



COMMIT TO
Connect

Supporting Social Connection Through Volunteerism

September 3, 2025

Presenters

Katie Clark Wheeler, Policy Analyst, Office of Interagency Innovation,
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Katie Clark Wheeler
Social Connection Lead, ACL



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COMBATting SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS IN ALL COMMUNITIES





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www.committtoconnect.org

■ **Technical Assistance**

- *Annual National Summit to Increase Social Connections (September 2025)*
- Professional and consumer resources
- Webinars and Office Hours

■ **Communities of Practices on outcome evaluation**

- Impact of Chronic Disease Self-Management Education programs on social connection






■ **“Innovations Hub” to encourage replication**

- Clearinghouse of 100+ model programs, interventions, and solutions

■ **Engage an online Nationwide Network of Champions**

- 600+ leaders at local, state, and national levels

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Recent Activity

 **RE: Engaging Rural Older Adults**
Posted by: [Robert Lefkowitz](#), 22 hours ago

Posted In: [Open Forum Discussions](#)
Hi Carol, I'm a volunteer for Conversations to Remember. We're using virtual visits to reach seniors all over the country. All the senior needs is a tablet or computer, and they can meet with a set of ...

 **RE: Engaging Rural Older Adults**
Posted by: [Keith Moore](#), 3 days ago

Posted In: [Open Forum Discussions](#)
Blooming Health offers a messaging platform optimized for older adults that can send group texts, emails and voice calls in over 70 languages. It can be used for event reminders, wellness checks, and surveys, ...



 **RE: Engaging Rural Older Adults**
Posted by: [Robert Signore](#), 3 days ago

Posted In: [Open Forum Discussions](#)
Hi Carol. Technology can help with rural older adults since transportation can

Take Action!



Recent Blogs

-  **Meet a Commit to Connect Champion: Lori Murphy**
By Ali Fehlhaber
-  **Meet a Commit to Connect Champion: Jan Amys**
By Ali Fehlhaber

CTC Nationwide Network of Champions





Innovations Hub

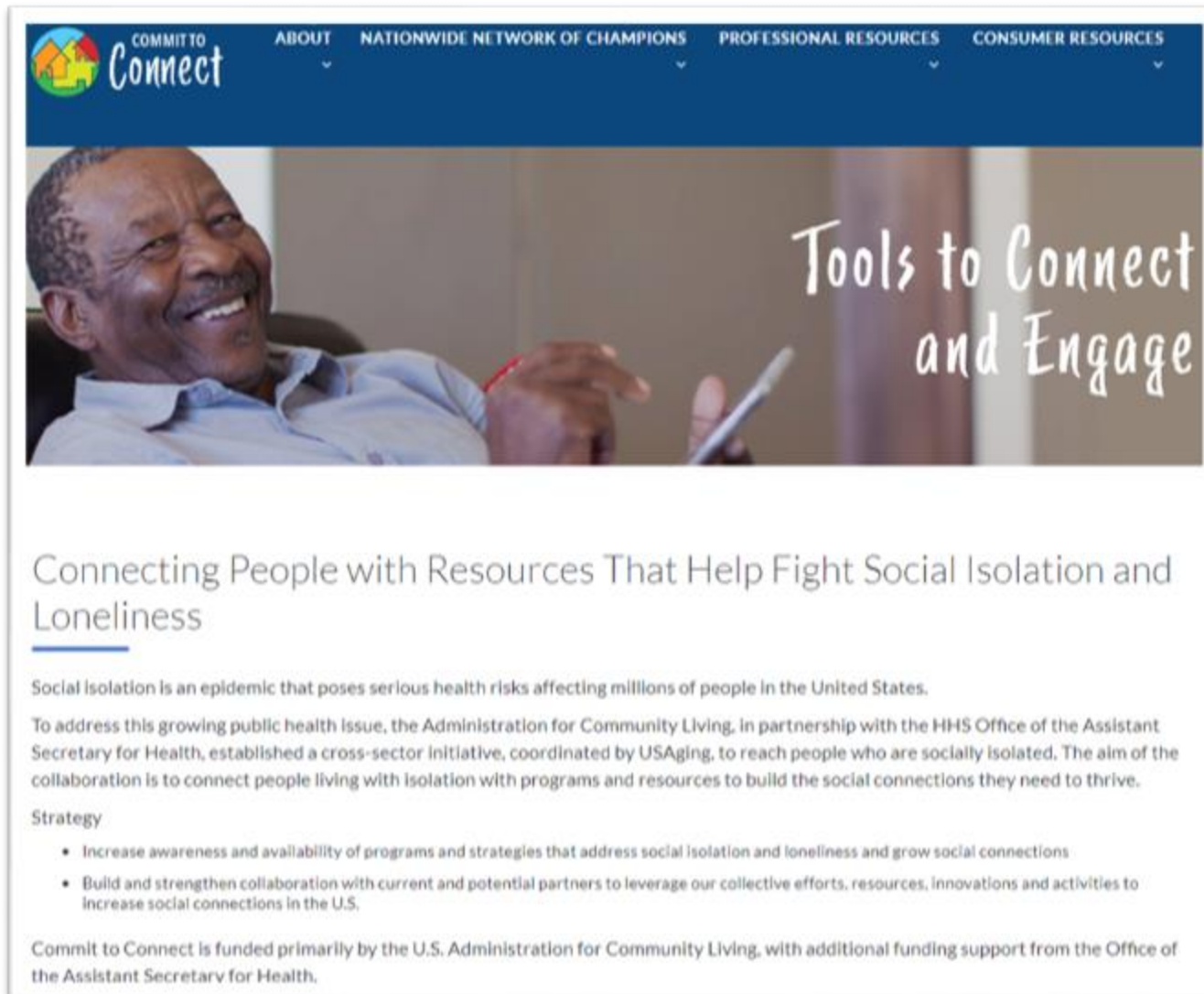
committoconnect.org/innovations-hub

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Organization Name	City, State	Brief Description	Intervention Type	Population Served	Geographic Population Served	Organization Type	Partners Involved	Funding Source	Description
Caring Together, Living Better AgeOptions	Oak Park, IL	Partnering with faith-based groups to offer social engagement activities for Black and Hispanic family caregivers.	Intergenerational Technology	Older Adults Caregivers	Suburban Urban	Area Agency on Aging	Aging and Disability Resource Ce...	Private/philanthropic grant	Program Description AgeOptions, an Area Agency on Aging based in Oak Park, IL,
Friendly Phone Calling Decatur Catholic Charities – Faith in...	Decatur, IL	Older adults who are homebound received phone calls from friendly volunteers.	Intergenerational Volunteerism	Older Adults People with Disabilit	Rural Urban Suburban	Other Community-Based Organi...	Area Agency on Aging Faith-base	Older Americans Act Private/phila	Program Description Faith in Action of Macon County provides friendly phone calling
ONEgeneration Letters to O... ONEgeneration	Van Nuys, CA	This letter writing program allows older adults and students to connect without using technology.	Intergenerational Arts and Creati	Older Adults	Suburban Urban	Aging Services Provider	Intergenerational groups Nutritic	Private/philanthropic grant Other	Program Description In a world where access to digital resources can improve overall social
COAST-IT (Connecting Olde... University of Colorado Anschutz Mu...	Denver, CO	Pairs college students studying health with older adults for intergenerational social phone calls.	Health and Wellness Intergenera	Older Adults	Rural Frontier Suburban Urt	University	Aging and Disability Resource Ce...	Other	Program Description The University of Colorado (CU) Anschutz Division of Geriatrics and
Fairfax County Virtual Cent... Fairfax County Department of Neig...	Fairfax, VA	Virtual senior center developed in response to closures of in-person senior centers and adult day health centers due to the COVID-19 ...	Arts and Creative Expression Heal	Older Adults People with Disabilit	Suburban	Senior Center	Aging and Disability Resource Ce...		Program Description At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, senior centers, adult day

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ABOUT NATIONWIDE NETWORK OF CHAMPIONS PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES CONSUMER RESOURCES

Tools to Connect and Engage

Connecting People with Resources That Help Fight Social Isolation and Loneliness

Social isolation is an epidemic that poses serious health risks affecting millions of people in the United States.

To address this growing public health issue, the Administration for Community Living, in partnership with the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, established a cross-sector initiative, coordinated by USAging, to reach people who are socially isolated. The aim of the collaboration is to connect people living with isolation with programs and resources to build the social connections they need to thrive.

Strategy

- Increase awareness and availability of programs and strategies that address social isolation and loneliness and grow social connections
- Build and strengthen collaboration with current and potential partners to leverage our collective efforts, resources, innovations and activities to increase social connections in the U.S.

Commit to Connect is funded primarily by the U.S. Administration for Community Living, with additional funding support from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health.



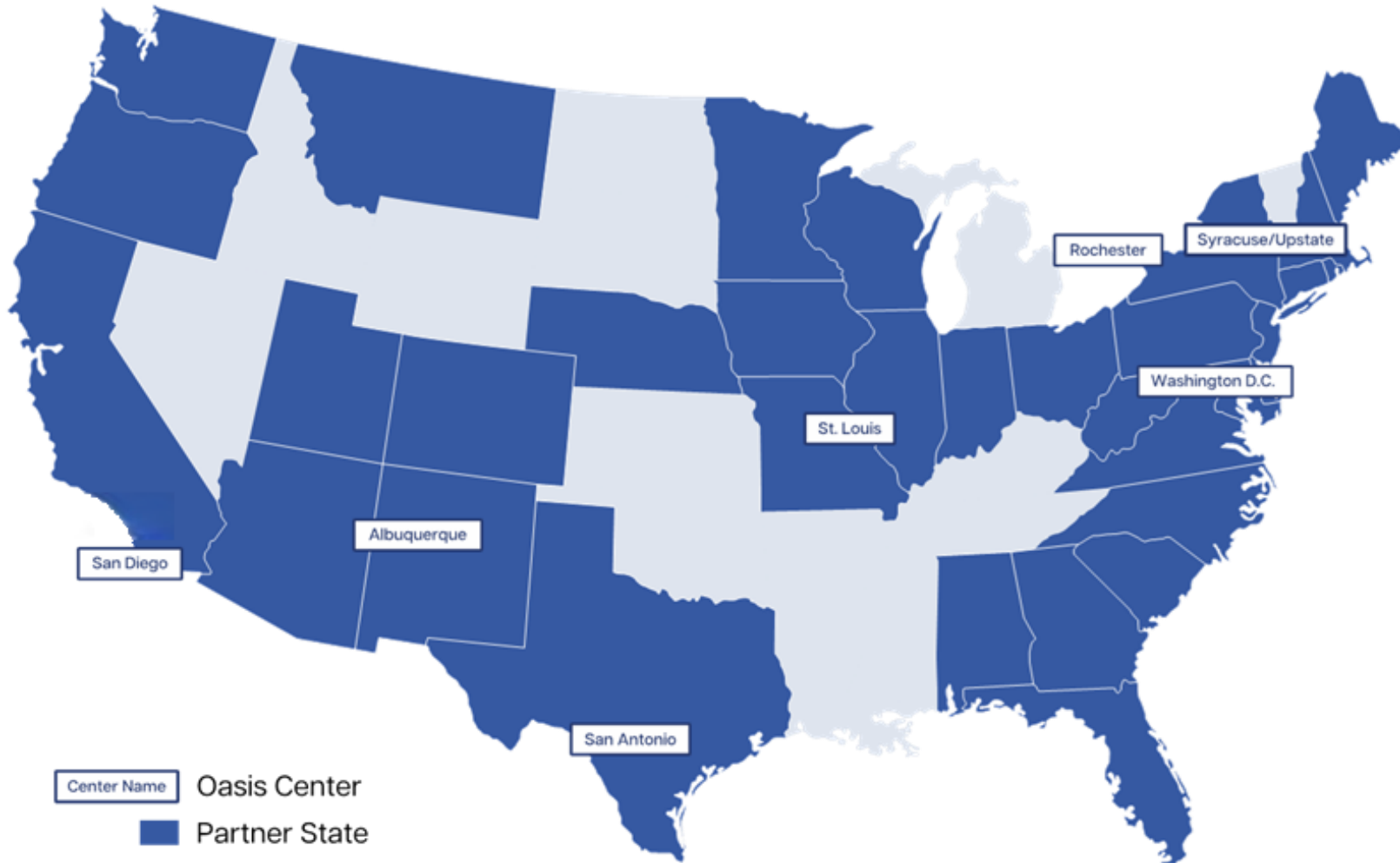
Volunteers Supporting Healthy Community Living



Oasis: A Pioneer in Healthy Aging

Founded in 1982, Oasis is a non-profit educational organization that empowers thousands of older adults nationwide to pursue healthy, productive, and meaningful lives.





Oasis programs reach a broad audience in more than 700 communities through **seven education centers** and a national network of over **800 partners** in over **44 states**.

Health and Wellness

- More than 3,560 health and wellness classes are offered nationwide each year.
- Evidence-based programs for falls prevention, chronic disease self-management and peer-led discussion groups
- Exercise, fitness and wellness classes



Lifelong Learning

- More than 24,000 adults nationwide take over 5,500 lifelong learning classes each year
- Locally-developed classes in the arts and humanities
- Award-winning technology training with the Oasis Connections Program





To Learn More
about Oasis

www.oasisnet.org





Overview

- National, federally funded program
- Innovative local models
- Volunteer nonmedical assistance
- Assisting family caregivers, older adults and adults with disabilities
- Maintain independence in the community





Goals

1 Increase the number of community-based volunteer programs available to provide nonmedical assistance.

2 Decrease the number of older adults, persons with disabilities age 18 and older, and family caregivers who need assistance in maintaining independence in the community but are unable to obtain help.



As of June 30, 2025

Reach

Application Cycles

- Number of funding cycle 5
- Number of grantees 132
- Funded to date \$15.8 M

Individuals

- Older Adults 30,691
- Adults with Disabilities 5,719
- Family Caregivers 12,897
- Total 49,307
- Volunteers 16,911

Assistance

- Hours of Assistance 451,983
- Value in Dollars \$14,698,506



Social Isolation

- A measurable lack of social connections, characterized by few social roles, interactions, or relationships.
- Risk factors:
 - Aging
 - Disability or chronic illness.
 - Living alone, especially in rural or hard-to-reach areas
 - Socioeconomic barriers, cultural or language differences
- Impacts:
 - Health
 - Quality of life
 - Increased demand on healthcare and social service systems

Social Connections

- The ways in which people feel linked to and supported by others
- The presence of relationships and the perceived sense of belonging, trust, and mutual support those relationships provide
- The experience of feeling close to and valued by other people
- A fundamental human need



Find Your Purpose: Volunteer Engagement

Volunteering:

- Keeps the brain active, which contributes to mental health
- Can make you feel happier and have a more positive outlook on life
- Can lower your risk of dementia and other health issues
- Provides you with a sense of purpose



Levels Of Volunteer Impact

Community level

- Advocacy and ambassadorship
- Public trust and cohesion
- Sense of belonging and connection

Organizational level

- Economic/cost savings
- Capacity building
- Sustainability and fund raising

Individual level

- Health and well-being
- Transportation
- Respite care
- Intergenerational connections



Volunteers Advancing Social Connections

Become like extended family

- “Our volunteer has become such a good friend for my mom. Even though she moved into assisted living, her volunteer continues to visit with her and helped with the transition.” -*Cooley Dickinson Hospital*
- M has been a Helping Hands volunteer since 2023. She visits S, a person with ALS, weekly. S lives in an adult care home and does not have any surviving family. M shared, “I was inspired to volunteer after my best friend's mom was diagnosed. Giving back to the community fits with my belief of always trying to do the greatest good for all mankind. It's rewarding to see how the relationship unfolds—S is part of my family. We talk about everything, and we both look forward to these visits with pure joy.” -*ALS Northwest*

Volunteers Advancing Social Connections

Blend social supports with practical help

- “Volunteers provide more than a ride. They provide a relationship.” – *Faith in Action Georgetown*
- “I could not have appreciated it more, the volunteer was polite, professional, it was so nice of her to help. Without the assistance from the volunteer, I would not be able to have flowers in my yard, which I look forward to seeing daily. I would have fallen if I attempted to garden, as I am not as steady as I used to be”. –*Area Agency on Aging Region IV*

Volunteers Advancing Social Connections

Caregivers receive companionship and respite, helping them feel less alone in their responsibilities

- “When I first learned of the Respite Care Companion Program, I knew immediately that I wanted to be a part of it. Having been a caregiver to both of my parents in their later years, I know firsthand the joys of caregiving but also the struggles and frustrations of this role. I so appreciated the opportunities I was afforded from other family members to take a little time for myself to recharge and re-energize and, as a result, it made me a more understanding and patient caregiver. I now would like to provide this same opportunity to others who are doing this important work. I know it will mean a great deal to them, but it will be enormously gratifying to me as well.” – *Southern Maine Area Agency on Aging*

Volunteers Advancing Social Connections

Intergenerational relationships are opportunities to learn from each other's wisdom, life stories, and perspectives.

- “E got home from church at the exact time that I pulled into the driveway, so she greeted me cheerfully and joked about the coincidence. We sat on the sofa and had warm cookies together as she described the church she frequents. She appeared engaged and reminiscent throughout the visit, even telling me some stories I had never heard before about her grandmother and cooking mentors. To finish the visit, she read me a recipe from the cookbook on ackee and codfish, vividly describing to me the shape and color of this fruit native to Jamaica.” *–Hospice of the Valley*

Volunteers Advancing Social Connections

Volunteers become peer mentors

- “I was a caregiver for many years and learned many things, I wish I had had a mentor. After my husband passed, I decided that all that knowledge needed to be shared to help others in their journey. Supporting, helping and caring for my mentee's has been a joy and a new life purpose for me. Duet is providing a vital life service to a community that is invisible (the caregivers), and it is my honor to be part of it.” –*Duet Partners in Health and Aging*



Volunteers Advancing Social Connections

Brings purpose, fulfillment, and friendship to the lives of volunteers

- “Serving and helping others. Being in service, helps my self-worth and I enjoy making friendships.” – *Region IV Area Agency on Aging*
- “I am proud to volunteer at CaringMatters, an organization dedicated to helping those in need with dignity and concern.” –*CaringMatters*
- “It gives me something to do, gets me out of the house, and I get to be around people.” –*Central Community House*

To Learn More about Community Care Corps

www.communitycarecorps.org



Lori's Hands

Community Health Service Learning

A large, stylized graphic of two hands in shades of green. One hand is in the foreground, reaching towards the left, while another hand is behind it, reaching towards the right. The hands are rendered in a simple, rounded style.

Maggie Ratnayake, LPCMH, ATR, NCC
Program Director

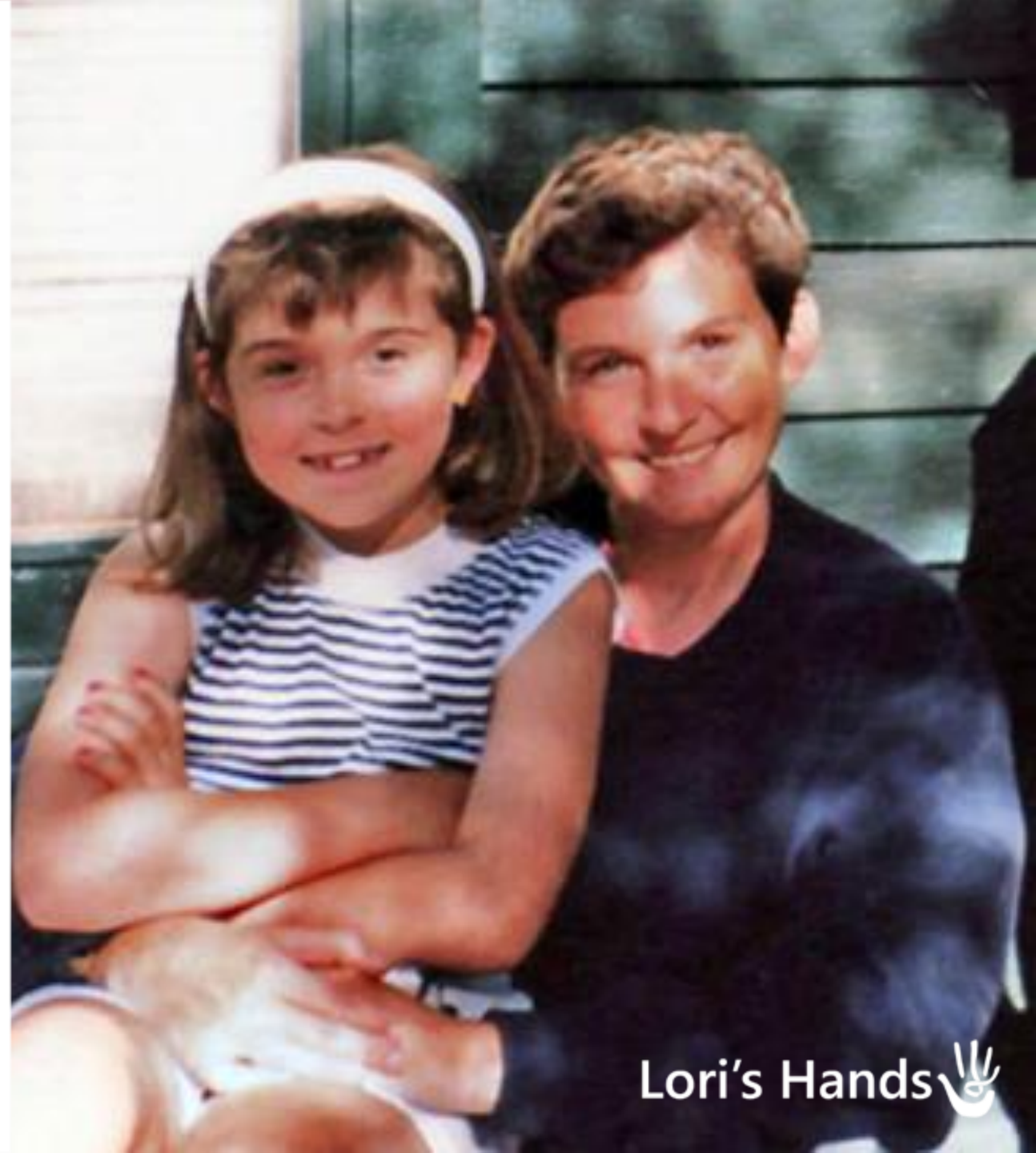


Mission

Lori's Hands builds mutually beneficial partnerships between community members with chronic illness and college students, fostering empathy, connection, and resilience. Students provide practical assistance to support community members' independence at home, and community members share their health and life experiences to support students' learning.

Inspiration

- Sarah & Lori LaFave
- Founded in memory of Lori
- Assistance with small daily tasks and honoring a person's independence are both important





History

- 2009: Student club launched
- 2011: 501(c)(3) status issued
- 2013: Service learning class at UD
- 2016: LH app to track services
- 2017: First full time staff person
- 2020: LH Baltimore launched with C3 Support
- 2022: LH Metro Detroit launched

Community Care Corps

- Enabled Baltimore launch
- Supported Newark, DE growth
- Strengthened evaluation & replication
- Policies & bylaws for scaling





Model

- 2 college students & 1 community member
- Weekly visits
- Services free of charge
- Semester-long partnerships; some 3+ years
- Intergenerational relationships central

Mutually Beneficial

- Clients:
 - Receive instrumental & social support
 - Share lived experience and wisdom
- Students:
 - Learn and grow through unmatched experiential learning
 - Provide instrumental and social support
- Caregivers:
 - Receive peace of mind and additional support for their loved one
 - Share lived experience and wisdom





Client Benefits

- Client-directed in alignment with 5 domains:
 - Food access & nutrition
 - Safety & livability of the home environment
 - Physical activity
 - Access to and coordination of care
 - Social connection

Student Benefits

- Learning domains in alignment with a student's goals:
 - Connectedness
 - Knowledge about chronic disease, healthcare, community resources, etc.
 - Communication skills
 - Knowledge about self & professional interests
 - Personal value fulfillment and community involvement
 - Professional development





Lessons Learned & Tips

- Pre-recorded training modules & quizzes
- Mutual language: everyone is a volunteer
- Let relationships evolve naturally (don't over-match)
- Intergenerational connection is key
- Leverage faculty partnerships

www.lorishands.org



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Questions and Discussion

Thank you!

- Visit www.committoconnect.org for additional resources
- Contact Commit to Connect at: info@committoconnect.org

