



HOMEFRIENDS CELEBRATES 30 YEARS!

Thirty years ago, Joce Helm, co-founder of PSRC, Barbara Purnell and Sue Tillett started the HomeFriends program at PSRC, modeled on a program Barbara ran in Montclair which created an opportunity for home-based older adults and people with disabilities to have visitors once a week. From the outset, these visitors perform modest tasks that make a big difference for people who want to remain in their own homes.

The HomeFriends program focuses on people living independently in Princeton. Volunteers chat over a cup of tea or a scrabble game, do the grocery shopping and help put the food away, read mail, help sort photos, plant and tend a flower planter, listen to a lecture together, and many other tasks that are tailored to meet a particular need. Volunteers can also alert staff when someone may need additional services.

HomeFriends are matched for similar interests, personalities and needs. For example, one match was made because the two shared a first language, and the volunteer helped the recipient navigate the American medical system. Another recipient wanted someone to speak her second language with her so she could maintain fluency. Another volunteer reads correspondence to her visually-impaired friend. HomeFriends are not intended to replace home care assistance, which requires professional training in memory loss and personal care.

HomeFriends help alleviate the isolation, depression and loneliness that are increasingly common as people (and their friends and family) age, become more frail and no longer drive. Many recipients and volunteers don't have family nearby, so the friendships that grow are deeply meaningful to both partners. Some of these relationships last for several years.

Being a HomeFriend is a great way for adults to make a difference in someone else's life. The visits can be scheduled around work and family obligations.

A year ago, M.M. had retired, and although busy with an active social and family life, was looking for a 1-1 volunteer opportunity that would make a difference. At the same time, E.B. got in touch with Dave Roussell, the HomeFriends coordinator. She was concerned that she was becoming more socially isolated as she had stopped attending the activities she enjoyed and had lost a special friend. In the beginning M and E spent time getting to know one another, talking about families and life experiences. As time went on, their activities broadened to include running short errands, light housework, and assistance with completing paperwork. Together, they have returned to some of the activities that E. once participated in

at PSRC. The depth of their friendship is evident in the easy, light-hearted way they interact and the activities they do together.

If you are interested in being a HomeFriend volunteer or want a visitor, please contact Dave Rousell at 609-252-2362.

Susan W. Hoskins, LCSW