

Caring Companions help seniors stay in their homes



Donation impact to United Way

- \$20/week provides materials for a volunteer-built ramp allowing a low-income senior to live at home safely.
- \$3/week provides 2 seniors with an individualized fitness program designed and monitored by a kinesiologist at Area 10's Endwright Center.
- \$5/week provides a ride to work every day for a year on Area 10's Rural Transit for a person without their own vehicle.
- \$5/week supplies 130 home delivered meals to local low-income home-bound clients in need of food assistance.

United Way of Monroe County Campaign Highlights

Week Ending 1/15/16 **Highlights of the Your Donation has Power Campaign**

Total Dollars Raised: \$1,006,000 (77%)

- * The Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce is building better business and a better community through \$1,800 in employee contributions.
- * Printpack is helping convert vision into value right here in our community with \$1,996 in donations.

* Employees at Hoosier Hills Food Bank, a United Way partner agency, are feeding the hungry and fighting poverty as well as contributing a healthy \$1,950 to this year's campaign.

Impact:

Donations to United Way help supply 147,430 pounds of locally grown and freshly harvested food to hungry Hoosiers through food pantries.

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The smell of frying tilapia wafted through Martha Boren's apartment Monday afternoon while the 92-year-old sat comfortably in an armchair watching the Weather Channel.

After she had a stroke several years ago, Boren's physicians recommended that she stop cooking for fear that she would forget to turn off a burner or other kitchen appliance. Area 10 Agency on Aging provides a group meal at her apartment complex every weekday, but after suffering a spinal fracture soon after her stroke, Boren has needed to use a walker, limiting her mobility.

"I thought to myself, 'I wish I had somebody to help me cook,'" Boren said.

Her family visits regularly, but Monday afternoons are a special treat. Boren sits down to a lunch of pork chops, chicken fried steak, fish or another country-style dish and enjoys the company of an unlikely new friend — 21-year-old Ashley Watkins, who Boren was paired with through Area 10's Caring Companions program.

"Martha is surprisingly young at heart," Watkins said during a break from cooking.

The senior-aged population is growing, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging has reported, and their lives are rapidly changing. Friends and family members die, and seniors' physical and mental health can begin to decline.

But people ages 65 and older don't always want to combat illness or loss of community by moving to an assisted living facility, said Lisa Tinsley, Caring Companions coordinator for Area 10, a United Way Agency.

"As old as I am, it gets lonesome," Boren said. "Anybody that lives by themselves, I think, has a tendency to wish somebody was here to talk to you."

Area 10 Agency on Aging clients who use the Caring Companions program are matched with a volunteer — sometimes someone close to their age, sometimes someone younger — who can help them with light chores, shopping and cooking.

“You actually get to meet somebody and form a relationship,” Watkins said.

Volunteers can pick up groceries, help seniors read their mail and pay their bills, and offer friendship to Area 10 clients who may have become isolated in their old age. And because the volunteer has a chance to regularly observe an Area 10 client, he or she can report concerns such as declining physical and mental health to the nonprofit and in turn provide resources from Area 10 to the senior.

Last year, Area 10 Agency on Aging's affordable housing and home-based nutrition, visitation and repair services programs allowed 1,682 area seniors to stay safely in their homes, according to United Way statistics. The nonprofit delivered 40,890 meals, served 17,127 group meals and provided 8,450 bags of groceries to these clients.

For people like Boren, who lives alone and is trying to maintain her independence, “a volunteer can make a big difference,” Tinsley said.

“It does a lot to be able to share with someone and just have someone there to listen,” Tinsley said. “It’s as much for the volunteer as it is for our seniors.”

Despite their multigenerational age gap, Boren and Watkins, a pre-nursing student at Ivy Tech Community College, have found common ground reminiscing about the Bloomington of the past and watching Indiana University sporting events.

Boren has lived in Bloomington since 1957, and worked in IU’s business office for many years. Watkins regularly attends IU basketball and football games, and can tell Boren — a former season ticket holder — details from the game that Boren might have missed on TV.

Monday’s lunch was spent catching up after Watkins left town for a winter break from classes.

“I didn’t do much of anything over the holiday,” Boren said. “It’s really good to see Ashley.”

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