She is a lot of fun to be with and very appreciative each time I am there."

More volunteers are needed and the next training will be held Sept. 28 at the John Muir Health Medical Center in Walnut Creek. To learn more, or to apply for the next training, contact Appel at Stacy.Appel@johnmuirhealth.com or (925) 952-2999, or visit the Caring Hands website at johnmuirhealth.com/caringhands.

- J. Wake

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