

Seniors Council Senior Companion Program

Serving Monterey, San Benito & Santa Cruz Counties

Highlights:

- **Over 18,000 hours of Senior Companion light respite care and companionship provided to at-risk seniors so that they can continue to live independently in their homes in 2011-12.**

The Challenge: There is a large number of frail, home-bound seniors in need of personalized assistance to continue to live independently and avoid institutionalization in a skilled nursing facility. Senior Companion volunteers are one response to this challenge. They are very low-income seniors who serve 15 - 25 hours per week as companions and provide light respite care to frail elders.

National Program with Strong Local Roots: The Seniors Council Senior Companion Program is part of the National Senior Service Corps, a cluster of federally-funded senior volunteer programs with a strong emphasis on local community support. Federal funding is provided by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The Program has been active in the Monterey Bay Area since 1977. It is sponsored by the Seniors Council which is a federally-mandated Area Agency on Aging.

Qualifications & Benefits: Senior Companion volunteers have a commitment to give back to their communities and a desire to work with the elders. Only individuals with incomes of \$22,000/yr. or less (200% of the Federal Poverty Line) may serve. In fact, these hard-working volunteers are among the very poorest people in our community with an actual average annual income of \$15,000.

Senior Companions receive numerous benefits in return for their substantial community service. Under federal and state law they are considered volunteers who receive a \$2.65/hr non-taxable stipend as a cost reimbursement to very-low-income seniors when they have no cash cushion to personally support their substantial community service. They can accrue vacation time and sick leave. The Program reimburses Senior Companions for their transportation costs. Work sites provide them with a lunch if available for each day served or a \$2.00 per day subsidy if lunch is not available. They undergo training at a monthly in-service meeting held at a local all-you-can eat buffet restaurant. In addition, the

Program provides liability, personal injury, and excess automobile accident insurance coverage.

Each year in October we celebrate Senior Companion achievements with an Annual Recognition Luncheon attended by Senior Companions, their supervisors, relatives and friends at the Coconut Grove Ballroom of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. This is an event with live entertainment and a banquet cuisine that these low-income seniors rarely enjoy. They also receive substantial personal gifts in recognition of their outstanding community service from merchants.

Senior Companion Program Advantages:

- Encourages volunteer work from a neglected portion of the community: low-income seniors.
- Measurably improves the quality of life of home-bound seniors.
- Exposes frail elders to the companionship, emotional stability, and expertise of caring peers.
- Keeps frail elders out of skilled nursing facilities at a great cost savings to the elder and the greater society.
- Non-taxable stipend increases monthly income of senior volunteers by 15%.
- Gives status and meaning to the life of seniors who might otherwise spend all their time at home.

Senior Companions Work With:

- Isolated seniors;
- Seniors in adult day care & health care facilities;
- Seniors living unattended in adult communities;
- Seniors suffering from dementia

Given the volume of requests received by the Senior Companion Program there is a clear need for additional senior volunteers to work with frail and home-bound elders in our service area..

The Performance Goals for Senior Companions are;

Performance Evaluations will document that:

On a scale of 1 = poor to 4 = excellent the Senior Companion work performance will average 3.5 or better.

Client Care Plans will document that the frail elderly clients will show some, moderate or significant improvement in one or more of 5 quality of life indicators due to the friendly intervention of Senior Companions.

- Socialization

- Activities (games, reading, conversation)
- Personal Expression
- Mood & Behavior
- Companionship