

Retired senior companion volunteer receives care from another

by [Frank Lee](#) on Mar 4, 2018 at 6:00 a.m.



Nancy Joseph of St. Paul (left), Lutheran Social Service Senior Corps Coordinator Marcia Ferris and Patricia Durose, an LSS volunteer, spend time Friday with 86-year-old Arlene Boesch, a Baxter resident who, in her earlier years, volunteered to spend her own time with other seniors as part of the LSS companionship program. Frank Lee / Brainerd Dispatch **1 / 2**

BAXTER—Arlene Boesch loves helping others, but after more than two decades of assisting other seniors as a volunteer, she now receives care as part of the very same volunteer program.

The Lutheran Social Service Senior Companion Program partners with Crow Wing County Community Services and Essentia Health to identify seniors in need of extra help, who are then matched with volunteers—volunteers like Boesch and Patricia Durose, Boesch's companion.

"The most rewarding thing is just making them feel at home with me and at ease," said Durose, a 71-year-old from Crosby and a senior companion volunteer who volunteers 15 hours a week.

Senior companions visit each assigned senior, taking them to medical appointments, grocery shopping, errands, or just out for coffee or an ice cream cone. Boesch recently injured herself after falling, so Durose's visits are even more appreciated now. Boesch could barely talk because of her medication but said she felt good about the attention.

"I appreciate them because they are a little bit older than me, and I understand older people and what their needs are," Durose said of the seniors she visits.

Looking frail and in a wheelchair after her accident, Boesch smiled upon seeing her 64-year-old daughter Nancy Joseph, who paid Boesch a visit Friday at the Baxter assisted living facility.

"She loved people. She loved to serve people and help them be what they could be," said Joseph, who lives in St. Paul and is one of 86-year-old Boesch's six children.

"She liked to visit with all the people and it gave her the opportunity to do hobbies together—crocheting, knitting, watching 'Wheel of Fortune,' 'The Price is Right.'"

LSS receives grants from the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Minnesota Board on Aging and offers the senior companion program volunteers a stipend.

"Social isolation is difficult for our senior population when they do not drive and may not have friends or family in the area," LSS Senior Corps Coordinator Marcia Ferris said.

"One of the major goals of the Senior Companion Program is to keep seniors living independently for as long as possible. Everyone wants to stay in their own home or apartment. It is also a much cheaper option."

The senior companion program volunteers also receive mileage, training, recognition, volunteer liability and "the satisfaction of knowing they are making a difference in the lives of so many seniors," according to Ferris.

"I appreciate the volunteers and the amount of time that they commit to this, and we do take them from their families," Ferris said.

"We keep a waiting list of people that need help and then I saw Arlene's name come up on the waiting list and thought, 'Oh, how lovely! For someone who has given service for 22 years, it's kind of the circle of life.'"

Matching seniors who have extra time to give with seniors who need assistance is one way to address the large number of seniors expected in the years ahead, according to Ferris.

"We try to keep it flexible for their lifestyle, but the seniors these volunteers see look forward to their visit each week, and the senior companions assist these seniors staying in their own home or apartment," Ferris said. "I call the job description 'Doing what friends do for friends.'"

Durose added, "Doing things that you'd want people to do for you when you get to that age."

Durose sees five seniors a week, but some volunteer 30 hours a week and see as many as eight seniors as part of the LSS program. "All the things that Arlene did for clients—she took them shopping and out to coffee and visited with them—and just was their light every week," Ferris said.

Ferris said Joseph mentioned Boesch taught the whole family to volunteer and "give back to the community."

"I think it's great to have a senior companion and as many eyes can be looking out for my mom now the better," Joseph said. "I think it's great."