

## KEEPING OUR SENIORS IN MIND

NORWESCAP's Senior Help Line stands ready to help during this difficult time

Dear Friends of NAMI Sussex,

This is Bob Cubby, a member of the NAMI Sussex Board of Trustees and a NAMI Connection Group Facilitator. I am also a volunteer with NORWESCAP's Senior Help Line. I've been doing this volunteer work since May 2019. Calls come into the NORWESCAP Senior Help Line call center requesting guidance, direction, assistance or just conversation with seniors concerning various services they need but cannot find. We are very blessed in this area of Sussex, Morris and Warren Counties, with many agencies offering a wide array of services. Trying to narrow the search can become very confusing for many. This is often particularly confusing for our seniors.

That's where I come in. Rather than the senior doing the searching for the best source of assistance, I do the searching and then suggest a much shorter list of possible service providers and agencies. In a normal week I handle about six calls for service. NORWESCAP is dependent on agencies being available to the inquiring seniors. In many instances I do not get repeat calls, so I can assume the services to which I referred the seniors proved sufficient.

But these are now not normal times. The vast majority of agencies that NORWESCAP utilizes and depends on are closed due to social distancing mandated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We at NORWESCAP are not closed. Although we are now working from home, we still maintain telephone contact with our seniors. But with most agencies closed now, what can I, volunteering for Senior Help Line, do to assist our seniors?

We will have to reset and consider what our seniors are going through in these trying times and what we at NORWESCAP can do to assist in any way. Our seniors are probably alone and isolated or are self-isolating because they are considered high risk for contracting COVID-19. It is well documented that isolation can lead to depression and suicide. Studies have shown that we need to bring seniors out of isolation by bringing companionship to them through our programs. We instituted Senior Help Line to address this need in seniors and to try to bring companionship and assistance to them, but now we cannot. While we must adhere to social distancing, those companion programs cannot work as planned.

Many of the agencies Senior Help Line utilized are now closed, the volunteers barred from visiting our seniors. They are faced with being in the high risk population for COVID-19, uncertain, as we all are, of what our futures hold, alone and likely to be depressed and anxious. They may be unable to secure groceries because the shelves are bare or they cannot get to a store due to physical restrictions. What can Senior Help Line offer our seniors to help them during this difficult time?

The recommendation of NORWESCAP is simple, as our options are few: reach out by telephone to our clients. Sometimes all they need is to be reassured they are not forgotten, not alone, that someone cares for them enough to call and spend time with them on the telephone. Although, in the past, the senior calling was asking for information, often what helped them the most was simply to talk to a friendly voice... a friendly voice that will stay on the line for as long as the senior wishes, not rushing them off because we're too busy with our frantic schedules and lifestyles. With the advent of this pandemic, maybe it's time to re-examine those priorities and that lifestyle or schedule we've taken on. Many of us have found time on our hands we never had before. A lot of seniors have nothing but time on their hands.

As we at NORWESCAP are doing, please reach out to your senior neighbors, relatives and friends. If nothing else, try to comfort them and reassure them in these trying times. Your friendly voice may be the only outside contact they get while self-isolated in this pandemic. Please feel free to give them my name and the NORWESCAP Senior Help Line number, as well.

Thank you,

Robert D. Cubby

Volunteer, NORWESCAP Senior Help Line

973-784-4900, extension 3503 (main number), extension 210 (my desk)

*NORWESCAP is a private, non-profit corporation designated as a "Community Action Program," or CAP agency, originally established in 1965 to serve low-income residents of northwest New Jersey.*