

YOUR ROLE AS A VOLUNTEER

Research has shown that the older person most at-risk of being placed in a nursing home is the single individual with little or no support network. Elderly and disabled individuals with family support become most at-risk of institutionalization when the family is no longer able to cope with the physical/emotional demands of caregiving.

As a volunteer, you will be a vital part of the person's support network:

- By supporting the person, you support the family's ability to care for their relative.
- By befriending a person, you become a new friend to share the joys and sorrows of life.
- By filling a gap in a chain of support, you help the person remain in their own home longer and more comfortably.

The following are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Family members have a history of relating to each other in certain ways. You may not always understand the "why's" of their families. Asking difficult questions of the elderly or disabled person can create distress and distrust. If you have questions about the family situation, ask your Volunteer Coordinator.
- The role of family in each of our lives is influenced by our values, lifestyles, cultural background and family patterns. Your expectations of your family may be very different from the expectations of another. It is not your role to judge the family situation. It is important for you to understand that most families are doing the best they can within their own capabilities.
- Remember that the individual has the right to say how much support he/she is willing to accept from others. Sometimes living alone and resisting help is the only way a person can express independence. It is important that we acknowledge the right of the individual to make decisions about their own life.
- You may become aware of things going on in the family setting not known by the formal network of the elderly person. If you feel there has been a drastic change in the individual's physical/emotional health, see evidence of abuse or neglect, or other circumstances out of the ordinary, you have a responsibility to report the change to your Volunteer Coordinator. Such signs may be warning of an elderly person's greater need for professional help.