



## **NO ONE AGES WELL ALONE**

As I looked for inspiration this month, my attention was directed to a New York Times article entitled “Loneliness Can Be Deadly for Elders; Friends are the Antidote” (12.30.16). It seemed a good topic to address in the dark wintry months when people get out less than at other times of year.

The article notes that nearly 25% of men and 46% of women over age 75 live alone. Isolation increases the risks of neglecting health, medication errors, poor nutrition, and depression, but people can be lonely even when they don’t live alone. Studies show that people who report feeling lonely are more at risk for mortality, depression, and selfneglect. A New York Times article of September 5, 2016 calls loneliness among older adults an “epidemic,” raising stress hormone levels and decreasing immune function, among other negative health effects.

The more recent article focuses on the importance of friendships, and how rewarding it is to develop new friendships later in life. As we age, we lose friends who move away, or become unable to interact in meaningful ways, or they die. It’s valuable to find new friends with common interests; these friendships will be different from those you’ve had for decades, but they certainly can also be rewarding.

There are many ways to find new friends. Some people choose to move to residential communities for the social activities and connections found there. Others find friends in their faith, neighborhood and social communities, such as Community Without Walls. And, of course, PSIRC is a great place to meet people with similar interests. We believe that every activity here is an opportunity for connection. People who come here have established deep friendships while painting or playing table tennis, debating cosmology, or attending a caregiver, widows or Let’s Talk group. We’ve even seen marriages grow out of friendships started here!

Some GrandPals volunteers go out for lunch together after a reading session, and I know of a HomeFriends match built on a love of speaking a foreign language together. Some of the Women in Retirement group enjoyed deepening their friendships while making the table decorations and hors d’oeuvres for the holiday party in December.

Starting a new friendship can be as simple as inviting someone to a library lecture, concert, movie, meal, or PSRC event. Or, if you live alone and don't get out much, become a "daily call" buddy with someone else or ask us about a HomeFriend.

New technology can be a great vehicle for staying in touch with family and friends old and new. Phone minutes are inexpensive today. You can also carry on a conversation using email or message applications—they're faster than mail and can be continuous or include several sessions over time. Learn how to use Skype, a two-way video tool that enables you to both see and talk to family and friends in real time. Our computer volunteers would be happy to teach you how to use it!

I know that I find it harder to connect during the winter. I can't walk after work because it's already dark. I'm more reluctant to make plans for fear that the weather will be bad. Plans I do make get cancelled for illness or weather. Making connections takes more effort. But I also know what happens when I don't make that effort: I feel lonely.

Don't let loneliness impact your health and well-being. Resist the winter blues. Make new friends and stay in touch with the old ones. Remember that PSRC can be a great resource for you!

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