



**“God bless these people”**



**Food Force friends**



**Sharing art and stories**

# CONNECTIONS

Summer 2023

INTERFAITH  
VOLUNTEER  
CARE GIVERS  
OF GREATER  
NEW HAVEN



*Artist-In-Residence Doug Jones and IVCG Director Dan Camenga at the unveiling of the community-created original artwork: “Our Communities at the Public Garden’s Edge”.*

# Together

In this summer edition we celebrate connections and community.

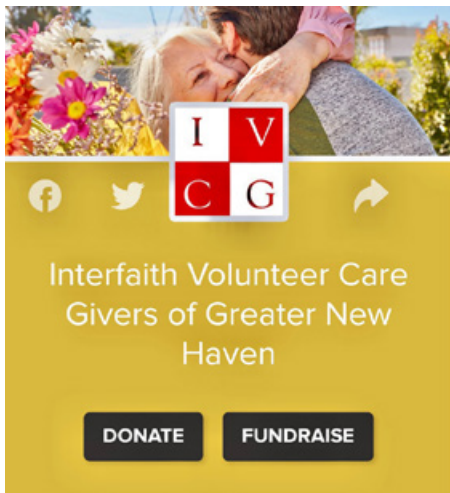
It's an exciting time to be part of this incredible organization, and one year since joining as Director of IVCG, I'm personally celebrating the milestones, growth and generosity that sustain us.

## Congratulations

First, congratulations to everyone who helped us reach a new milestone during The Great Give.

Our highly ambitious goal of raising \$10,000 from a record number of donors was met.

Interfaith Volunteers more than doubled its Great Give fundraising compared to previous years.



*Our Great Give fundraising page.*

I also want to acknowledge the tremendous impact of those who donate their time and energy to help others.

As a volunteer-based organization, our ability to deliver “Rides, Care, and Love” is an expression of individual kindness.

Our volunteers maximize the impact of every dollar raised.

I feel heartfelt gratitude to our volunteers, Board, staff, donors, and clients whose support enables our social benefit organization to make a lasting difference.

Behind the scenes, our dedicated IVCG staff has worked successfully to boost administrative efficiency.

What began as a computer and phone upgrade effort has now enabled us to improve response times and increase support capacity for local seniors.

## Community and connection

This year we launched several new community outreach efforts. We proudly participated in Earth Day community festivities, Hamden Fest, Branford’s volunteer recruitment fair, and several chamber events.

These activities, combined with a steady pace of individual meetings with leaders from other local organizations, reflect an ongoing commitment to forge new friendships and partnerships that boost our collective impact.

## Looking ahead

Looking ahead to next year’s 40th anniversary of Interfaith Volunteers, I am acutely aware of the growing need for support of local seniors.

We are working to further diversify our funding to enable us to reach more people.

We have already established IVCG’s first Board Stability Fund with strategic long-term holdings in The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven as well as Capital for Change.

Our goal is to raise \$120,000 for this combined fund by the end of next year. We’re already nearing \$90,000. Please reach out if you’re interested in helping us with a current or planned gift.

With the unwavering support of our community, we have achieved much during our first 39 years and laid a solid foundation for future growth.

Let’s embrace the power of kindness, strengthen our connections and work together to create a more compassionate and inclusive society. Thanks again for all that you do. – Dan



*Dan Camenga creating art with Doug Jones at NXTHVN in March.*

# Art & Gardens

## Celebration

Over 50 people gathered at Whitneyville Cultural Commons in Hamden in late May for the celebration phase of our first annual Senior Garden Experience, organized by the CT Garden Collaborative.

Artist-in-Residence Doug Jones unveiled the finished work.

The co-created art titled “Our Communities at the Public Garden’s Edge” used Doug’s innovative PIXEL technique, and will tour several locations around Connecticut beginning in September.



*Doug Jones with Rose Grenfell.*

This public event is an example of IVCG’s caring embrace of local seniors.

The art project began late last year.

Dozens of people of different backgrounds, skill and experience levels participated.

They included senior clients, volunteers and local Girl Scouts.



*Denese Bellinger, Willa Eno, Shay Jones.*

Doug Jones worked with seniors who signed-up for the activities in a series of conversations he called discovery sessions.

This was followed by the art creation session at NXTHVN in New Haven and the public unveiling.

**“A lot of gifts to share.”**



*Blossetta Chambers and Ruth Risberg at Whitneyville Cultural Commons.*

“It was a wonderful experience,” says Doug. “The people we worked with were extraordinary with a lot of gifts to share.”

They just brought so many incredible ideas and we were careful to include each voice, make sure everyone felt heard and connect with people in ways that worked for them.”

“We painted a Japanese red maple to symbolize the garden,” he wrote in an artist’s statement about the work.

“The maple’s big red leaves stand out against the bright blue sky.”

The public celebration and the creation phase of the artwork are both examples of IVCG’s renewed attempts to build community.

“Isolation caused by mobility challenges makes many spaces inaccessible to seniors,” says Doug.

“The Senior Garden Experience helps because it gets us out of our isolation and puts us in contact with each other.”

To learn more, visit the new CT Garden Collaborative website: [connecticutpublicgardens.org/](http://connecticutpublicgardens.org/)



*“Our Communities at the Public Garden’s Edge.”*

# Food force

Margot Sarkozy is among our hardest working care givers. She leads IVCG's all-volunteer Food Force committee that meets regularly to problem solve and discuss our food equity work.

This includes weekly grocery deliveries, Groceries in the Garden pickups and the annual Thanksgiving for All food delivery drive.



*Margot Sarkozy leads the Food Force Committee.*

“Our goal as a committee is to problem solve, grow volunteers and increase the number of seniors we provide services to,” she tells Connections.

Food Force coordinates the weekly grocery delivery program to deliver free food to low-income seniors in Greater New Haven.

“We also talk about Groceries in the Garden” for Hamden seniors.”

Twenty clients meet together on Saturday mornings to get a fresh bag of groceries at Winnett Food Forest.

“They catch up with each other, chat with Dan Camenga or volunteer leaders and get a bag of groceries from the pantry that supplies the delivery program.”

**“Seniors often lose out on that friendship.”**

“It’s really about building community for seniors who so often lose out on that friendship and relationship building,” says Margot.

Each program reaches several dozen seniors. “Sometimes our groceries are the only fresh produce and meat the seniors will get in a month. We definitely fulfill a food insecurity need that is very present in New Haven County.”

**“Sometimes they haven’t spoken to anyone.”**

“For me when I deliver food I always have a conversation with seniors, and sometimes they haven’t spoken to anyone for a couple of weeks.

It’s just a nice way to extend empathy and connect with people.”

**Food plus community**

Part of the vision of IVCG’s grocery programs is “food plus community”.

Margot is a post-graduate student at Yale, who learned about IVCG on a volunteer match site.

She says that “she really enjoys” meeting seniors and delivering food to those who really need it.

Margot hopes that more young volunteers will get involved.

“My hope is to engage the high school and college community.

**“So much you can learn from elderly people.”**

Right now, it’s mostly working adults and retirees who volunteer their spare time.

Given the amount of schools and colleges in the area, I think this would be a really great opportunity for inter-generational community engagement.

There is so much you can learn from elderly people.”

She has no doubt about the need for these programs.

“It’s such a wonderful and scarce resource,” Margot says.

“I think it’s just really great work and hope to get more people involved.”

# God bless

## God bless these people

In countless ways our rides service is a two-way street.

Each year Interfaith Volunteers drives hundreds of seniors to and from essential doctors' offices and medical appointments.

Without us, many elderly people who live alone have few other options.



IVCG Rides client Audrey Richards.

Drivers and their clients share stories and laughter too.

Audrey Richards has been getting rides from IVCG for the past three years.

"The drivers are excellent people", she says. "They're so friendly and nice.

I say to myself, God bless these people for giving their time and vehicle to transport those who desperately need to get to the doctor and don't have another way."

Audrey tried several other services before she found

Interfaith. "I would not have been able to afford some medical rides.

This helps me a great deal," she says. "Interfaith drivers are always on time."

## Very caring

Betty Mahieu has been booking rides with IVCG since last year when she had "a lot of medical problems" and had no easy or affordable way to get to them.

"The reason I choose Interfaith Volunteers is that I find them to be very caring.

They helped me get into and out of the car," she explains.

The drivers are "very kind and nice".

She remembers one man who went out of his way to make sure that her doctor's appointment went smoothly.

**"On the other days she is often home alone."**

"They gave me a form to fill out and he helped me with the application.

He was a very caring person."

Audrey babysits for her granddaughter several days a week.

But on the other days she is often home alone.



"I need to interact with other people. I can't speak enough about what Interfaith volunteers do."

## We get help

Our two major public events, organized by the CT Garden Collaborative during the spring were made possible with help from other non-profit organizations.

Special thanks go to Mary Wade | Chatham Place at Mary Wade, Hamden Senior Center, ACT Foundation, NXTHVN, The Community Soup Kitchen and our friends at The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven.

## Got questions?

Phone: 475-257-6538

Email:

[Director@CareNewHaven.org](mailto:Director@CareNewHaven.org)

Website: [CareNewHaven.org](http://CareNewHaven.org)

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*Or current resident.*

**“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”**

*Leo Buscaglia*

You may have thought about volunteering but wondered how you could help. Give Dan a call and you'll be surprised how easily you can help to turn someone's life around.

**Phone: 475-257-6538 today**

**Email: [Director@CareNewHaven.org](mailto:Director@CareNewHaven.org)**

**Website: [www.CareNewHaven.org](http://www.CareNewHaven.org)**

# Thank you

Interfaith Volunteer Care Givers (IVCG) says thank you to all of our donors. Your generosity helps New Haven County's senior citizens lead independent, connected, and healthy lives.

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