

OBSERVING FOR CHANGES/RED FLAGS

Once CareGiver volunteers get comfortable and familiar with the people that they are serving, they become “first-line” observers of changes that could signify that there exists a new problem or need. The term “red flag” is used to denote any substantial changes that are taking place with the client that are a cause for concern. Certain changes may take place over an extended period of time, therefore being rather subtle. Other changes may happen more quickly and consequently are more noticeable at the on-set.

Besides being able to see changes, volunteers often hear about changes from the care receivers. If they have a trusting, positive relationship, care receivers often tell their volunteer if they are having difficulties of any kind. Sometimes, just a little extra encouragement and/or assistance is all that is needed. However, other changes could indicate that a need for more volunteer services and/or referrals to community medical and social service providers.

It is important to note that it is **not a violation of trust if you divulge information to the proper authorities concerning issues that involve harm either to the care receiver or to others**

The following are examples of potential changes:

- **Physical Observations**
 - changes in overall appearance (not getting dressed, not groomed)
 - increasing difficulty in moving about
 - loss of balance
 - noticeable change in energy
 - weight loss
 - slurred speech
 - alcohol/drug use

- **Mental Observations**
 - change from the usual manner (i.e. depressed, hopeless, excessive crying, irrational thoughts)
 - increasing confusion and/or forgetfulness
 - marriage problems

- **Environmental Observations**
 - safety hazards (steps in need of repair, newspapers and clutter piling up)
 - changes in “usual” household maintenance (piles of dirty dishes, clothing, trash or unsafe storage of food)

As a CareGiver volunteer, the most important thing is to stay observant and record and report any changes. Volunteers need to contact their Volunteer Coordinator for help whenever they have a question or concern about their care receiver. *When in doubt, report it.*