

Program Evaluation of a Boston-based Friendly Visiting Program

Final report prepared for:



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DISCLAIMER

The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the authors who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data presented herein. This project was funded, in part, through a stipend from the organization FriendshipWorks, Inc. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of FriendshipWorks, Inc. This report does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation.

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<u>Table of Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
Disclaimer and Acknowledgements	i
Executive Summary	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction	
Project Significance	1
Brief Review of the Literature	1
Chapter 2: Program Volunteer Surveys	
Methodology	4
Volunteer Demographics.....	4
Results and Analysis	7
Motivations for Volunteering	7
Experiences with the Program	10
Outcomes from Volunteering	11
Volunteers' Role for Recipients.....	14
Likes, Dislikes, and Feeling Overwhelmed	16
Chapter 3: Program Recipient Surveys	
Methodology	21
Recipient Demographics	21
Results and Analysis	22
Understanding Long-term Matches	22
Comparing New and Existing Matched Recipients	24
New Recipient Follow-Up Data.....	31
Benefits of Successful Matches	33
Exploring the Dyad Relationship	39
Chapter 4: Volunteer Qualitative Interviews.....	42
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications	
Areas for Growth and Improvement	43
Better Serving Recipients	43
Better Serving Volunteers	44
Conclusions	48
Reference List	51
Appendix	53

Executive Summary

Loneliness and isolation endanger the health and wellness of older adults. Elders who have limited social networks or feel lonely have been shown to suffer worse mental and physical health than those who feel cared for and socially connected (Cornwell & Waite, 2009). Lonely elders are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's (Wilson et al., 2007), and strong social networks help prevent memory decline (Ertel, Glymour, & Berkman, 2008). High levels of self-reported loneliness have been linked to increased risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure, bad sleeping patterns, and worse cognition over time (Hall & Havens, 2003; O Luanagh & Lawlor, 2008).

Though the relationships between health, wellbeing, and social isolation/loneliness have been clearly established in the literature, the mechanisms by which they operate remain to be understood. The level of social connectedness a person experiences impacts psychological, behavioral and some biological processes. Social relationships act as a buffer to the damaging health effects of stress (Holt-Lunstadt, 2010, Thorsteinnsson et al., 1999) and may encourage older adults to seek preventative or appropriate medical treatment, better adhere to medications or treatment plans, and participate in less negative health behaviors (Lett et al., 2007; Seeman, 2000). This may all positively affect their health outcomes. As research continues to illuminate the benefits of having a social network, it becomes crucial to investigate programs designed to support social isolated elders.

The main goal of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of FriendshipWorks' Friendly Visiting program which provides inter-generational friendship "matches" as an intervention for improving elders' health and well-being. The hope is to incorporate any findings into FriendshipWorks' ongoing work and to improve the program. In addition, the organization hopes to share findings with funders, similar programs, researchers, and any planning to initiate comparable programs in their area through publication and other forms of dissemination. Our main research questions are as follows:

- ❖ How does being in a friendship match benefit the individuals involved?
- ❖ Do friendship matches promote healthy aging and/or increase well-being in later life?
- ❖ What are the main roles volunteers play in the life of their match?
- ❖ Are there program weaknesses or areas for improvement?

This research project builds on the existing literature about companionship in old age and the benefits on individual's health and wellbeing. By evaluating the friendship matches as a model for promoting healthy aging and developing tools to track the impact on an ongoing basis, FriendshipWorks can improve the quality and credibility of the program. By qualitatively understanding the experience of socially isolated individuals, we can add depth to the current complexities of conceptualization and relation between social isolation, loneliness and depression. Also, by understanding who is affected by social isolation, interventions can be appropriately targeted and tailored.

The findings suggest the Friendly Visiting program at FriendshipWorks is improving the lives of those elders and volunteers who remain in successful matches. Volunteers are experiencing positive life changes associated with their participation and often they are developing a better understanding of the aging process. Elders being referred to the program are the disadvantaged, isolated people FriendshipWorks wants their program to help.

Via survey data and semi-structured interviews, we understand a lot about the benefits both recipients and volunteers gain from the Friendly Visiting Program, as well as the main roles volunteers play in the lives of their matches. Volunteers expressed a number of life changes they experienced through volunteering including: a better understanding of aging, personal growth, feeling appreciative, feeling useful, removing social isolation and creating friendships.

The results suggest certain motivations for volunteering with elders may lead to more or less success with the Friendly Visiting program. While reasons for volunteering are very personal and subjective certain motives emerged as more or less successful in this program:

- ❖ Young volunteers (under 30) are more successful if they state an intergenerational relationship sparked their interest in volunteering with elders.
- ❖ Young volunteers (under 35) are less successful if they are looking for companionship or if they believe the match relationship will provide an insightful, wise older adult.
- ❖ Middle-age and older volunteers (45 and older) are more successful if they express companionship as a major reason for working with elders.
- ❖ Middle-age volunteers (30 to 59) are more likely to be advocates and have previous experience working with older adults than young volunteers.
- ❖ Advocate volunteers were matched the longest, on average, out of all categories. No advocate left the program before 6 months.
- ❖ Volunteers with professional experience vary; over one-fifth last over 4 years but over one-half did not make it to one year.
- ❖ Volunteers in the “insightful” category who are looking to learn from their match experience are the group least likely to be successful.

Elders reported life changes such as feeling less lonely and having someone in their life that they can count on, two main objectives of the Friendly Visiting program. Recipients reported receiving different kinds of assistance from their volunteer and two main categories emerged – social support (feeling and being cared for and feeling that one is part of a supportive social network) and instrumental support (tangible assistance). Additionally, volunteer data revealed that Friendly Visiting volunteers are providing much more than companionship for their match. Volunteers listed socialization, help running errands, and support walking as the top ways they assist their elder.

At times volunteers expressed feeling overwhelmed by their participation with the match or the level of engagement expected of them. Elders also had some negative comments regarding the program, often related to them no longer being matched, not knowing the whereabouts of their volunteer, or the way certain volunteers treated them or the activities they did together.

Given the small numbers of recipients who completed both a pre- and post-survey (n=7), we are unable to draw conclusions about the Friendly Visiting program’s ability to promote healthy aging and/or increase well-being later in life. We do know that of those recipients who had been matched for six months or more, many report increasing their physical activity in the form of walking and report they are getting out of the house more often. Elders also reported feeling less lonely, more secure, and more connected to the outside world because of the presence of their Friendly Visitor. Perhaps most importantly, over 75 percent of elders in the program now feel they have someone in their life they can count on.

Self-Reported Life Changes Associated with having a Friendly Visitor (n=37)

Life Change	Frequency	Percent
“I now have someone in my life I can count on”	28	75.7
“I feel less lonely”	23	62.2
“I feel more connected to the outside world”	19	51.4
“I feel more secure”	17	45.9
“I am getting out of the house more”	15	40.5
“I am exercising more”	11	29.7
“I am taking better care of myself”	9	24.3
“I’ve experienced other changes”	7	18.9

Perhaps the act of conducting this research more than the actual survey data itself revealed more to the research team about the quality of the Friendly Visiting program. For example, one of the most important findings of this evaluation came from the surprisingly large number of elders who were ineligible to participate in our research because they were either matched for less than 6 months or never matched at all. This finding leads to several recommendations:

- ❖ *Matches that end within the first 6 month need to be systematically examined, so the organization has a better understanding of this phenomenon.* This is an important reality about our research – which is a report about successful matches. Little is known about unsuccessful matches.
- ❖ *Volunteer training should emphasize the importance of notifying the organization about wanting to close a match and make it easy and guilt-free for volunteers to do so.*
- ❖ *Emotional distress and pain amongst elders who have had a negative experience with the organization (i.e. wait a long time to be matched or have a match fail in first six months) needs to be examined and minimized*

There are a number of areas that can be improved that relate to volunteers, specifically the areas of recruitment, retention and ongoing communication.

- ❖ FriendshipWorks' need to deliver consistent messaging to their volunteers
 - *Marketing materials emphasize the “exceptional matches” which are not the norm. Volunteers need to be prepared for the realities of these relationships*
 - *Volunteer training emphasizes boundaries, but FriendshipWorks' deep held belief about this program advocates for personalized friendship and support, a space where boundaries blur*
 - *Related to this, we suggest FriendshipWorks' attempt to maintain an organizational presence, even as matches become more and more like “old friends”*

- ❖ It seems harder to retain younger volunteers than older volunteers – FriendshipWorks should think about creative ways to use younger volunteers and more often look to match older volunteers with elder recipients

- ❖ Volunteers want feedback to know how they are doing
 - *While the desire for more contact with the organization varies by volunteers, it is clear that volunteers want to know how they are doing.*
 - *FriendshipWorks should also check in with elders to understand how matches are going, from their perspectives and share that information with volunteers*

We hope that FriendshipWorks can utilize these data to improve the program, assist with fundraising efforts, and share with the broader community of others interested in doing this kind of work. We thank the FriendshipWorks staff for their continued support on this project through all its ups and downs. The program, overall, is providing a valuable service to Boston's elders and with modifications and improvements developed from this research the program will continue grow and thrive for another 28 years.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Project Significance

The main goal of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of FriendshipWorks' Friendly Visiting program which provides inter-generational friendship "matches" as an intervention for improving elders' health and well-being. The hope is to incorporate any findings into FriendshipWorks' ongoing work and to improve the program. In addition, the organization hopes to share findings with funders, similar programs, researchers, and any planning to initiate comparable programs in their area through publication and other forms of dissemination. Our main research questions are as follows:

- ❖ How does being in a friendship match benefit the individuals involved?
- ❖ Do friendship matches promote healthy aging and/or increase well-being in later life?
- ❖ What are the main roles volunteers play in the life of their match?
- ❖ Are there program weaknesses or areas for improvement?

The site of this research project is at the non-profit Boston-based organization FriendshipWorks. FriendshipWorks' Friendly Visiting program is an established companion matching program that elected to assess and evaluate their service. FriendshipWorks was founded in 1984 to meet the needs of frail and isolated seniors. Since its inception, FriendshipWorks has assisted over 19,550 Boston area elders and adults with disabilities, providing over half a million hours of donated care. The organization's Friendly Visiting program screens, trains, and matches volunteers with isolated elders and disabled adults. The volunteers visit and assist with tasks one friend might do for another in need. The volunteers offer friendship, as well as help with everyday tasks that keep life on track. Services include help with light chores and errands, paying bills, picking up groceries, reading aloud, and offering ongoing companionship. Some volunteers also include healthy movement and walks into visits, attempting to prevent falls and increase the older adults' fitness.

Brief Literature Review

Loneliness and isolation endanger the health and wellness of older adults. Elders who have limited social networks or feel lonely have been shown to suffer worse mental and physical health than those who feel cared for and socially connected (Cornwell & Waite, 2009). In terms of mental health, loneliness and isolation are linked to cognitive and emotional decline. Research has found that lonely elders are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's (Wilson et al., 2007), and strong social networks help prevent memory decline (Ertel, Glymour, & Berkman, 2008).

Social isolation and loneliness also threaten physical health. For women, high levels of self-reported loneliness have been linked to increased risk of developing heart disease (Hall & Havens, 2003). One study suggests that strong social ties reduce the risk of heart disease in the elderly population

(Sorkin, Rook, & Lu, 2002). Further research indicates that lonely individuals are more prone to experiencing high blood pressure, bad sleeping patterns, and worse cognition over time (O Luanaigh & Lawlor, 2008). Mortality was found to increase after hip surgery when the patient reported little to no social contact prior to the hip fracture (Mortimore, et al., 2008).

While these relationships have been clearly established in the literature, the mechanisms by which they operate remain to be understood. The level of social connectedness a person experiences impacts psychological, behavioral and some biological processes. Social relationships act as a buffer to the damaging health effects of stress (Holt-Lunstadt, 2010, Thorsteinsson et al., 1999). In addition, if an individual desires more or higher quality relationships than one actually has, this discrepancy can result in feelings of loneliness (Weiss, 1973). It is this distressing psychological process that activates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis; this axis is a major part of the neuroendocrine system that controls the body's response to stress (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1984). Further, social relationships may encourage older adults to seek preventative or appropriate medical treatment, better adhere to medications or treatment plans, and participate in less negative health behaviors (Lett et al., 2007; Seeman, 2000), thus positively affecting health outcomes. As research continues to illuminate the relationship between social network and individual health, it becomes crucial to further investigate the mechanisms operating behind this relationship and use findings to fight negative health outcomes.

Risk factors for being isolated include living alone, being female, geographically distant from network members, death of network members, experiencing role loss (i.e., retirement), or being functionally impaired or of low socioeconomic status (Theeke, 2007; O Luanaigh & Lawlor, 2008). Loneliness continues to be higher in women, widowed individuals, and elders with physical disability and the oldest old (Golden, et al., 2009). There is a relative deficiency in research, however, that separates loneliness from depression (O Luanaigh & Lawlor, 2008). Measures of loneliness and social network size independently affect mood and wellbeing in the elderly, and the constructs of depressed mood, hopelessness, and wellbeing were all independently associated with loneliness and social networks (Golden, et al., 2009). Furthermore, individual experiences of loneliness were found to be complex and not always linked to depression; while being lonely can devastate individuals, being lonely can also help to enhance life in old age (Graneheim & Lundman, 2010). Older adults can be socially isolated and not experience the distressing feelings of loneliness, while those who are not considered socially isolated can feel lonely (Adams et al., 2004; Routasalo et al., 2006). Although few studies have distinguished between the objective construct of social isolation and the subjective construct of feelings of loneliness, research suggests both social isolation and loneliness may have adverse effects on health (Cornwell and Waite, 2009; Golden et al., 2009; Cacioppo et al., 2006).

Further study of loneliness and social isolation is needed to understand the distinctiveness of each construct and to separate them from depression. While some researchers argue that social isolation and feelings of loneliness should be treated as separate constructs altogether (Cornwell & Waite, 2009), others view loneliness as just one type of isolation (Weiss, 1973). Other researchers define loneliness as one potential side effect of social isolation (Nicholson & Nicholson, 2009). These numerous definitions of social isolation lack clarity, uniformity and consistency in measurement. In addition, research on social isolation and health is primarily conducted on non-Hispanic white

populations, leaving a gap in knowledge on the health effects of social isolation in diverse populations (Tomaka, Thompson & Palacios, 2006). Social isolation might affect minorities and foreign-born individuals in distinct ways.

Further study is also needed to understand organized programs designed to support social isolated elders. A review of the literature suggests group participation benefits elders, but we have little insight into the benefits of individual-focused programs designed to reduce social isolation. Research is especially sparse regarding programs designed to reduce social isolation and loneliness by creating personalized support and one-to-one matches. Pennington and Knight (2008) studied the meaning of social relationships between volunteers and elders in a senior companionship program and found that when volunteers maintained the expectation of companionship and structured visits, the relationship was viewed as a friendship. When the parties developed a deep connection and the volunteer went above and beyond to assist the elder, feelings of strong friendship and family grew. These types of friendly visiting interventions have been effective in connecting isolated adults to new network members, inducing feelings of “being needed”, and increasing well-being (Routasalo et al., 2008). The unique contribution of these friendly visiting programs is that they do not only introduce a new social network member but also emphasize the emotional quality and closeness of the relationship, targeting the relief of both social isolation and feelings of loneliness. These two constructs, as mentioned earlier, both play important roles in the relationship between social isolation and health.

This research project will build on the existing literature about companionship in old age and the benefits on individual’s health and wellbeing. By evaluating the friendship matches as a model for promoting healthy aging and developing tools to track the impact on an ongoing basis, FriendshipWorks can improve the quality and credibility of the program. By qualitatively understanding the experience of socially isolated individuals, we can add depth to the current complexities of conceptualization and relation between social isolation, loneliness and depression. Also, by understanding who is affected by social isolation, interventions can be appropriately targeted and tailored. Finally, the research is intended to reach a broader audience, establishing companionship programs as an evidence-based practice for helping older adults maintain their health and quality of life through caring connections and socio-emotional support.

CHAPTER 2: PROGRAM VOLUNTEER SURVEYS

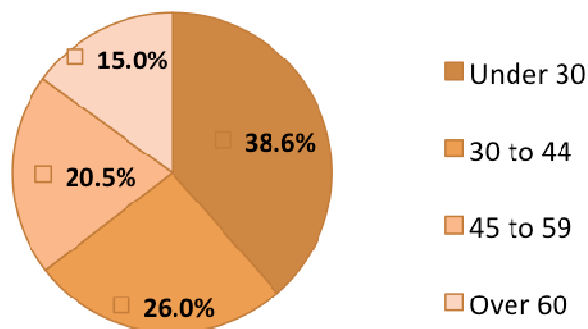
Methodology

In order to evaluate the Friendly Visiting program, both program recipients and service volunteers were surveyed. This project was approved by the University of Massachusetts Boston's Institutional Review Board before participants were recruited. Volunteers were eligible for study participation if they were matched with an elder for at least six months between the data collection time frame of September of 2010 to September of 2011. In other words, at the start of the study all volunteers matched for at least 6 months were recruited. Over the year of data collection, the study continued enrollment of new program volunteers who remained matched for 6 months, for a final sample size of 127 volunteers. We reached volunteers by both emailing and mailing the survey to them. Sixty-eight volunteers returned our survey for a response rate of 53.5%. This is a respectable response rate for emailed/mailed surveys (Fowler, 2002). Further information was also collected on the 23 volunteers who elected to participate in an additional 20-30 minute in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interview (see Chapter 4).

Volunteer Demographics: Who Are They?

The demographic profile of the entire sample (n=127) of Friendly Visiting volunteers was based on information collected directly by the organization. Extant literature finds that the typical American volunteer is white, female, and over the age of 50 (Wilson & Musick, 1997). The volunteers of the Friendly Visiting program are overwhelmingly women (80%), but we find a noticeable difference among age and racial groups. A little over half of the program volunteers are White (56%), while 23% are Black, 14% percent identify as Asian, and 7% report being of Hispanic ethnicity. The age distribution for this sample also differs from the literature: the largest group of volunteers are under age 30 (39%) and the number of volunteers decrease as the age group increases (Figure 1).

Fig 1. Distribution of Volunteer Age Groups (n=127)



Those volunteers who responded to our survey (n=68) were only slightly different from the entire sample (Table 1). The sample respondents are less racially diverse, slightly more male, and slightly

older than the eligible population. While we were able to get more representation from Hispanic volunteers and similar numbers for Asian volunteers there is a clear lack of response from the Black participants who make up over one-fifth of the organizations volunteers.

Table 1. Demographics of Eligible Volunteer Population vs. Final Sample of Volunteer Respondents

	<i>Eligible Population</i>	<i>Sample Respondents</i>
Total	N=127	N=68
Average Age	40.6	42.1
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	19.8%	21.5%
<i>Female</i>	80.2%	78.5%
Race		
<i>White</i>	56.3%	66.2%
<i>Black</i>	22.5%	10.3%
<i>Asian</i>	14.1%	13.2%
<i>Hispanic</i>	7.0%	11.8%

A detailed description of the sample respondents can be viewed in Table 2. Based on analysis of age and marital status (not shown) there are two predominant profiles for the Friendly Visiting volunteers: over half are between ages 30-59 and married, and 19% are under age 30 and single. They are an educated group, with 36.8% having a graduate school degree. The majority of volunteers are employed or students, but several are retired (17.6%). Religion is reported as being very important to many volunteers, though the most common listing for religious affiliation is “none.” A cross tabulation of religious importance with religious affiliation suggests volunteers who feel religion is very important practice a particular faith. Of all volunteers, 11.9% were Roman Catholics and 9.0% were Protestants who felt religion was very important which *may* be linked to recruitment efforts at local congregations. The largest group of volunteers, however, are those who do not feel religion is important and do not have a religious affiliation (34.4% of all volunteers).

We explored the social networks and elder connections of our volunteers by asking them to describe the size of their network, whether they had an adult aged 70 or older in their life, and if they had regular contact with this elder. Volunteers coming to the Friendly Visiting program know they are expected to develop a one-on-one relationship with an older adult. These questions, therefore, were an attempt to understand whether volunteers wish to develop this connection because they lack other relationships—particularly intergenerational relationships—in their life.

Most volunteers had a small network (i.e. a few people they see on a regular basis) and had an elder in their life outside of the program (77.9%). Therefore, most volunteers coming to FriendshipWorks do have an intergenerational relationship outside of the organization. An additional finding from analysis based on the volunteers’ ages (not shown) suggests, however, that a particular age group may be less likely to have an elder in their life than the other groups: of volunteers between the ages of 30 and 44, 64% do not have an elder in their life compared to about 20% of volunteers in the other age categories.

Table 2.
*Demographic Information for Volunteer Survey Respondents (n=68)**

Demographic Measures		N	Percent
Gender	Female	52	78.5
	Male	15	20.5
Age	Under 30	19	29.2
	30 to 44	20	30.8
	45 to 59	15	23.1
	60 and older	11	16.9
Race/Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	45	66.2
	Black/African American	7	10.3
	Asian	9	13.2
	Hispanic	8	11.8
Education	High school	5	7.4
	Some college or college degree	38	55.9
	Graduate degree	25	36.8
Marital Status	Married/Partnered	28	41.2
	Divorced/Separated	7	10.3
	Widowed	3	4.4
	Never married	30	44.1
Employment	Working (full- or part-time)	45	66.2
	Retired	12	17.6
	Student	8	11.8
	Unemployed	3	4.4
Importance of Religion	Very important	24	35.8
	Somewhat important	18	26.9
	Not important	20	29.9
	Don't know	5	7.5
Religious Affiliation	None listed	33	48.5
	Roman Catholic	13	19.1
	Protestant	7	10.3
	Jewish	4	5.9
	Unitarian	3	4.4
	Other (Muslim, Buddhist, etc.)	8	11.8
Social Network	Large network	22	32.8
	Small network	42	62.7
Connection with Elders	One person or no one	3	4.5
	Elder (over 70) in their life	51	77.9
	No elder or doesn't see them regularly	22	32.4

*Due to missing information not all demographic measures add up to 68

Results from Volunteer Survey Data

I. Motivations for Volunteering with Elders

The organization asks new volunteers to write down the reasons why they have chosen to work with an elderly population. These open-ended responses were available for ninety-two volunteers in our sample (72.4%) and were analyzed along with the volunteer’s length of time with the program to gather insight into what constitutes a “successful” volunteer. Nine distinct reasons for volunteering emerged (Table 3).

Table 3. Reasons for Volunteering with Older Adults (n=92)

Reason Code	(N) %	Definition of Code
Natural Volunteer	(43) 46.7%	<i>Volunteer feels they have an innate ability to connect with elders or they want to give back in some way and help an elder in need. They often suggest they have important skill/attributes that will help them succeed as a volunteer.</i>
Intergenerational Relationships	(32) 34.8%	<i>The volunteer mentions family or a previous elder friendship and their experiences with this person (aging parents, grandparents, other elder relatives, elder friend).</i>
Companionship	(25) 27.2%	<i>The volunteer clearly states that they hope to develop a relationship with an elder in some capacity (i.e. to be a companion, friend, listening ear).</i>
Insightful	(24) 26.1%	<i>Volunteer believes elders have something to offer and that they will provide valuable insight, understanding and wisdom to the volunteer. The volunteer expresses a hope to learn from the elder.</i>
Advocacy	(14) 15.2%	<i>The volunteer specifically voices that society’s mistreatment of older adults (i.e. they are forgotten, overlooked, disregarded, etc.) bothers the volunteer and that they are hoping to actively change this by joining this program.</i>
Previous Experience	(14) 15.2%	<i>Volunteer has previous work or volunteer experience with older adults.</i>
Spare Time	(12) 12.0%	<i>Volunteer states that they have spare time and would like to spend that time volunteering.</i>
Professional Learning	(7) 7.6%	<i>Volunteer believes they will gain experience from volunteering that will further their career/job in some way.</i>
Aging Self	(6) 6.5%	<i>The volunteer self-reflects on their own process of aging (in most cases they are over 60) and thoughts about their future self. This leads them to want to volunteer with older adults.</i>

Our results indicate four major reasons why volunteers are attracted to the program: they want to help the elderly and feel some personal quality will drive their success (natural volunteer), their life has been influenced by an older family member or elderly friend (intergenerational relationship), they hope to develop a relationship with an older person (companionship), and they believe they will gain wisdom and knowledge from contact with an elder (insight).

Those volunteers in the “natural volunteer” category were very similar to the population as a whole, most likely because this group represents about half of our sample. There are no distinguishing characteristics that make up those volunteers who are in the natural volunteer category. The codes spare time, professional learning, and aging self are all important, distinct reasons for wanting to volunteer with elders but unfortunately their numbers are so small they cannot be properly analyzed. We discuss the remaining categories below which all differentiate themselves from the entire volunteer sample.

Intergenerational Relationship – Family members and close friends play an important part in our lives, even if they live far away or are no longer living. This sentiment was expressed by many volunteers who describe an older family member or an experience with an elder friend when asked about their reasons for volunteering with elders. “Intergenerational relationship” volunteers were very similar to the entire sample of volunteers, besides being slightly younger (50% under age 30) than the entire sample. What is notable about this group is length of match: over half of volunteers (53%) in this category are reaching two years or more with their match.

Companionship – Developing a meaningful relationship with an older adult is the foundation upon which the Friendly Visiting program and FriendshipWorks was built. Thus, we would expect volunteers expressing a desire to become a friend or build a lasting relationship with their match to be highly successful in this program. It was surprising to find, instead, that average length of match for “companionship” volunteers (2.3 years) was lower than average match length for the entire sample. Closer examination revealed that there are two types of “companion” volunteers who differ by age. One type consists of volunteers who remained matched over 4 years. All of these volunteers were over the age of 45 (average age 51). In contrast, those volunteers who did not make it to 6 months with their match were all under the age of 35 (average age 27). This suggests that the meaning of “companionship” and building a relationship with an elder may be viewed very differently depending on age of the volunteer. The subjective nature of these concepts makes it difficult to determine what the individual is truly expressing when they say they wish to be a companion or friend to an older person. It does seem that middle-aged adults desiring companionship out of their friendly visiting volunteer experience are more likely to experience a long-standing relationship with their matched elder.

Insightful – Older adults have lived a long life and have experienced many things that may make them particularly good at giving advice, guidance, and insight. However, it is important to be clear that not all older adults achieve wisdom, and that there is a wide variety of characteristics among the older adult population. Moreover, old age comes with a number of challenges and if a volunteer is entering a relationship with an elder with a preconceived notion that the elder is wise and prepared to offer great advice there may be complications with the relationship. In analysis, we found that “insightful” volunteers were staying matched 1.5 years on average, which is lower than average match length for the entire sample. Seventy-one percent of “insightful” volunteers in our sample did not reach their year obligation to the program. Thus, our results suggest volunteers who have an idyllic view of what their match will be like may be particularly at risk for leaving the program early if the elder is not what they envisioned. It is also possible, based on the definition of the code “insightful,” that this type of volunteer is hoping to gain something personal from

participating in the program rather than looking to help someone. Whenever a volunteer expresses the “insightful” code in an evaluation it is important to consider their full motivation for wanting to volunteer with elders. If they have little else to add to their desire for wisdom and learning they may not be a good fit for the program.

Advocacy –The Friendly Visiting program aims to support disadvantaged, isolated elders in the community by creating lasting, life-enriching relationships. Our research shows that a number of volunteers come to the program with these same goals in mind. They voice a concern for socially isolated elders and displeasure in the way society treats them. Volunteers in the advocacy group were generally middle-aged women and interestingly, were more often paired with a minority elder (39%) than the entire sample (29%). Volunteers seeking to advocate for elders were matched with their elder for an average of 3 years, the highest average of all the categories. Exploring the match length further we find that “advocacy” volunteers have never lasted less than 6 months with their match and 43 percent have reached the 2 year mark. Some matches did end before the one year mark and knowing the reason why these matches ended would be helpful. Advocacy for vulnerable adults as a reason for volunteering aligns very well with the mission of FriendshipWorks and may be a reason why they remain matched longer, on average, than other groups. However, we do not have enough information to understand why some “advocacy” volunteers do not last one year with their matches.

Previous Experience – Volunteers with previous experience have either worked with or volunteered with older adults in the past before coming to the Friendly Visiting program. These volunteers feel that their past experience will help them be better volunteers. It is not surprising, given the demographics of who works with and cares for the elderly, that all of the sampled volunteers in this category were women. Most of them (43%) were between the ages of 30 and 44 years old. One might expect that these volunteers' familiarity with older adults would result in a longer match. However, while the average length of time these volunteers remained matched was 2.7 years—longer than the 2.1 year average length of match of the entire sample—length of match varied widely within this group: 57% of “previous experience” volunteers did not make it to one year. Twenty-two percent, however, lasted over 4 years with their match which is the highest percentage of volunteers making it to 4 years. Further analysis should be undertaken to gain a better understanding of why such a large percentage of “previous experience” matches fail.

A detailed table of the finding from the qualitative analysis of “reasons for volunteering” can be found in the Appendix. These findings should be interpreted carefully. Though the results suggest certain motivations for volunteering with elders may lead to more or less success with the Friendly Visiting program, reasons for volunteering are very personal and subjective. Also, a volunteer might have different reasons for joining the program, and thus would simultaneously fit into multiple code categories. The categories created were based on the volunteers’ literal words and not attitudes behind those words or our interpretation of their meaning. This is important to keep in mind as we summarize the findings below:

- ❖ Young volunteers (under 30) are more successful if they state an intergenerational relationship sparked their interest in volunteering with elders.

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- ❖ Young volunteers (under 35) are less successful if they are looking for companionship or if they believe the match relationship will provide an insightful, wise older adult.
 - ❖ Middle-age and older volunteers (45 and older) are more successful if they express companionship as a major reason for working with elders.
 - ❖ Middle-age volunteers (30 to 59) are more likely to be advocates and have previous experience working with older adults than young volunteers.
 - ❖ Advocate volunteers were matched the longest, on average, out of all categories. No advocate left the program before 6 months.
 - ❖ Volunteers with professional experience vary; over one-fifth last over 4 years but over one-half did not make it to one year.
 - ❖ Volunteers in the “insightful” category who are looking to learn from their match experience are the group least likely to be successful.

II. Volunteers Experience with the Organization and Program

Volunteers of the Friendly Visiting program reported positive opinions of the organization and the program throughout the survey. Ninety percent were extremely satisfied or satisfied with their experience and almost 30 percent had volunteered in some additional capacity with FriendshipWorks. In addition, one-third of volunteers have had more than one match with FriendshipWorks indicating a number of volunteers enjoy the experience enough to be re-matched even after their match-friendships end. Most volunteers felt they were adequately prepared for their role as a friendly visitor (89.4%) and for many (61.2%) this was their first time participating in this form of face-to-face visiting with an elder.

Most volunteers knew which staff to call on for assistance (85.1%) and felt the amount of contact they have with staff is just right (79.4%). Volunteers’ personal preferences about contact with the organization varied. Many of them reported connecting with staff once a year or less (44.8%) while others are hearing from staff three times a year or more (43.3%). An analysis of volunteer contact with staff and feelings about its adequacy is outlined in Table 4.

Of the 21 percent who expressed a desire to have more contact with the organization, most of them have contact once a year or less (61.6%). Surprisingly, 30 percent of those who want more contact speak to the organization three or more times a year. The need of each volunteer varies and while most feel their contact with the organization is just right, there are a few who would like more communication.

Table 4. Volunteers Feeling about Staff Contact by Their Reported Amount of Yearly Contact (n=67)

Contact Per Year	Too Little (20.6%)	Just Right (79.4%)	Total (100.0%)
Less than Once	30.8	22.9	23.9
Once	30.8	18.5	20.9
Twice	7.7	13.0	11.9
Three or More	30.8	46.3	43.3

Related to the need for more organizational contact, volunteers expressed interest in participating in social programs. Eighteen percent of volunteers were very interested and roughly 62% expressed some interest in engaging in activities and events with the organization. Options for specific activities were not identified in the survey but these may include volunteer events and workshops, group discussion sessions, or activities where the match pair can interact with other matches.

III. Outcomes Related to Volunteering with the Program

VFI Scale – A previous section outlined the major reason why volunteers come to the Friendly Visiting program and choose to volunteer with elders over other populations. Based on analysis from the Vanderbilt Functioning Index (VFI) Volunteering Outcomes Scale filled out by the volunteers we can assess what volunteers feel they have achieved from participating in this program. Table 5 suggests that most volunteers in our sample were acting on important values they hold—such as helping those less fortunate—by participating in this program.

Table 5. Volunteering Outcomes from the VFI Outcomes Scale (n=68)

Outcome	Definition	% Agree	% Strongly Agree
Values	The volunteer expressed or acted on important values (such as helping those less fortunate) by volunteering	85.3%	67.7%
Enhance	The volunteer has grown and developed psychologically through involvement with the program	82.4%	51.5%
Social	Volunteering allowed the person to strengthen their social relationships	76.5%	45.6%
Understand	Volunteering allowed the person to learn more about the world and to exercise skills that are often unused	54.4%	26.5%
Protect	The volunteer has used the experience to reduce negative feelings or to address personal problems	23.5%	11.8%
Career	The volunteer has gained career-related experience	11.8%	4.4%
Satisfaction	Overall program satisfaction based on a scale from 5 to 35. <i>Note: Average satisfaction is high at 31.1</i>	88.1%	67.2%
Long-term Intentions	Those volunteers who intend to continue volunteering at this organization one year from now (answered yes).	80.6%	—

Many volunteers felt they have experienced personal growth by becoming involved with the program. Volunteers also felt participation has helped to build and strengthen their social relationships. These outcomes suggest that both the elder and the volunteer benefit socially and psychologically from being matched. The three other possible outcomes on the VFI Outcomes Scale are experienced by fewer volunteers. Roughly half of the volunteers in our sample agreed that they have learned more about the world and utilized their skills through this volunteering experience. Less than 25 percent felt volunteering has helped them overcome personal problems, and only about 12 percent reported gaining some form of career-related experience.

Perhaps one of the most important findings for the organization is that 67 percent of volunteers were very satisfied with their experience and 81 percent planned to remain volunteering at FriendshipWorks for the next year.

Life Changes Associated with Volunteering – Sampled volunteers expressed a number of life changes they experienced through participating in the Friendly Visiting program. Of the volunteer respondents, 59 percent wrote about changes in their life that they believe are a result of volunteering with FriendshipWorks. They fall into 6 major categories: 1) Better understanding of aging (see next section for details), 2) personal growth, 3) feeling appreciative, 4) feeling useful, 5) removing social isolation, and 6) creating friendships.

Many volunteers related experiences of personal growth to their involvement in this program, specifically saying that their communication skills, attitudes, or confidence improved. Quotations from their responses illustrate this point:

I can easily communicate with people in large groups [now] instead of being shy or nervous.

I am always gaining a different perspective on life via my interactions with my match.

I feel more comfortable in uncomfortable situations and with people with unfamiliar disabilities than I used to.

Volunteers also related feelings of enhanced gratitude to their experience with the program, and expressed ways in which volunteering renewed appreciation for their own life, health, and the well-being of their loved ones:

[I've developed] an appreciation for the people in my life and my level of independence.

It's humbling when I see how much I complain...and I'm confronted with someone whose challenges are far greater and she doesn't. She's inspiring.

I have become even more grateful that I was born with [disabilities] rather than [developing them] at an older age.

Volunteers also reported feeling useful and feeling like they were making a difference. Helping out

resulted in feeling useful and appreciated which not only supported the elder's situation but also benefited the volunteer's sense of worth.

I have felt that I am doing something very worthwhile.

I feel a bit more at peace knowing that I am finally volunteering and giving back to the community.

Volunteers also articulated that the match enhanced their life through creating friendships. Being matched helped them to realize the value of removing social isolation for frail, isolated seniors in their community and what it means to be a friend to someone.

Wonderful advice from my first friend helped to heal a family wound.

I have realized that a little bit of companionship can make a big difference in the quality of someone's life.

The experience has reinforced my belief in the importance of reaching out to the isolated.

Better Understanding of Aging– An interesting finding from our volunteer survey suggests that many volunteers are observing the aging process firsthand and gaining insight into the detriments related with aging in isolation. When asked if the volunteering experience has changed their attitudes or beliefs about elders and growing old, 51 percent of volunteers said it had, while 10 percent were unsure. Analysis from the open-ended questions suggests that volunteers are experiencing aging in two ways. Some are saddened by what they find, feeling helpless about the future of their match and their own future given their new knowledge about elder care. These volunteers expressed distress over the physical or emotional problems of aging:

I sometimes feel overwhelmed or saddened by my match's situation.

It can be hard seeing my new friend struggle with things that I can do nothing about.

It worries me that [I] will possibly be in facilities where no one sees me as a person with feelings and interests...and [with] doctors that don't appear to take issues seriously. It makes me feel a little hopeless.

Others believe they have grown from the experience and have a better understanding of elders, aging issues, and how to alleviate social isolation in this population. While they may still feel unhappy by what they see, they are not overcome by feelings of hopelessness or despair. Rather, these volunteers believe their lives have changed for the better with this new knowledge. Volunteering has either enhanced their beliefs that elders should be treated well by society or helped them see beyond disabilities or age when they meet new people. They know that even if they are not changing everything negative in the elder's life, they are making a difference.

I understand more what it's like to be elderly and I have more compassion for people who are alone or physically helpless.

I've realized how fast everyone moves around us when we are out walking and...how little patience people have. I've found myself loosening up a bit and having more patience.

[Volunteering] has helped me to see more of the realities of aging and better see beyond the disabilities and complications to the people themselves and their unique life stories.

IV. Volunteers' Roles in the Life of their Match

Now we have an understanding of the volunteers' characteristics and motivations for participating in the program, their opinions of the program and what the volunteers are gaining from this experience. This next section will go into detail about the volunteers' perceptions of what they are providing for their match and how the program is affecting their match.

Volunteers in our sample were not traveling very far to see their matches. This is unsurprising, since match-making is often based on location and proximity. Whether leaving from work or home, 69 percent reported traveling less than 5 miles and 40 percent were walking or biking when they go see their match. Over one-half (55.9%) of volunteers reported staying for the allotted 1 hour to 1 ½ hour when they visited their match each week. A significant percentage—one-third (33.9%)--chose to stay for 2 hours or more.

In addition, we found that volunteers are occasionally speaking to their matches in between visits by telephone. Fifty-one percent said this type of exchange happens sometimes, 19 percent said it happens often, and 9 percent said it always happens between visits. This call is often a check-in to schedule and coordinate times but also takes the form of a call on holidays and special occasions, or emergency contact when needed. Phone communication ensures contact even when physical visits are not possible. This is often because the volunteer will be absent one week or the elder is receiving medical care and the volunteer calls the elder to check-in.

Our results suggest volunteers are providing a number of services for the match, in addition to being a consistent weekly companion. The types of helping fall into five major categories: 1) socialization and activity, 2) assistance with medical needs, 3) help outside the home, 4) help inside the home, and 5) advocacy. The categorizations (Table 6) show the number of sampled volunteers who support aging-in-place for these socially isolated elders. Socialization and activity are major components of the program, and the other four categories delineate what types of volunteer-provided assistance help these frail, isolated elders to remain in their homes.

Table 6. Volunteers' Additional Assistance (n=66) Answer to multiple choice, multiple answer question: 'What kinds of things have you helped your match do?'

Assistance Code	Percent	Activities Associated with Code
Socialization and Activity	75.0%	Be more social – 52.2% Be more active (e.g. take walks) – 43.3% Get into the community more – 35.8%
Help Outside the Home	55.9%	Run errands (e.g. get milk) – 53.7% Provide transportation – 22.4%
Medical Assistance	33.8%	Medical needs (e.g. scheduling, prescriptions) – 22.4% Get to medical appointments – 19.4% Look at assisted living facilities – 8.9%
Help Inside the Home	32.4%	Read mail – 25.4% Stay on top of bills – 19.4% Cooking – 16.4%
Advocacy	29.4%	Advocated for match (e.g. housing issues) – 17.9% Made important phone calls – 16.4%

It is important to note that 47.8 percent of volunteers did *not* report helping their match be more social. Many elders are too frail to leave their homes and engage in their community or even take walks; but due to the nature of the program we would expect higher numbers for socialization. This could be related to respondents' misunderstanding of the survey question, or it could be possible that volunteers do not view the everyday, one-on-one interactions with their match (in which they do things like converse, share stories, and laugh) as helping someone to be more social.

Forty-five percent of volunteers reported solving a very specific problem for their match. These problems ranged from home maintenance to technology assistance to providing transportation. Problems being solved by volunteers fall into four major categories and closely relate to the assistance categories above: 1) advocacy, 2) assisting with medical needs, 3) reducing social isolation, and 4) allowing the elder to remain independent and living at home.

When listing specific problems they helped their match to solve, advocacy and assistance with medical needs were the themes that emerged least often. In these instances, volunteers mentioned assisting their match with getting to the doctors or needing to advocate for them on major housing issues like heating or evictions. An example of both advocacy and medical help are below:

He was going to be evicted from his old house so I advocated for him.

When she had problems hearing and when she recently lost her appetite, I contacted her nurse who came to examine her.

More frequently, volunteers mentioned helping with problems related to social isolation and increasing the elder's independence. Many volunteers felt the major problem they helped solve was connecting their match to the outside community, even if they could not leave their homes.

In addition, volunteers reported improving methods of communication and helping with emotional/interpersonal issues:

When I first met my match, the method of communication [was difficult]. I bought an erasable white board and all of the staff started using [it]. The board made all conversations move more quickly.

[I] purchased a baby monitor so her daughter could hear when her mother needed help if she could not get to the phone.

On a couple of occasions she has called me with interpersonal relationship issues and we've talked it through so she wasn't so upset.

Volunteers also frequently mentioned helping with problems that threatened the elder's ability to remain at home and live independently. By providing things like transportation, home repairs and maintenance, financial help, or grocery shopping, volunteers supported their match living alone:

I resolved health code violations by doing heavy cleaning, removing clutter, doing small repairs, and installing smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

He needed to sell his auto since he is now in assisted living. I placed an ad which led to a sale and needed income for him.

My match was getting weaker so I helped him continue making meals by switching him to smaller, manageable product sizes.

V. Likes, Dislikes, and Feeling Overwhelmed

When asked what it was they liked most about the Friendly Visiting program volunteers reported five major topics. The two biggest "likes" of the program related to developing friendships and making a difference in someone's life. For many volunteers, the word "friend" was used frequently and there was a sense of mutual enjoyment of the weekly visits; these results suggest the organization is meeting its goal of going beyond simple visiting to develop deep and lasting connections:

I love being able to talk with my match each week and give him an opportunity to tell his stories and share his thoughts.

[My match] and I have developed a real bond over the years and have become good friends.

I've enjoyed getting to know my match. We have become friends and I look forward to our conversations.

What many volunteers liked most about the program was that they were able to make a real difference in the life of an older person. Making a difference related to feelings of being useful, of being helpful, and knowing they are a support to their match:

I like helping her, I feel like I have made life a little easier for her.

I like...helping her get out and take advantage of things she doesn't like to do alone, like [going to] concerts.

The ability to see the change that I am making in someone's life is extremely rewarding.

The other three categories were not expressed by as many volunteers but still emerged as three distinct themes that volunteers liked most about their participation in the program. Some volunteers said that improving the mood of the match was what they valued most:

I like to be able to make someone happy by contacting and visiting them.

I like bringing a little joy into other people's lives in the form of conversation.

The thing I like most is knowing that we have brightened his day by our visit.

Others said that they experienced personal growth because of their volunteerism and this was what they liked most about the program. These responses echo the responses of volunteers who related "personal growth" as a life change they associated to volunteering with the program:

I enjoy having a friend with totally different experiences and perspectives.

He's a great storyteller and I always walk away with some highly quotable pearls of wisdom.

[I like] the fact that I have met people I wouldn't have met otherwise.

Finally, some volunteers reported that what they liked most about their role in the Friendly Visiting program was that they are removing social isolation in a lonely, isolated population:

The one-to-one contact with a senior ensures that they do matter.

[I like] knowing that I make a difference to help my match not feel so alone.

Overall, volunteers in our sample reported enjoying the program, and an overwhelming majority feel that FriendshipWorks is effectively providing friendship and companionship to a number of isolated older adults in the Boston area. However, volunteers also reported disliking certain aspects of the program. The most common dislike volunteers experienced with the program related to the demands of their volunteer role. They felt challenged by both practical demands like travel and scheduling issues as well as emotional demands related to an elder's growing dependence on them:

Sometimes coordinating when to come over can be difficult with my schedule and her normal variations in health, tiredness, and function.

I feel burdened by the responsibility I feel for my match's well-being.

I visit my match after work, sometimes I am tired and would prefer to go home.

Volunteers also referenced their firsthand experience with aging as something they disliked about their role. While they were often happy to be supporting an older person in need, the visiting conditions and/or seeing their match grow old were difficult for some volunteers:

Realizing that elder care seems worse than I'd realized. Bad food, bad attitudes by staff, nothing seems all that great – at least on a personal/emotional basis. The place may be clean, there's food on the table, but there is nothing really healthy or life-fulfilling about it.

To hear an elder speak of the disconnect with the world, friends, and family – especially children and grandchildren as they age.

Going into the assisted living community where my match lives makes me sad.

A number of volunteers wanted more active or meaningful visits. These volunteers either stated they felt unfulfilled by the friendship and had trouble connecting with their match on an emotional level, or that they felt unfulfilled by their visits. These volunteers expressed desire to engage in more activities or get out of the house more than their match would like:

My match doesn't really have an interest in doing activities like walking so I find the weekly meeting quite long. I wish I knew of activities I could do with him.

[I'm] feeling not helpful enough – not having enough ideas. Usually we just 'hang out.'

It is difficult to have conversations with my match. I find myself doing most of the talking...it is frustrating to not be able to ask him questions because due to his memory problems he can't always answer.

Some volunteers also felt dissatisfied by the amount of help they were able to provide for their match. These volunteers expressed a desire to increase the help they provide. Volunteers wanted to do more for the elderly individual or felt helpless in some instances, and these feelings were exacerbated by their inability to devote more time to volunteering:

I have a full time day job and do not have all the time to spend with my match.

It can be hard seeing my new friend struggle with things that I can do nothing about.

I've felt some conflict about helping him out in ways that I think he would like to be helped versus "helping" him in the way the FriendshipWorks thinks he should be helped.

Finally, a few volunteers expressed administrative issues with the program. Rather than commenting on what they liked least about their role as a Friendly Visitor (which was the question asked), these volunteers mentioned organizational issues they had experienced as drawbacks to the program:

I've been disappointed that the admin staff hasn't reached out to me or my match at any point to check in and see how things are going. The goals they set forth for me in matching us up really aren't [working].

[I don't like] that we don't know all the Friendly Visitors on the program and we don't...make a chain among the providers.

FriendshipWorks was very difficult to get a hold of via email. The original woman I worked with disappeared...and the second person didn't respond for ages after multiple tries...[so] trying to get another match went unresponded.

Related to some volunteers' dislikes, the survey found that match relationships build over time and in some instances the volunteer's role in the life of their match can become overwhelming. Approximately one-fifth of volunteers expressed feeling overwhelmed by their match relationship at some point during the experience. Those volunteers who did experience feeling overwhelmed explained this for us in their own words. Four categories emerged which are somewhat similar to the program 'dislikes' listed above.

Some volunteers experienced an overwhelming concern for their match, either feeling unable to help them or distressed at seeing them in pain:

She is a bit depressed, at times it is hard.

Sometimes my match gets upset...or has bigger issues than I am used to dealing with. It can be a little overwhelming moving between my regular life and her life.

I have felt overwhelmed when she vents to me about how she is sad or lonely or feels helpless.

Other volunteers felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility for their match, and were particularly troubled by the increasing dependency the elder placed on them. Not wanting to or not being able to meet this increased need made some volunteers feel guilty:

My match has become increasingly reliant as health has weakened.

For a while, I was her only source of emotional support and she called [frequently]

begging me to come see her.

It is hard to figure out a way to stop. What if I simply don't feel like doing it anymore?

Volunteers also expressed that some programmatic elements of Friendly Visiting made them feel overwhelmed. In particular, they were either confused by their role in the life of their match or were overwhelmed by the time commitment once they became fully involved in the program:

[I don't know] if I am doing enough or if I'm more enabling her by the little errands I do.

I often feel like I should get involved but I'm not sure how to go about it, if that's in my purview.

My job got really busy and [I] couldn't find time to walk with my match.

Finally, a few volunteers expressed feeling overwhelmed by having a match relationship that they felt was unfulfilling. They desired a friendship with an older person and were not satisfied with their experience so far.

I do not believe she really likes me. We had good visits [but] I did not fill what I thought she wanted.

I don't feel like I am able to get very close to her.

Maybe overwhelming isn't the right word, One woman I visit cannot really talk clearly...we can't communicate.

CHAPTER 3: PROGRAM RECIPIENT SURVEYS

Survey Methodology

A thorough evaluation of the Friendly Visiting program requires a detailed understanding of the service recipients. Our analysis was aimed at understanding the characteristics of persons who contact the organization for services, who actually get matched by the program, and who are matched successfully for a long period of time. Due to difficulties in recruitment and retention of elderly participants much of the data only speak to clients who are successful in this program.

Programmatic data was used to determine basic demographic information for all matched participants (n=437) who were part of the program between 2003 and 2010. Program intake forms also allowed us to take a snapshot of all recent enrollees who were referred to the program with in the past year (n=37) and most of these new recipients were interviewed at baseline for a detailed analysis of their situation (n=24). Surveys were conducted with a number of currently matched elders (n=37) to get a sense of how the program is meeting their needs. Seven of these currently matched recipients had taken our baseline survey, were matched for over 6 months, and agreed to a second survey, providing us with limited longitudinal data and a comparison of newer to older matches. Response rates and comparison data between those who were captured in the surveys and those who were not can be found in the Appendix.

Recipient Demographics

When we explored all the organizational data of elderly recipients the FriendshipWorks Friendly Visiting program (n=437), we found a lot of data on previous matches was missing. The information that is available tells us that the recipient population is largely older, female, and more likely to be White (Table 8). Volunteers are more likely to be young and female (Table 7). The average match length is 2.1 years. Since matches were made over time, we use “age” to refer to the age at the time volunteers and elders became matched. We can therefore view at what age people are more likely to join the program.

**Table 7. Basic Demographics of Program
Volunteers: All Time**

<i>Percent Female (n=400)</i>	83%
<i>Average Age (n=407)</i>	39 years old
<i>Age Group (n=407)</i>	
- Under 30	45.2%
- 30 to 44	20.4%
- 45 to 59	18.2%
- 60 and older	16.2%

Table 8. Basic Demographics of Program Recipients: All Time

Percent Female (n=430)	76%
Average Age (n=383)	76 years old
Race/Ethnicity (n=412)	
- White	62.4%
- Black	13.3%
- Asian	2.4%
- Hispanic	19.9%
- Other	1.9%
Age Group (n=383)	
- Under 65	19.1%
- 65 to 74	18.8%
- 75 to 84	35.8%
- 85 and older	26.4%

Results from Recipient Survey Data

I. Understanding Long-term Matches

In terms of how long matches lasted, 63.9% of matches passed the one year mark (22.9% of matches lasting 1 to 2 years, 28.6% lasting 2 to 4 years, and 12.4% of matches lasting over 4 years). While these data show longevity of most matches, it also tells us that a significant number of matches did not last a year, with 17.6 percent of matches not reaching 6 months. In order to improve the program, it is important to understand why this many matches fail.

Gender of both the elder and the volunteer showed that women stay matched slightly longer than men but our results showed no statistically significant relationship between gender and length of match. Age of the recipient seemed to make little difference with regard to length of match. However, our analysis did find a statistically significant relationship between age of volunteer and length of match. Table 9 shows very clearly that as volunteers increase in age, so does the length of their match. In fact, 62 percent of volunteers over age 60 remained matched for over 2 years.

Table 9. Length of Time Matched by Volunteers' Ages

	6 Months or Less	6 Months to 1 Year	1 Year to 2 Years	2 Years to 4 Years	Over 4 Years
Under 30	26.6%	22.8%	26.6%	20.1%	3.8%
30 to 44	15.7%	19.3%	18.1%	30.1%	16.9%
45 to 59	13.5%	14.9%	17.6%	36.5%	17.6%
60 and older	4.5%	9.1%	24.2%	45.5%	16.7%

Race of the recipient was also found to be a significant predictor of how long a match remains. Given the small number of Hispanic, Asian, and “Other” recipients included in our sample, conducting statistical analysis of racial characteristics required combining these three groups into a general “Other” category. The results in Table 10 suggest minority elders are remaining matched longer than White program recipients: almost 50% of African American and 55% of Other racial groups remained matched for over 2 years.

Table 10. Length of Time Matched by Recipients’ Race/Ethnicity

	6 Months or Less	6 Months to 1 Year	1 Year to 2 Years	2 Years to 4 Years	Over 4 Years
White	20.6%	19.5%	24.1%	27.2%	8.6%
Black	9.1%	20.0%	21.8%	30.9%	18.2%
Other	13.0%	14.0%	18.0%	33.0%	22.0%

Organizational data on previous matches did not capture the reasons a match relationship ended. In more recent years, the organization has attempted to keep records of this information. Though not all matches that ended during this time have a reason recorded, records from the 2010-2011 data collection year are displayed below in Table 11.

Table 11. Reasons Matches Ended 2010-2011

End Reason	Frequency	Percent
Volunteer Moved	22	34.9
Recipient Deceased	12	19.0
Volunteer too Busy	8	12.7
Recipient too Difficult	4	6.3
Conflicting Schedules	4	6.3
Conflicting Personalities	3	4.8
Volunteer Lost Interest	3	4.8
Recipient Moved	2	3.2
Recipient’s Health	2	3.2
Volunteer’s Health	2	3.2
Other	1	1.6
Total	63	100.0

Since many of these categories are only used a handful of times, reasons for closed matches were combined to make 6 categories. Combining the cases provides more statistical power to explore the reasons behind matches ending.

After combining these categories we can descriptively show differences in the reason a match ended by the volunteers’ ages, the elders’ ages, and the race/ethnicity of the elder. Overall, moving is a major reason that matches have ended. We know from the frequencies above that moves were primarily initiated by the volunteer, not the elder. Coordination issues and the elder passing away are the two other main categories.

New Classification	Old Classification
(1) Personality Issues	Conflicting Personalities Recipient too Difficult Volunteer Lost Interest
(2) Deceased	Recipient Deceased
(3) Move Occurred	Recipient Moved Volunteer Moved
(4) Health Issues	Recipient's Health Volunteer's Health
(5) Coordination Issues	Conflicting Schedules Volunteer too Busy
(6) Other	Other

The main end reason by age of volunteers:

- ❖ Volunteers Under 30 (n=35): 40% *Move Occurred*, 23% *Coordination Issues*
- ❖ Volunteers Age 30 – 49 (n=20): 30% *Move Occurred*, 30% *Recipient Deceased*
- ❖ Volunteers 50 and Older (n=21): 33% *Move Occurred*, 29% *Recipient Deceased*

The main end reason by age of elder:

- ❖ Elder 75 and Younger (n=24): 54% *Move Occurred*, 29% *Coordination Issues*
- ❖ Elder 76 and Older (n=48): 33% *Recipient Deceased*, 27% *Move Occurred*

The main end reason by race/ethnicity of elder:

- ❖ Caucasian (n=43): 37% *Move Occurred*, 26% *Recipient Deceased*
- ❖ African American (n=14): 43% *Coordination Issues*, 36% *Recipient Deceased*
- ❖ Hispanic (n=15): 60% *Move Occurred*, 27% *Coordination Issues*

The above results should be viewed with caution. A number of match cases ended during the 2010-2011 year but the reasons for closure were not recorded. Given the frequency of reasons like “volunteer moved” and “deceased”, it is possible that the organization is more aware of the relationships that end because of unanticipated, faultless circumstances. In other words, it may be harder to keep track of matches that end because of “conflicting personalities” or where the “volunteer lost interest” because volunteers are less likely to contact the organization and report on these matches ending.

II. New Incoming Program Recipients Versus Currently Matched Recipients

During the data collection phase (Sept/2010-Sept/2011), 37 elders were enrolled into the Friendly Visiting program. Demographic information, living situation, income, and health status for these individuals can be found in Table 12. The elders entering the program during this period were a notably disadvantaged group. The majority were living alone, low income, and had some physical impairment. Over 70 percent had at least one clinical diagnosis with 65 percent having two or more diagnoses. Many of the elders had never been married (39%) or were divorced (25%); these numbers are high when compared to 14.4% never married and 14.7% divorced among Boston elders overall (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Research shows divorced and never married elders are

statistically more likely to have limited social networks and social support in old age (Hurlbert & Acock, 1990).

Table 12. Demographics for All Incoming Friendly Visiting Recipients (n=37)			
Demographic Measures		N	Percent
Gender	Female	25	69.4
	Male	11	30.6
Age (average = 76) (median = 74)	65 and younger	9	24.3
	66 to 75	11	29.7
	76 to 85	8	21.6
	86 and older	9	24.3
Race/Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	25	67.6
	Black/African American	11	29.7
	Other	1	2.7
Marital Status	Married	3	8.3
	Divorced	9	25.0
	Widowed	10	27.8
	Never Married	14	38.9
Religious Affiliation	Protestant	11	31.4
	Roman Catholic	7	20.0
	Jewish	6	17.1
	Other (Unitarian, Hindu, Agnostic, etc.)	9	25.8
Referral Source	None	2	5.7
	Friend or Family	12	35.3
	Community Organization	10	29.4
	Health Care Agency	6	17.6
	Senior Housing/Facility	4	10.8
Income	Self-Referral	2	5.4
	Low Income	25	67.6
	Under \$14,999 per year	18	56.3
	\$15,000 to \$19,999	7	21.9
Living Situation	Over \$20,000 per year	7	21.9
	Lives Alone	35	94.6
	Lives in Institution	11	29.7
	Renter (does not own home)	25	78.1
Impairment	Disabled	17	47.2
	Mobility	24	64.9
	Hearing	7	18.9
	Sight	6	16.2
	Confusion	5	13.5
Use Assistive Device	Cane	12	32.4
	Walker	12	32.4
	Wheelchair	3	8.1
Number of Diagnoses	No Diagnoses	11	29.7
	One Diagnosis	2	5.4
	Two or More Diagnoses	24	64.8
Physical Health Conditions	Arthritis	15	51.7
	High Blood Pressure	14	48.3
	High Cholesterol	10	34.5
	Heart Problems	8	27.6
	Diabetes	6	20.7
	Prior Stroke	6	20.7
Osteoporosis	5	17.2	

	Cancer	2	6.9
	Other Physical Condition	4	13.8
Mental Health Conditions	Clinical Depression	10	34.5
	Clinical Anxiety	5	17.2
	Alzheimer's or Dementia	3	10.3

Our baseline survey was completed by 24 elders out of the 37 who came into the program during the data collection phase. The response rate for this survey was 67.6 percent and details about this calculation can be found in the Appendix. This data offers an in-depth look at who comes to FriendshipWorks in need of Friendly Visiting services. It is important to note that the 24 people who completed our survey are very different from those who refused. A comparison of those who completed our baseline survey and those who refused is available in the Appendix. The individuals who refused to take our survey were more often older, female, white, and widowed than those who did complete it. They were also less often disabled and low-income. Thus, our baseline survey captured a very specific subset of elders who are referred into the Friendly Visiting program, missing information on candidates who are more “well off.”

Elders who've been matched at least 6 months with their volunteer were asked to participate in a similar survey. This survey included the questions asked on the baseline survey as well as questions seeking to measure the elder's experience being matched and success of the program. Response rates for this survey are in the Appendix. A number of program recipients were too frail, ill, or impaired to participate in our survey. Also, many matches that were believed to be ongoing had ended either because the elder had died, the volunteer stopped coming to visit, or for some other unidentified reason.

Only 68 recipients qualified to take our survey and, of these, 9 individuals could not be located for participation. Thirty-seven qualified individuals completed our survey for a response rate of 73.5 percent. At the time of data collection, these elders were living alone, low income, and had some physical impairment; still, because of missing organizational data on long-time matches, we believe these proportions should be higher. At the time of data collection, over 70 percent of sampled recipients had at least one clinical diagnosis with 65 percent having two or more diagnoses. The average age of the sample is 77 and the median age is 78, suggesting a slightly older population than those who were new to the program in 2010-2011. Additional details on the demographics of successful recipients can be found in the Appendix.

The following sections compare the 24 incoming elder recipients (not yet matched) to the 37 successfully matched recipients in an attempt to show descriptively the difference between elders before and after they become part of the program. *This does not imply causality; since we are not testing the same elders before and after they are being matched we cannot know for sure any differences between the two groups can be attributed to the program.*

Assistance with Daily Tasks

On a scale about daily levels of assistance where 0 means no assistance and 5 means a lot of assistance, the average level of assistance for the incoming program recipients is 2.17 and for the

successfully matched recipients is slightly higher at 2.38. Due to health or memory problems, the top three tasks elders had difficulty with were cleaning/doing laundry, transportation (driving, taking taxis, or using public transit), and shopping. A number of individuals also needed assistance with preparing meals, managing finances, taking medications, reading mail, and making phone calls.

To understand if FriendshipWorks is reaching its target population and meeting its goals, it is most important to explore whether individuals who have difficulty with these tasks have someone in their life that can help them. In Table 13 the first column shows the percentage of people who have difficulty with the corresponding task. For example, most of the people who come to the program have difficulty cleaning and accessing transportation because of existing health or memory problems. The second column lists, for the population of recipients who reported that a particular task was challenging, the percentage of those who reported having no one in their life to help them with that task. (Note: This question is *only* asked of those who said the task was challenging.)

Table 13. Assistance with Daily Tasks and Whether Someone Can Help by Recipients Match Status

Difficult Task	Incoming Program Recipients		Successfully Matched Recipients	
	Yes, I have difficulty	IF YES - I have no one to help me	Yes, I have difficulty	IF YES - I have no one to help me
Cleaning/Laundry	79.2%	17.7% (n=4)	91.9%	11.8% (n=4)
Transportation	70.8%	50.0% (n=12)	83.8%	32.3% (n=10)
Shopping	57.3%	33.3% (n=5)	75.7%	10.7% (n=3)
Managing Finances	41.7%	54.5% (n=6)	54.0%	15.0% (n=3)
Reading Mail	37.5%	70.0% (n=7)	45.9%	11.8% (n=2)
Preparing Meals	37.5%	40.0% (n=4)	45.9%	26.3% (n=5)
Taking Medications	25.0%	28.6% (n=2)	40.5%	20.0% (n=3)
Using the Phone	25.0%	85.7% (n=6)	24.3%	66.7% (n=6)

The exact number “(n=x)” of people who said no one is available to help them is displayed. For example, a large number of people said they have trouble cleaning and doing laundry but we find that most of them have someone to help with those tasks. Therefore, only 18 percent (4 elders) have no one to help them. Looking at preparing meals shows a much smaller number of people that have trouble with this task (38%). Of the people who find preparing meals challenging, 40 percent of them (4 elders) have no one to help them. The percentage with no one to help them is larger because there are fewer people experiencing difficulties with preparing meals.

Why is this distinction important? Let’s consider the task of using the telephone. At first glance this does not seem to be difficult for too many people who come to the program. We see that only a quarter of people (25%) have difficulty with this task. Yet, when we ask these people if they have anyone to help them with the phone we find the large majority of them do not (85.7%). In other words, difficulty with using the telephone may be an infrequent limitation but those who experience challenges with this task rarely have someone to help them. This is actually more valuable

information for FriendshipWorks than simply knowing a task is difficult. It is notable how many of our constituents have trouble cleaning and doing laundry, but the fact that most of them have someone helping with this task is an important distinction.

We see in the table above that service recipients who are in successful matches have difficulties with a lot of daily tasks; however, the large majority of them have someone to help. Though only 24 percent of recipients need help with the telephone, we find that this is the task they are least likely to have assistance with.

Emotional Well-Being

Three scales were used to measure the well-being of individuals referred to the program: the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS). Descriptions of each scale and the findings are listed below.

The GDS is a reliable and valid screening device for measuring depression or “suggesting depression” symptoms in elderly patients and is often used by physicians to assess a patient before referring them to a psychiatrist. The GDS is not a substitute for a diagnostic interview by mental health professionals but is a useful screening tool. There are three outcomes for this scale: no sign of depressive symptoms, answers are suggestive of depression, or answers almost always indicative of depression. Displayed in Table 14, a number of elders who were referred to us for Friendly Visiting were suggesting depression or were experiencing depression at the time of data collection.

Table 14. Geriatrics Depression Scale Results				
	Incoming Recipients		Successfully Matched Recipients	
Depression Level	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
No Depression	10	41.7	18	50.0
Suggesting Depression	9	37.5	14	38.9
Severe Depression Likely	5	20.8	4	11.1

The SWLS measures subjective well-being. Participants can fit into one of 6 categories after completing the scale: very high life satisfaction, high satisfaction, average satisfaction, below average satisfaction, dissatisfied, or highly dissatisfied. For our purposes, we combine these classifications in Table 15 below.

Table 15. Satisfaction with Life Scale Results				
	Incoming Recipients		Successfully Matched Recipients	
Satisfaction Level	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Very High to High	6	27.3	13	36.1
Average to Below Average	6	27.3	16	44.5
Dissatisfied to Highly Dissatisfied	10	45.4	7	19.4

Elders in the lowest category are considered to be substantially dissatisfied with their life and dissatisfaction comes from multiple areas, meaning that more than one thing is not going right for this person. Elders coming to the program are often dissatisfied with their life, self-reporting low levels of well-being.

The BSCS was developed to represent the “sense of community” dimensions of needs fulfillment, group membership, influence, and shared emotional connection. Higher scores on the BSCS scale have been found to be correlated with community participation, psychological empowerment, mental health, and depression (Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008). Scores can range from 9 to 45, and a higher score on the scale indicates a higher sense of community.

- ❖ Incoming Recipients: average BSCS score = 24.6 (low sense of community)
- ❖ 38 percent scored 20 or lower (very low sense of community)

- ❖ Successfully Matched Recipients: average BSCS score = 23.3 (low sense of community)
- ❖ 34 percent scored 20 or lower (very low sense of community)

Table 16 lists incoming recipients' self-reported levels of stress and worry. The majority of these individuals reported feeling stressed or worried sometimes or more frequently.

Table 16. Life Stress or Worry Frequencies					
	Incoming Recipients		Successfully Matched Recipients		
How Often	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
Feel Stressed					
Never	4	16.7	4	10.8	
Rarely	0	0.0	8	21.6	
Sometimes	10	41.7	14	37.8	
Often	9	37.5	7	18.9	
Always	1	4.2	4	10.8	
Feel Worried/Anxious					
Never	2	8.3	6	16.2	
Rarely	0	0.0	4	10.8	
Sometimes	14	58.3	16	43.2	
Often	7	29.2	9	24.3	
Always	1	4.2	2	5.4	

Social Isolation

With the organization's goal of reducing social isolation, it is important for FriendshipWorks to understand the level of social isolation experienced by those who come to their program. The Lubben Social Network Scale (LSNS) and questions measuring recipients' attendance at social events and frequency of leaving the home help to determine these levels of isolation. The LSNS is a brief instrument designed to measure social isolation in older adults by quantifying an elder's perception of social support received by family and friends. The scale asks questions like, “How

many relatives do you see or hear from at least once a month?” and “How many friends do you feel close to such that you could call on them for help?” Scores range from 0 to 60 with higher scores indicating a greater level of social support and low risk for isolation. A score less than 20 may indicate a person has an extremely limited social network and is at high risk for isolation. Studies have linked physical health problems (Hurwicz & Berkanovic, 1993), mental health problems including depression (Chou & Chi, 1999; Dorfman et al., 1995), all-cause hospitalizations (Lubben, Weiler & Chi, 1989; Mistry et al., 2001), decreased adherence to good health behaviors (Potts, Hurwicz & Goldstein, 1992), and mortality (Ceria et al, 2001) to LSNS scores of 20 or below (Lubben et al, 2006). The results from other questions on social networks can be found in Table 14.

- ❖ **Incoming Recipients:** average LSNS score = 23.6 (limited social network)
- ❖ 37.5 percent scored 20 or lower (extremely limited social network)

- ❖ **Successfully Matched Recipients:** average LSNS score = 25.6 (limited social network)
- ❖ 28.6 percent scored 20 or lower (extremely limited social network)

Table 14. Frequencies of Social Network and Isolation Measures		
	Incoming Recipients	Successfully Matched Recipients
Relatives that Visit “In Person” Once per Month or More		
None	54.2%	56.8%
One	33.3%	21.6%
Two or More	12.5%	21.6%
Friends that Visit “In Person” Once per Month or More		
None	54.2%	24.3%
One	20.8%	32.4%
Two or More	25.0%	43.2%
List the 3 Most Important People In Your Life		
Listed no one	0.0%	8.1%
Listed only 1 person	16.7%	5.4%
Listed only 2 people	37.5%	24.3%
Listed 3 or more	45.8%	62.2%
Match listed as one of the most important people	----	29.7%
How Often You Leave Home for Social Events		
Less than monthly	45.8%	48.6%
Monthly	20.8%	16.2%
Weekly	16.7%	27.0%
Daily	16.7%	8.1%
How Often You Leave Home for Errands		
Less than monthly	25.0%	40.5%
Monthly	16.7%	21.6%
Weekly	50.0%	35.1%
Daily	8.3%	2.7%

As would be expected, elders who scored low on one well-being measure most often scored low on the other measures. Still, the results suggest that FriendshipWorks' Friendly Visiting program targets specific individuals in the community with low levels of emotional well-being and social networks. They reach a particularly disadvantaged population who could benefit from the organization's mission: to reduce social isolation, improve quality of life, and preserve dignity.

III. Incoming Program Recipients Follow-Up Data

Of the elders who came onto the program during the data collection phase, 56.8 percent are currently matched. In other words, 16 elders did not qualify to be matched after being assessed by staff or they were matched but the match ended within the first 6 months. A comparison of matched elders with unmatched elders is displayed in the Appendix.

Elders who were successfully matched were more likely to be female, White, and referred by a friend/family member or themselves. They were less likely to be never married, low income, or to have a mental health issue. In other words, those individuals deemed ineligible for a match or who had an "unsuccessful" match were more often men, minorities, low income, never married, and had at least one mental health issue. Elders who were not successful with the program were referred by a community organization 50 percent of the time. *Please note, the small sample size does not allow us to test statistical significance for any of these characteristics.*

Though the hope was for follow-up data from the 24 elders who took the baseline survey, longitudinal information was only captured for 7 recipients. This is largely due to the fact that, of the 24 elders who took our survey, only 9 were eligible to participate in a follow-up survey. Of these 9 individuals, 2 individuals were unable to participate: one we were unable to contact, and the other was unable to complete the survey due to linguistic barriers (Note: recipient later transferred to Jamaica Plain chapter to be matched with a Spanish-speaking volunteer and thus disqualified from this evaluation). The Appendix shows details on the numbers for eligibility for the follow-up survey.

While the response rate is very good at 92 percent and no eligible recipients refused participate in the follow-up survey, seven follow-up responses does not work well with the survey design. The survey was not designed as an in-depth, qualitative conversation intended to contextualize individuals' statuses before and after being matched. Rather, this survey was designed with primarily close-ended questions and intended to be completed by a greater number of participants so quantitative analysis could be conducted. With such a small sample size, the only way to adequately analyze the follow-up data of these 7 participants is qualitatively. *Please review the following analysis as preliminary and exploratory.*

Table 15. Comparing Measures from Baseline and Follow-Up Survey for all Respondents who Completed Both the Initial and 6-Month Survey (n=7)

	Time Period	GDS	SWLS	LSNS	BSCS
1	<i>Baseline Measure</i>	Suggesting	27	15	12
	<i>Follow-up Measure</i>	None	30	38	9
2	<i>Baseline Measure</i>	Severe	13	22	20
	<i>Follow-up Measure</i>	Suggesting	22	46	24
3	<i>Baseline Measure</i>	Suggesting	---	12	---
	<i>Follow-up Measure</i>	None	18	46	18
4	<i>Baseline Measure</i>	None	32	28	20
	<i>Follow-up Measure</i>	None	26	35	16
5*	<i>Baseline Measure</i>	Severe	14	13	42
	<i>Follow-up Measure</i>	Severe	11	13	35
6	<i>Baseline Measure</i>	None	23	43	12
	<i>Follow-up Measure</i>	None	29	45	9
7	<i>Baseline Measure</i>	None	19	35	24
	<i>Follow-up Measure</i>	None	13	17	45

*Respondent number 5 currently has a clinical diagnosis of depression.

The four validated measures used in this survey are displayed in Table 15 showing any changes between reports during baseline and at follow-up. In all instances the Geriatric Depression Scale either remained the same or improved. When looking at the Satisfaction with Life Scale, we find that individuals' life satisfaction improved for a few recipients at follow-up. Respondent 1 went from a high life satisfaction rating to a very high rating. Respondent 2 increased from a dissatisfied rating to an average level of life satisfaction, and Respondent 7 increased from average satisfaction to high life satisfaction. Respondent 5 remained the same (at dissatisfaction), while respondents 4 and 7 decreased.

The Brief Sense of Community Scale barely changed for the participants. If an individual had a low or moderate sense of community at baseline, this typically stayed constant at follow-up. Indeed, most respondents had an extremely low sense of community (score of 20 or less) and one person saw a slight increase above 20 at follow-up. Respondent 7 is the only participant to have a large increase in their BSCS, going from a 24 at baseline to a 45 at follow-up.

The Lubben Social Network Scale shows large increases for all but 2 individuals. One individual's social network remained the same while the other actually saw a large decrease in the social network measure. As mentioned previously, 20 points suggests an extremely low social network size. Two individuals, respondents 1 and 3, went from below 20 points to well over 30 points and 40 points, respectively; these results suggest their social network increased greatly by follow-up. Respondent 2, who was on the cusp of scoring extremely low at baseline, also had a greatly increased social network score at follow-up. Respondents 4 and 6 had increases in their social network score as well, but these changes were not as dramatic as with the other 3 individuals. Respondent 5 had no change. Respondent 7 is a particularly interesting case, as their social network

score dropped from healthy (35) to extremely low (17). Although it is likely that something happened in this person's life to shrink their social network or cause them to move away from their network, we cannot know for sure from this measure.

The individuals at follow-up were generally better off than before being matched. In particular, two measures stand out as improving for these recipients at follow-up: the Geriatric Depression Scale and the Lubben Social Network Scale. This suggests that for those individuals in successful matches, the program does not worsen their depression levels and in some instances may help to improve depression. In almost all instances, the being matched increased the social networks of those who participate in the program. At follow-up, one woman recognized that she had become more confident since being matched. Having a consistent visitor in her life to talk to helped her to develop a sense of self-worth that had diminished as she descended into isolation. This improved mood roused her to go out into her building and talk with neighbors. This respondent believed the change in her mood and confidence is why, at follow-up, she had so many new friends to report.

IV. Recipients in Ongoing Matches: Data About the Match Relationship

Those people currently matched in the program were asked questions about their experience. We wanted to capture how the elder viewed their match relationship, what types of support they felt they received from the exchange, and any benefits they believed resulted from having a friendly visitor. As mentioned before, these findings largely represent successful matches – those that have lasted a long time and where both the elder and volunteer are benefiting from the relationship.

Satisfaction and Feelings on the Match Relationship

First, we asked whether or not they enjoyed the program and were satisfied with their match. Everyone reported being satisfied, with 94.6 percent of people reporting being “very satisfied.”

Elders told us what they thought of their volunteer, describing how they view them or what they would call them when introducing them to people. Most people in the program viewed their match as a friend (40.5%), but a good number of elders felt more strongly about their match relationship. Volunteers were identified as being a close or “best” friend (32.4%) or were called “like family” (27.0%) by many program recipients.

When asked to describe the relationship in their own words, program recipients articulated the above findings, frequently saying the volunteers are “friendly,” they have a “good relationship,” and that they “are a person I trust a good deal.” The following quotes offer further insight into these findings:

Our relationship is beautiful. I look forward to seeing her, she is a lovely woman.

I like him, [my match] thinks I'm neat and interesting.

I feel I can say anything to her and [I can] be a help to her like she helps me.

It is like a mini-vacation when I go out with her. She is one of the most important people in my life now.

She makes it possible for me to live and face the outside world. She's helped me control my anxiety.

[Our relationship] is very good, very friendly. To her, I'm like a mom away from home and to me, she is like a daughter away from home. She is a blessing.

Instrumental Support, Social Support, and Problem Solving

The table below highlights what types of assistance elders reported receiving from their volunteers. The questions have been organized into 5 categories, comparable to the questions on the volunteer surveys.

Table 16. Elders' Self-Reported Assistance (n=37) Answer to multiple choice, multiple answer question: 'What kinds of things has your match helped you do?'

Assistance Code	Percent	Activities Associated with Code
Socialization and Activity	70.3%	Be more social – 43.2% Be more active (e.g. take walks) – 40.5% Get into the community more – 29.7%
Help Outside the Home	51.4%	Run errands (e.g. get milk) – 37.8% Provide transportation – 29.7%
Medical Assistance	18.9%	Medical needs (e.g. scheduling, prescriptions) – 5.4% Get to medical appointments – 13.5% Look at assisted living facilities – 2.7%
Help Inside the Home	24.3%	Read mail – 21.6% Stay on top of bills – 10.8% Cooking – 2.7%
Advocacy	10.8%	Made important phone calls – 10.8%

When we compare Table 16 to Table 6 (which shows the volunteers' reporting of the same types of assistance), we find that there is some inconsistency: overall, volunteers report providing more assistance than elders report receiving. Either volunteers are over-reporting what they provide for their match or the elders are underreporting what the volunteer provides. It is possible that the volunteer is remembering instances of support more often than the elder, but we cannot know this for sure.

When we talked to elders and asked for more details about the important things their volunteer does for them we get a richer picture of the program. Two major areas emerged as the most important: social support and instrumental support.

Social support is defined as feeling and being cared for and feeling that one is part of a supportive social network. These supportive resources can be emotional (e.g., nurturance), informational (e.g., advice), or companionship (e.g., sense of belonging):

I love her patience and that she always comes and calls beforehand. She likes my company and listens if I need to talk.

She is the only friend I have that I can really talk to – and I trust her. It is hard for me to trust people.

What do I think is most important? He is there for me.

Her friendship, herself, that is important. Besides the difference in our ages we just click. She is like another granddaughter.

I can depend on him, I know he is going to show up and I can count on him. I enjoy spending time together.

It didn't take long for me to confide in her. Yes, the shopping is important but we can talk to each other about anything and that is very important.

Instrumental Support is a branch of social support that focuses on providing tangible assistance (e.g., shopping, checking mail, etc.). It involves providing goods or services to the elder and captures the concrete, direct ways volunteers are assisting:

She puts my medications together and helps me with bills that I cannot do online.

He is my best friend and has helped with installing my TV and to make an electronic photo album.

He is a very important person, I can ask him about letter and what to do with them. He is educated and sometimes makes calls on my behalf.

She goes to the store for me and brings me things I need. I say a prayer for her every time she comes to visit.

She is whatever I need. She meets the needs of what I don't have.

We also asked recipients to tell us about any specific problems they can remember their volunteer helping with. About 57 percent of people could remember a problem they got help solving. The three problem solving tasks listed were related to emotional support, housing/cleaning assistance, and computer/technology help.

In terms of emotional support elders said that the main problem being solved by their volunteer was their loneliness, bad mood, or need for companionship:

I felt lonely when I didn't have her.

She solved my need for companionship. I had a friend pass on and [my match] became equivalent to this friend.

When he comes on the weekends, that makes Saturday more bearable.

Got me getting out again. I was suffering from having fallen outside and I never wanted to go out because of it.

Elders also said their volunteer helped solve home maintenance, cleaning, or heating issues:

The heating problem never got solved until [my match] called all over for me.

I have lost a lot of things. My [my match] won't give up, she keeps looking until she finds it.

I had a heavy chair that I couldn't get out of my house, so my volunteer and her husband came over and took it out to the dumpster for me.

I had bed bugs and she helped get rid of them.

Finally, many elders were able to learn about computers, technology, and to feel safe online with assistance and training from their volunteers:

He helped me set up my computer. It took a lot of time, over three weeks. He increased the font size and took time to show me how to use it.

Spam, email spam – taught me what to stay away from, what is a virus.

He helps with computer problems, put my printer/scanner together for me and showed me how to use it. He still changes the ink for me.

He fixed my television, helped me order it and install it too.

Self-Reported Benefits of the Friendly Visitor Program

Another question asked of elders was what they associate with having a volunteer in their life. In other words, self-reported assessments of the benefits of the program were obtained by asking the elders directly if they believed their match provided them with the following: a connection to the outside world, feeling of security, feeling less lonely, more exercise and physical activity, someone in their life they can count on, ability to get out of the house more, and the desire to take better care of themselves. Results from these questions are listed below in Table 17.

Life Change	Frequency	Percent
“I now have someone in my life I can count on”	28	75.7
“I feel less lonely”	23	62.2
“I feel more connected to the outside world”	19	51.4
“I feel more secure”	17	45.9
“I am getting out of the house more”	15	40.5
“I am exercising more”	11	29.7
“I am taking better care of myself”	9	24.3
“I’ve experienced other changes” (see comments below)	7	18.9
Number of Changes Experienced		
Elder reported 1 change	9	24.3
Elder reported 2 or 3 changes	12	32.4
Elder reported 4 or more changes	16	43.2

Elders in successful matches reported important life changes that happened to them once they became part of the program. The two most frequently reported life changes, “having someone to count on” and “feeling less lonely,” are key objectives of the Friendly Visiting program. Examination of the number of changes experienced suggest that most elders get multiple benefits from participating in the program.

Elders were asked to elaborate on this multiple choice question when we asked them specifically to identify, “what changes in their life, if any, do they associate with their Friendly Visitor?” This provided us with rich qualitative information on the benefits people are receiving from the program. Primarily increased happiness, socialization, and other emotional benefits:

[The program] has been a key factor in helping me adjust to living alone.

I feel more secure because she tells me I can call her anytime. If I am ever in the hospital I would want visitors and she’d visit me.

I really feel like I have gained a friend. I really like to be myself, so I don’t open up to a lot of people...I didn’t expect it to turn out as wonderful as it did.

I have an uplifted spirit and a desire to want to try harder. I have more of a sense of worth.

I’m much happier. She fills the void of my family living so far away.

I feel stronger and happier because I have a person that is like a family member visiting me. She calls on Christmas and Thanksgiving and is there for me during the holidays because I would not have anyone [otherwise].

Finally, we talked to program recipients about their likes and dislikes of the program. When asking people what they liked about the program, recipients cited further examples of both instrumental and social support. Additionally, recipients offered encouragement for the program by sharing how much they enjoyed it and mentioning that they recommended it to others:

It's nice that there is an organization that takes care of its seniors.

The program is a very good idea. [My volunteer] is a person who does a lot more than people who get paid to help.

This is a good service for people who live absolutely alone.

I think the program is excellent, I have recommended it to others.

I think you need to keep up the program as long as you can. There is a lot of people in the neighborhood that need help but they're afraid to speak up.

Most people did not have anything they disliked about the Friendly Visiting program: only 21.6 percent of recipients commented on this question. Their answers were particularly interesting because most dislikes related to the elder no longer being matched, no longer knowing the whereabouts of their volunteer, or fear that the match might end soon:

Nothing I don't like, but I am afraid she may move because of work.

I don't know why my visitor doesn't come anymore; we lost contact when I went into the hospital.

I would like my new match to let me know if she is back from vacation. Is she upset about something I said or did?

Maybe they need more volunteers? They haven't had luck recently finding someone.

Another major category of program dislikes related to their particular volunteer. Elders didn't like the way certain volunteers treated them or the activities they did together:

Maybe volunteers should be more educated about various elder care services available. I asked [about services] and my volunteer couldn't help me.

I want to get out of my building more because it's getting warmer. We should go for walks.

I'm a smoker and I feel like the volunteer pushes it. That when he visits, I am not to smoke.

I have an allergy that causes my nose to run. The volunteer will constantly give me tissues... I feel like the volunteer is treating me like a baby during those times.

Sometimes there are things my visitor can't do for me, like go to the drug store.

Finally, a few elders had a bad experience with the program or the organization and expressed their dislikes. Others did not know who FriendshipWorks was until the interview:

I don't hear from the organization except for mailings. I can't get a medical ride when I call and don't feel like FriendshipWorks, as an organization, follows through with anything.

Keep in touch with me, especially when [the volunteer] can't come anymore. Let me know when she can't come.

I didn't know the program was an outside organization, I thought it was associated with my senior center.

I don't know a lot about your organization and the rest of the programs, I only see [my match].

V. Understanding the Dyad Relationship

The surveys were not designed to analyze the dyad relationship—the match relationship between specific pairs of volunteers and elders. Therefore, what we can say about the match itself is limited. The purpose of this analysis is exploratory. Specifically, we aim to investigate the relationship between elder-reported and volunteer-reported assistance. We also seek to analyze the relationship between elder and volunteer demographics to determine if similar people remain matched longer.

Through our volunteer and recipient surveys, we were able to collect data from 25 match pairs. These matches have lasted 4 years on average, again indicating our sample consists primarily of successful matches (range: 1 year to 13 years).

Exploring the Reporting of Assistance and Support

Both volunteers and recipients were asked if they could recall a very specific problem the volunteer solved for the elder. Exploring responses from the 25 pairs, findings suggest that when asking about tangible, instrumental assistance volunteers and elders do not remember the same support. In many cases (n=12) the volunteer or elder remembered a specific problem but the other person could not

give any examples. Of the 25 pairs, only 5 pairs existed in which the volunteer and elder both recalled a problem the volunteer helped solve; still, the problems mentioned were often different. In one match pair, the volunteer and elder both recalled a major heating issue that occurred in winter. Another pair discussed a month long computer project that involved help with the initial purchase and further lessons to learn how to use the machine. In one pair, the elder suggested “we help each other all the time,” which fit with the volunteer’s report of multiple problem solving tasks that included computer help, repairing furniture, and help with a new cell phone. In the final two pairs that reported a solved problem, the volunteer and elder cited very different problems.

What does it mean that most matches are not remembering the same support and problem solving tasks? This is a difficult question to answer, and the answer may be related to the question itself. Participants were not asked to recall all the problems volunteers helped their elder to solve; rather, they were asked to tell us of a very specific problem they remember. This leads the respondent to recall either the first problem that comes to mind or the most memorable problem. The variety of responses within dyads might suggest that volunteers help elders with a number of problems, and comparing volunteers’ to elders’ answers is difficult due to the vagueness of the question.

Inconsistencies in volunteer-reported and elder-reported assistance support our hypothesis that the vagueness of the question itself might have led volunteers and elders to report problem-solving differently. Table 18 shows the consistency with which volunteers and elders reported on giving and receiving certain types of assistance. Consistently, both the elder and the volunteer are remembering times the volunteer advocated for the elder or when there was help inside the home (e.g. read mail, bills, cooking help). Reports of social assistance and medical assistance were also fairly consistent within dyads. When it came to reporting help outside the home, however, dyad responses were inconsistent. This category includes running errands and providing transportation: it is difficult to know why there would be inconsistency in recalling this type of assistance.

Table 18. Percentage of Matches who Responded with a Similar Answer to Assistance Questions	
Type of Assistance	Similar Answers Given
Social Assistance Provided	72%
Medical Assistance Provided	72%
Help in the Home	84%
Help Outside the Home	48%
Advocated for Elder	88%

Exploring whether Similar People Stay Matched Longer

As mentioned previously, all relationships in this dyad analysis have been “successful.” That is, they have all lasted a year or more and, on average, have lasted 4 years. It is important to note that the large majority of the matches where we have responses from both the volunteer and elder are

currently ongoing. *Both of these facts suggest our dyad analysis solely examines successful matches.*

Are the people in these successful matches similar? Many pairs were of the same race/ethnicity (64%), the same gender (56%), and valued religion similarly (most did not feel religion was important or did not list a religious affiliation). Differences in age were small (average years between the elder and volunteer were about 34 years) compared to the average age difference between volunteers and elders in the entire sample, with 20 percent of the matches having less than 10 years in age between them. Yet, these findings cannot tell us conclusively that similar people stay matched longer.

In the end, we are not surprised by the finding that basic similarities in age, gender, race, and religion do not necessarily facilitate a successful relationship. Discovering a magic combination of traits that will enable a strong bond to develop among two individuals is unlikely. We also cannot say with confidence that there is any one trait which, when possessed by both parties, makes a match successful. *Indeed every match relationship seems very unique and built by the personalities, preferences and requirements of the volunteer and elder.* The next chapter on volunteer interviews gives a critical glimpse into understanding just how different successful match relationships can be.

CHAPTER 4: THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS: VOLUNTEER INTERVIEWS

This chapter is currently underway as the evaluation team analyzes 20-30 minute interviews from 23 Friendly Visiting volunteers. A brief understanding of what the team is finding can be viewed in the diagram below from the work by Pennington and Knight (2008). Their research found the match experience to be a journey where both the elder and the volunteer are involved in making the relationship grow. A key piece of their research distinguishes between transgressing or maintaining boundaries in the relationship. When boundaries are maintained, the relationship remains professional and formal. There is friendliness but not friendship between the two individuals. Only when boundaries are transgressed did the researchers find deeper relationships based in friendship or family-like sentiments. A particular side-effect of building a like-family relationship was an increasing sense of responsibility, burden, and pressure to be there for the elder. Their findings are very similar to our results from the volunteer interviews which will be written up in the next month.

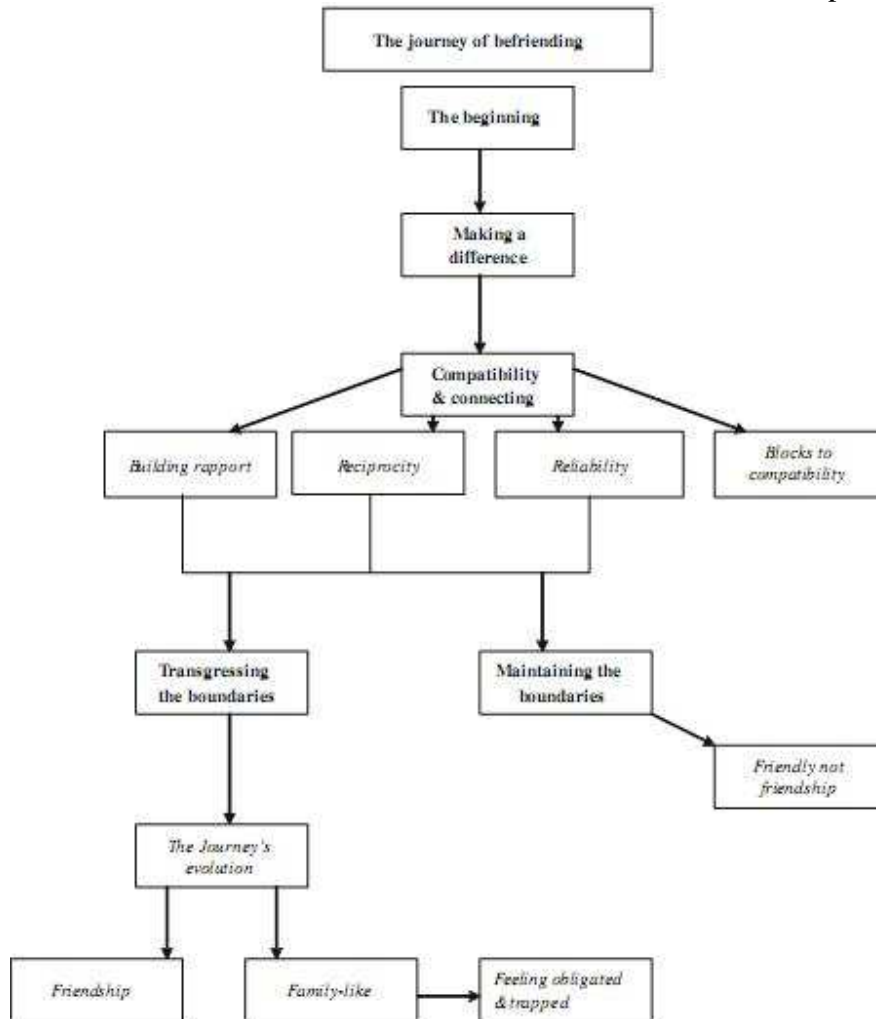


Figure 1: Pennington, J. & Knight, T. (2008). Staying connected: The lived experiences of volunteers and older adults.

CHAPTER 5: PROGRAM OUTCOMES, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall, this research finds that the Friendly Visiting program at FriendshipWorks is improving the lives of those elders and volunteers who remain in successful matches. Volunteers are experiencing positive life changes associated with their participation and often they are developing a better understanding of the aging process. Elders being referred to the program are exactly the type of disadvantaged, isolated people FriendshipWorks wants their program to help. Those elders who remain in the program are benefiting from an increased social network and having someone in their life they can count on. They are feeling less lonely and are receiving regular assistance which allows them to live independently if they so choose. Those people who remain successfully matched are experiencing life changing benefits, but there are still a number of areas for program improvement.

Areas for Growth and Improvement

I. Areas of Change for Better Serving Recipients

Perhaps the most important findings of this evaluation come from the surprisingly large number of elders who were ineligible to participate in our research because they were no longer matched and the organization was not aware (29.2%). In addition, when tracking all new matches over the course of one year and conducting follow-ups with these individuals 6 to 9 months later was problematic on a number of levels: Many elders were never matched, their matches ended before 6 months, or it took too long to match them so did not qualify for a follow-up interview.

First, many people referred to the program never made it past our initial assessment of them and were never matched. Almost 17 percent of new recipients either did not qualify for the program or refused our assistance for some other reason. Considering the substantial number of hours that FriendshipWorks' staff spends conducting the intake and assessment of recipients, a high number of unmatched individuals severely reduces the efficiency and effectiveness of the program. Not keeping records on why these people never become matched exacerbates this problem. Maintaining detailed records on why individuals remain unmatched could help staff quickly rule out new recipients as ineligible before going through all the trouble of an assessment. There are a number of reasons why someone would not qualify for the Friendly Visiting program; if the staff can design protocols for screening qualifications upfront, they may be able to spend less time on these types of recipients and more time on those who will make successful matches, thus increasing the efficacy of the program.

Second, of the people in our sample who were matched, 45.8 percent were still ineligible to complete the follow-up survey because these matches ended before 6 months or the elder said they did not know their volunteer. The absence of records leaves us unable to determine whether the elder, volunteer, or external circumstances ended the match. *We recommend that a study of closed matches, particularly those that close within the first 6 months, be conducted so the organization has a better understanding of this phenomenon.* In order to generate open communication and trust

between FriendshipWorks and its volunteers, we recommend working to alleviate the volunteer's feelings of guilt and stigma surrounding closing a match. Volunteer training could be enhanced to offer examples of different types of match relationships and match outcomes. The volunteer should be aware that some matches are unsuccessful and that this is okay, but *the importance of notifying the organization about wanting to close a match should be emphasized*. Open communication is likely to make a volunteer who is considering closing a match feel more comfortable contacting FriendshipWorks prior to the closing. Also, the researchers feel that formalizing the closing of a match by creating an exit interview or some other standardized procedure will both allow the organization to keep better records of closed matches and further encourage volunteers to contact the organization before closing a match. FriendshipWorks might choose to offer an online exit interview option for volunteers: designing an online exit interview, instead of requiring in-person or phone exit interviews would likely encourage volunteers to report closing matches by making the closing feel more anonymous.

Finally, our findings show that recipients may experience decline and emotional distress from a negative experience with the Friendly Visiting program. While the program benefits many elders, we find the elders who benefit are successful in the program and remain matched for more than 6 months. Some individuals who waited a significant amount of time to be matched or who had their match close within 6 months experienced varying levels of emotional pain. Elders were unclear as to why the match no longer visited or why the FriendshipWorks office had not yet found them a match. A few elders asked the researcher, "Is it my fault? Did I do something wrong?" Some elders also asked for a new match and hoped we could find someone else to come visit them. The researchers included these elders in their sample and called these elders because organizational data suggested they were still matched, indicating the program did not know the match had failed. The program in general supports the volunteers more than it supports the elders and unfortunately, the volunteer is rarely afflicted by a closed match. FriendshipWorks needs to consider if this volunteer-focused model for the Friendly Visiting program is a good fit for the recipients it is trying to help.

II. Areas of Change for Better Serving Volunteers

There are a number of areas that can be improved that relate to volunteers, specifically the areas of recruitment, retention and ongoing communication.

Recruitment of Volunteers

Our results suggest that there are a number of ways to improve the recruitment of volunteers. First, our volunteer interviews and surveys generated some rich material documenting enjoyable experiences in the program; these words from volunteers should be used in marketing materials. Our findings also indicate that volunteers who have a small social network, who are older, and who are looking for companionship or to be an advocate for elders will be a better fit for this program. Staff should be wary of any volunteers, particularly young volunteers, who say they want to gain insight and wisdom from their match relationship: if these are the only reasons they give for wanting to volunteer with the elderly, it is likely that they will not be a good fit for the program.

Volunteer Retention

Volunteers sampled in this research expressed a number of challenges with being matched. They had trouble figuring out what to do with their match each week, they didn't know if they were helping too much or not enough, and they had relatively low levels of program satisfaction (62% were very satisfied with the program, which seems low for volunteering and indicates a major area for improvement). Things that could help sustain the match relationship include:

- ❖ A manual or guidebook for things you can do with your match:
 - What to do if you are not “clicking”
 - What to do if the match is not mobile
 - What to do if the match does not want to go outside
 - Free or low cost activities to do together
- ❖ More recognition from FriendshipWorks: yearly “thank you gift” like a mug, hat, magnet, etc. with the logo on it. Also create a “*volunteer of the month*” (or quarter) who would will be highlighted on the website.
- ❖ Increasing contact with volunteers during their first year with the program and open the lines of communication for discussing issues and concerns that arise (currently being addressed by the Volunteer Leadership Council).
- ❖ Volunteers should be encouraged to be flexible and open in the beginning of the relationship, yet still keep to a consistent routine and schedule so the elder will begin to trust them.
- ❖ Enhanced training for volunteers so are familiar with assisting individuals who have mobility issues, difficulty walking, or even getting up from a chair or a fall.
- ❖ Enhanced training for volunteers so they understand how to keep boundaries and what to do if they feel uncomfortable.

The final bullet point highlights a larger issue with the Friendly Visiting training. Almost all volunteers felt their training was sufficient for their experience in the program. The message at the training, however, is not consistent with the message of Friendly Visiting in general. This research suggests that volunteers who go above and beyond for their elderly match, and matches that last a lifetime, are the exception and not the rule. Normal matches, however, are not the focus of FriendshipWorks internal message, marketing materials, newsletters, and appeals. It may be that expectations of a match must shrink for the organization. Volunteers are coming into the program with mixed messaging: on the one hand, they are told to have boundaries and keep their distance from the elder but, on the other hand, the program is about personalized support and friendship. Boundaries naturally fall down when you build a friendship with someone. This has been a challenge for a number of volunteers and they are unsure when and how to transition from a formalized volunteering role to an informal friendship. Some are unsure if this is appropriate and this is expressed well in the following quote:

I got the impression from the volunteer training that we're not supposed to be involved too much in their lives. I'm not sure if I can or should help out. If I can't help my match out, or shouldn't, I would like to know where I can go to advocate for them and be able to direct them to services that can help.

Finally, the research suggests it is harder to retain younger volunteers than older volunteers. Does the organization need to think about treating younger volunteers differently, at least in the beginning, until it is clear they will be a reliable match? Is it possible younger volunteers should get the option to be a substitute for matched volunteers? In other words, on weeks when a volunteer is on vacation or cannot visit their elder they will call the office and ask if a substitute volunteer can visit for them. Offering a “substitute volunteer” option could prove useful for all ages of volunteers: it may allow some volunteers to get involved without being as committed as necessary to partake in a “full-time,” successful match. This option might also serve as a stepping stone, helping some volunteers decide if they really want/are able to commit to a full-time match. We encourage FriendshipWorks to begin rethinking the involvement of younger volunteers and continue exploring different options for different types of volunteers.

Ongoing Communication with Volunteers

Related to the area of retention, some volunteers felt that they had too little contact with the organization was too little. When asked about improving the organization, volunteers stated they would like more organized activities and workshops for volunteers and elders:

Please create and maintain programs or activities that would allow both volunteers and matches to spend some time together as a group.

We should get together more often and have the volunteers show what they have done.

Develop workshops, maybe every 4 months, to give us an opportunity to know one another and learn new approaches and techniques that will improve and help us keep growing.

For social events, it would be helpful to have transportation so I can bring my match. We'd be more likely to attend if a van or even the RIDE were arranged to pick us up.

Volunteers also wanted the organization to keep in touch with their match and know whether or not the match was satisfied with the arrangement. The volunteers wanted to be told if they were doing a good job, but specifically to know what their elder felt about the situation:

I would like feedback as to whether my match is satisfied with me.

I do hope they are checking in with my match on a regular basis to ensure she is satisfied with what I am doing for her.

I think they should be checking in periodically to make sure that both parties are happy with the match.

Finally, a number of volunteers expressed times when they wanted more contact with the organization or tried to reach a staff member and were unable to. This may be partially due to the change in staff over time, especially with assistants coming on to help the Program Coordinator and then no longer being there for the volunteer to contact. It is clear, however, that many volunteers would like more contact with the organization or an easier way to get in touch with staff:

I gave up a Saturday to attend a training session to learn how to teach exercise classes for elders...it was fantastic and left me enthusiastic about getting involved. I was promised follow-up about opportunities and I never heard from the organization. Several months later I contacted you and found there were no opportunities. What was the point of hosting the class?

I hadn't spoken to anyone at the organization since being matched. I received a call to ask me to sell tickets for a fundraiser and normally this is something I would do, but I was just so taken aback that the only contact I would have with the program would be one call 7 months later asking me to fundraise.

I've been matched 9 months. A few months back I had a difficult time reaching my match. I emailed Josie about this asking her to try and contact my match or find out what happened. I never heard back from her, wrote once again and to this day I have not heard a word from anyone at the organization.

Respond and get more organized. You need to work with volunteers and help people get matches. I love the idea of the program but my match has ended and FriendshipWorks has been near impossible to contact and hugely unresponsive.

The current FriendshipWorks organizational philosophy should be reexamined. Cultivating friendships between volunteers and socially isolated elders is a difficult task that requires ongoing communication and support. The fact that a number of volunteers in our sample praised FriendshipWorks for finding them such compatible matches is a testament to the exceptional ability of the organization to build meaningful relationships. *However, it must be again emphasized that instant connections and informal friendships are the exception and not the rule.* For most volunteers, the match relationship—like most relationships—is complex and characterized by changes in emotional connectedness, and match relationships are further complicated by the match's age and impending mental or physical deterioration. This type of relationship, likely to be one of the most challenging relationships a volunteer has experienced, requires organizational support.

Removing FriendshipWorks from the equation will allow friendship to flower in certain relationships, but will further complicate the majority and place an added burden on most volunteers. Increasing organizational presence should make both the volunteer and the elder feel more comfortable and supported. Our previously mentioned suggestions speak to our overall recommendation that FriendshipWorks should increase its organizational presence: more marketing of the “normal,” increased appreciation for volunteers through volunteer “swag,” organizing activities and workshops, more frequent check-ins, and establishing protocols for closing matches all require more open communication between FriendshipWorks and individuals involved in the

program. While this support will not be necessary for exceptional match relationships, we believe increasing organizational presence will make the program more effective, efficient, and generally rewarding.

III. Conclusions

As stated in the introduction, the main goal of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of FriendshipWorks' Friendly Visiting program which provides inter-generational friendship "matches" as an intervention for improving elders' health and well-being. Below are some concluding thoughts related to our main research questions:

How does being in a friendship match benefit the individuals involved?

What are the main roles volunteers play in the life of their match?

Via survey data and semi-structured interviews, we understand a lot about the benefits both recipients and volunteers gain from the Friendly Visiting Program, as well as the main roles volunteers play in the lives of their matches.

Volunteers expressed a number of life changes they experienced through volunteering including: a better understanding of aging, personal growth, feeling appreciative, feeling useful, removing social isolation and creating friendships. Elders reported life changes such as feeling less lonely and having someone in their life that they can count on, two main objectives of the Friendly Visiting program.

Recipients reported receiving different kinds of assistance from their volunteer and two main categories emerged – social support (feeling and being cared for and feeling that one is part of a supportive social network) and instrumental support (tangible assistance). Additionally, volunteer data revealed that Friendly Visiting volunteers are providing much more than companionship for their match. Volunteers listed socialization, help running errands, and support walking as the top ways they assist their elder.

At times volunteers expressed feeling overwhelmed by their participation with the match or the level of engagement expected of them. Elders also had some negative comments regarding the program, often related to them no longer being matched, not knowing the whereabouts of their volunteer, or the way certain volunteers treated them or the activities they did together.

Do friendship matches promote healthy aging and/or increase well-being in later life?

Given the small numbers of recipients who completed both a pre- and post-survey (n=7), we are unable to draw conclusions about the Friendly Visiting program's ability to promote healthy aging and/or increase well-being later in life. We do know that of those recipients who had been matched for six months or more, many report increasing their physical activity in the form of walking and

report they are getting out of the house more often. Elders also reported feeling less lonely, more secure, and more connected to the outside world because of the presence of their Friendly Visitor. Perhaps most importantly, over 75 percent of elders in the program now feel they have someone in their life they can count on.

Are there weaknesses in the Friendly Visiting program or areas for program improvement?

Perhaps the act of conducting this research more than the actual survey data itself revealed more to the research team about the quality of the Friendly Visiting program. For example, one of the most important findings of this evaluation came from the surprisingly large number of elders who were ineligible to participate in our research because they were either matched for less than 6 months or never matched at all. This finding leads to several recommendations:

- ❖ *Matches that end within the first 6 month need to be systematically examined, so the organization has a better understanding of this phenomenon. This is an important reality about our research – which is a report about successful matches. Little is known about unsuccessful matches.*
- ❖ *Volunteer training should emphasize the importance of notifying the organization about wanting to close a match and make it easy and guilt-free for volunteers to do so.*
- ❖ *Emotional distress and pain amongst elders who have had a negative experience with the organization (i.e. wait a long time to be matched or have a match fail in first six months) needs to be examined and minimized*

There are a number of areas that can be improved that relate to volunteers, specifically the areas of recruitment, retention and ongoing communication.

- ❖ FriendshipWorks' need to deliver consistent messaging to their volunteers
 - *Marketing materials emphasize the “exceptional matches” which are not the norm. Volunteers need to be prepared for the realities of these relationships*
 - *Volunteer training emphasizes boundaries, but FriendshipWorks' deep held belief about this program advocates for personalized friendship and support, a space where boundaries blur*
 - *Related to this, we suggest FriendshipWorks' attempt to maintain an organizational presence, even as matches become more and more like “old friends”*
- ❖ *It seems harder to retain younger volunteers than older volunteers – FriendshipWorks should think about creative ways to use younger volunteers and more often look to match older volunteers with elder recipients*
- ❖ *Volunteers want feedback to know how they are doing*
 - *While the desire for more contact with the organization varies by volunteers, it is clear that volunteers want to know how they are doing.*

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- *FriendshipWorks should also check in with elders to understand how matches are going, from their perspectives and share that information with volunteers*

We hope that FriendshipWorks can utilize these data to improve the program, assist with fundraising efforts, and share with the broader community of others interested in doing this kind of work. We thank the FriendshipWorks staff for their continued support on this project through all its ups and downs. The program, overall, is providing a valuable service to Boston's elders and with modifications and improvements developed from this research the program will continue grow and thrive for another 28 years.

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APPENDIX

Appendix Table 1. Demographic and Match Length Information on Top Reasons for Volunteering

	<i>Entire Sample</i>	<i>Natural Volunteers</i>	<i>Inter-generational Relationship</i>	<i>Companion-ship</i>	<i>Insightful</i>	<i>Advocacy</i>	<i>Previous Experience</i>
Volunteers							
Female	83.5%	81%	84%	80%	83%	93%	100%
Average Age	38 years	36 years	38 years	37.5 years	36 years	40 years	38 years
Under 30	44%	47%	50%	48%	42%	21%	27%
30 to 44	24%	28%	22%	12%	25%	35%	43%
45 to 59	20%	19%	19%	32%	29%	35%	21%
60 and older	12%	7%	9%	8%	4%	8%	7%
Elders							
Average Age	77 years	77 years	72 years	77 years	75 years	78 years	77 years
Race	71% White 17% Black 12% Other	76% White 15% Black 9% Other	75% White 16% Black 9% Other	82% White 5% Black 13% Other	74% White 22% Black 4% Other	61% White 31% Black 8% Other	72% White 14% Black 14% Other
Impaired	42%	42%	50%	44%	50%	43%	43%
Match Length							
Average length	2.5 years	2.3 years	2.3 years	2.3 years	1.5 years	3.0 years	2.7 years
Less than 6 mo.	10%	12%	9%	24%	21%	0%	14%
6 mo. to 1 yr.	26%	28%	22%	16%	50%	36%	43%
1 to 2 years	22%	23%	16%	32%	8%	21%	14%
2 to 4 years	35%	23%	41%	8%	8%	21%	7%
Over 4 years	17%	14%	12%	20%	13%	22%	22%

Appendix Table 2. Demographics of Matched vs. Unmatched Friendly Visiting Recipients (n=37)

	<i>Unmatched Elders</i>	<i>Matched Elders</i>
Total	N=16	N=21
Average Age	75.5	76.2
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	40.0	23.8
<i>Female</i>	60.0	76.2
Race		
<i>White</i>	50.0	81.0
<i>Black</i>	43.8	19.0
<i>Hispanic</i>	6.3	0.0
Marital Status		
<i>Never Married</i>	50.0	30.0
<i>Divorced</i>	18.8	30.0
<i>Widowed</i>	18.8	35.0
<i>Married</i>	12.5	5.0
Referral Source		
<i>Friend or Family</i>	21.4	45.0
<i>Community Org.</i>	50.0	15.0
<i>Health Care Agency</i>	14.3	20.0

<i>Senior Housing</i>	14.3	10.0
<i>Self-Referral</i>	0.0	10.0
Low Income	81.3	57.1
Lives Alone	93.8	95.2
Physical Health Issue	68.6	66.7
Mental Health Issue	50.0	38.1

Appendix Table 3. Incoming Recipients' Survey Response Rate	
	N
<i>Total New Recipients (9/10-9/11)</i>	37
Removed Due to Known Impairments	-1
<i>Eligible Population</i>	36
Unable to contact	-3
Refusals or mid-terminates	-9
<i>Consented and Completed</i>	24
Final Response Rate	67.57%

Appendix Table 4. Comparison of Incoming Program Recipients Who Completed and Refused the Baseline Survey (n=37)		
	<i>Completed Survey</i> N=24	<i>Refusal</i> N=10
Total		
Average Age	73.2	81.0
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	46.0	20.0
<i>Female</i>	54.0	80.0
Race		
<i>White</i>	54.2	80.0
<i>Black</i>	45.8	20.0
<i>Hispanic</i>	4.0	0.0
Marital Status		
<i>Never Married</i>	45.8	33.3
<i>Divorced</i>	25.0	22.2
<i>Widowed</i>	16.7	33.3
<i>Married</i>	12.5	11.1
Low Income	91.7	30.8
Lives Alone	95.8	90.0
Disabled	63.0	20.0

Appendix Table 5. Currently Matched Recipients' Survey Response Rate	
	N
<i>Total Population Served</i>	130
Deceased	-6
Removed Due to Known Impairments	-7
<i>Contacted for Participation</i>	117
Competency issues/illness/ hospitalization	-11
Match ended/doesn't know volunteer	-38
<i>Eligible Population</i>	68
Unable to contact	-9
Refusals or mid-terminates	-22
<i>Consented and Completed</i>	37
Final Response Rate	73.50%

Appendix Table 6. Follow-Up Survey Response Rates	
	N
<i>Completed Baseline Survey</i>	24
Never matched	-4
Match ended/doesn't know volunteer	-11
<i>Eligible Population</i>	9
Unable to contact	-1
Removed – Transferred to JP Chapter	-1
<i>Consented and Completed</i>	7
Final Response Rate	91.67%

Appendix Table 7. Demographics for Successfully Matched Friendly Visiting Recipients (n=37)

Demographic Measures	N	Percent	
Gender	Female	27	73.0
	Male	10	27.0
Years Matched (average = 4.4)	Less than 2 years	11	29.7
	2 to 4 years	11	29.7
	4 to 6 years	7	18.9
	Over 6 years	8	21.6
Age (average = 77) (median = 78)	65 and younger	8	22.9
	66 to 75	8	22.9
	76 to 85	12	34.3
	86 and older	7	20.0
Race/Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	30	81.1
	Black/African American	5	13.5
	Other	2	5.4
Living Situation	Lives Alone <i>*some missing org data</i>	23	65.7
Referral Source	Friend or Family	11	33.3
	Self-Referral	8	24.2
	Community Organization	7	21.2
	Senior Housing/Facility	5	15.2
	Health Care Agency	2	6.1
Income	Low Income <i>*some missing org data</i>	16	44.4
Impairment	Disabled <i>*some missing org data</i>	12	33.3
	Mobility	17	45.9
	Hearing	3	8.1
	Sight	10	27.0
	Self-Care	1	2.7
Use Assistive Device	Cane	4	11.1
	Walker	6	16.7
	Wheelchair	3	8.1
	Other	7	19.5
Self-Reported Health	Excellent – Very Good	8	22.9
	Good	9	25.7
	Fair – Poor	18	51.5
ER and Hospital Treatment	ER in past 6 months	14	37.8
	No days in hospital in past 6 months	23	62.2
	1 to 5 days in past 6 months	7	18.9
	Over 5 days (week+) in past 6 months	7	18.9
Number of Diagnoses	No Diagnoses	1	2.7
	One Diagnosis	4	10.8
	Two or More Diagnoses	33	86.5
Physical Health Conditions	Arthritis	19	51.4
	High Blood Pressure	18	48.6
	High Cholesterol	14	37.8
	Diabetes	14	37.8
	Osteoporosis	13	35.1
	Heart Problems	12	32.4
	Prior Stroke	7	18.9
	Cancer	2	5.4
	Other Physical Condition	25	67.6
	Mental Health Conditions	Clinical Depression	10
Clinical Anxiety		8	21.6
Alzheimer's or Dementia		1	2.7

