



WELCOME

Jane Ferrall, Executive Director

My Dear Friends,

It seems so unbelievable that we are now over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic. I know when I wrote the welcome to the Spring 2020 newsletter, there was no way I thought we would still be in this place for the Spring 2021 letter. However, if you had asked me back then if I thought we would be well on our way to universal vaccination for seniors by now—or even that effective vaccines would have been developed at all—I would have thought that a dream, too.

Adjectives like “unprecedented” seem to fall short to adequately describe the challenges we have faced. As a direct service provider, and one that never closed even during the worst days of the pandemic, and finally as an agency that sits right at the joining place of seniors and their health care, IVCG has had a front-row seat to all the challenges and vicissitudes imposed by the health crisis. Our operations are still not back to normal, and now we are starting to wonder what “normal” is even going to look like in the future. We hope to be able to return soon to 100% volunteer-provided service, but we aren’t there yet and it may take even more time.

This is not at all to say that we have lacked for wonderful volunteers. To the contrary, more people have stepped up to do more things than

ever before. **Vaccine Buddies** and **Grocery Bag** are thriving, and have attracted a whole new set of friends—some of whom have even become medical drivers! Just since the start of this year, we’ve welcomed new drivers **Sydney Cohen, Annie Dymarczyk, Alex Egilman, Lee Febos, Mary-Kate Gill, Huang Hanfeng, Jaelen King, Laura Lynch, Peggy Myers, Deborah Shea, Susanne Turi, and Tina Weinstein.**

Last but most certainly not least at all, we have also welcomed returning Board member **Marion Ammons.** Marion’s association with IVCG goes back many years and we are so grateful to have her experience and caring heart back with us again.

Yours Sincerely

Jane

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VACCINE BUDDIES: “A FRIEND IN NEED IS...”

One of the most exciting and interesting initiatives to emerge from the pandemic has been the opportunity to serve our clients, and other seniors, in helping them access their COVID-19 shots. While we knew some months ago that state and local health authorities **should** make scheduling vaccines easy and accessible for people with limited or no online access, this message did not, we are sorry to say, make its way to decision-makers. Starting early in January, we began to have conversations with clients who worried that they might not be able to sign up for vaccines or to get to vaccination sites. The fact that many of the signup platforms were (to put it mildly) not user-friendly even for experienced computer users added a great deal of stress to an already difficult situation.

In response, working together with the Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut, we quickly put together a program, Vaccine Buddies, that recruited volunteers who agreed to be backgrounded and trained in the very special “art” of helping make vaccine appointments and then helping our clients get to them.

Volunteer response to the program—aided by wonderful publicity from WTNH and FOX61—was very strong. We ultimately recruited over 50 volunteers who became Buddies to hundreds of seniors. The beautiful part of the program is that, once having the vaccine appointment, IVCG could then provide the transportation! Especially since so many vaccine administration sites are in distant or out of the way venues, our drivers have made all the difference.

“ I could not have done it without you! My Vaccine Buddy saved my life! ”



THANK YOU TO THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION!

The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven has been an incredibly valuable partner to IVCG during this pandemic year. A year ago, the Foundation provided a grant to permit IVCG to hire additional staff to fill in to provide service that our volunteers could not then do. Then, in the winter of 2020 we received word that the Foundation had funded a capital grant to permit us to finish building out the downtown location of **Mae's Closet** (more about that in our next issue). Finally, this month we learned that the Foundation has once again stepped up to fund staff costs to help us continue to provide services even in this emergency period.

Most people who ride with us are aware that, even as volunteer interest and involvement have surged during the pandemic, the demand for our ride service (in particular) has spiked. Staff-provided rides continue to be a significant factor in our cost structure. While we hope to move away from this heavy reliance on staff as we move through 2021, the Foundation's grant will enable us to continue to provide service at prior levels.

One way that you can help is by participating in the Great Give and I hope you will do so! Watch your emails!

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS

We so appreciate all the wonderful support of our riders, clients, volunteers and friends. Your help keeps our doors open and our volunteer drivers on the road. Our sincerest thanks to all who gave in the first quarter of 2021.

Carmela Argentino	Roseanne Baldassare	Kathryn Benedict	Barbara Bretko
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Nick Sepesko	Joe Shapiro	Kevin Smith	Stuart Smith
Kathleen Smith-Bogan	Rosemary Spring	Gloria Testa	Sheila Thomas
Shirley Vitale	Tina Weinstein	Carolyn Young	Dorothy Young
	Beverly Zimmer	Stephanie Zito	
	Robert Mills	Florence Johnson	

And a special thank you to our congregation partner, Immanuel Missionary Baptist Church!

Mae's Closet

Mary Brooks	David Chevan	Franz Douskey	Marsha Hendran
Ann Levison	Sue McIntosh	Patricia Perkins	

HAVE YOU HEARD?

Some of the most reliable and generous supporters of Interfaith and our programs are area Rotary Clubs. In the past year, we have been proud to receive financial support from the Clubs of Hamden, Orange and Wallingford. You folks are the best

SERVICE UPDATE

Here are the latest updates regarding IVCG's services and programs:

- We continue to provide **ride service for medical appointments**; because our volunteer driver numbers have been reduced by at least 50%, we are having to do "more with less" and cannot provide service at the same level as prior to the pandemic. When we accept a ride we are committing to provide it, so we do close specific weeks or days once we've reached capacity. We appreciate your patience and understanding.
- **Mae's Closet**, our durable medical equipment lending bank, is open for loans. Please call **(475) 414-8333** for loans; you may call **(203) 230-8994** with items to donate including adult continence products
- If you would like to enroll in the Agency on Aging's **Grocery Bag free home delivery program**, please call the AOASCC at 203-785-8533. IVCG delivers groceries under this program but does not enroll clients.
- **Friendly and supportive calling** continues.
- **Friendly visits** and **Aging at Home** are suspended until this summer, at which point we will re-evaluate taking current medical conditions into account.
- IVCG cannot do home repairs, lawn clean-ups, household chores, or snow shoveling. We are currently re-evaluating our home grocery shopping program but it is likely this program will be discontinued within the next few months.

We are proud to announce that in the month of March, we brought **68** clients to their vaccine appointments!



A NOTE FROM JANE

Many of our clients have no doubt noted that IVCG's ride schedule continues packed and we frequently must turn away ride requests. One reason for this is because we are prioritizing "vaccine rides" and appointments. Often these rides are outside our service area or at times and days outside our normal service hours. However, because getting everyone vaccinated is so incredibly critical, we made the commitment to do "whatever it takes" to make vaccines happen for our clients, or any senior who needs a ride. We also suspended our regular "one ride per week with a week's notice" service limit for vaccines, which has placed still more pressure on our capacity.

I know that this state of affairs is frustrating and upsetting for many of our clients. Because we expect that our capacity issues will continue at least through the summer, it's a very good idea for clients to put into place alternate transportation arrangements. Whether this involves figuring out how to use Uber or Lyft, signing up for MyRide, or investigating the options offered through your local senior center, seniors are well advised to make sure they have several options for getting to medical appointments, not just IVCG. If you need help figuring out some of these other options, please call us in the office and we'll be happy to work with you to figure out the best alternatives.

You can also help us out by "staying on top" of your own schedule. When you cancel a ride within 24 hours of the appointment day and time, please understand that we cannot substitute an alternate rider, so that means the appointment slot is, essentially, "wasted." We have had months where our cancellation percentage is as high as 25%... this is frustrating for our staff and volunteers, but also a huge waste of a very scarce resource.

We do understand that "life happens," but we also know that our program isn't for everyone. If you're in a place where you need to be repeatedly canceling your scheduled rides, we'll work with you to help figure out a different approach, because IVCG's ride service isn't going to work for you.

CATCHING UP WITH MAE'S CLOSET

As most of our regular readers know, in June of 2019 Mae's Closet opened in Hamden under the auspices of Interfaith Volunteers. This effort had been run on an informal basis by Marilyn Bergen and Ann Levison before that time. The Closet provides "hard" (durable) medical equipment, free of charge (there is a \$1/item fee for legal purposes) to anyone who needs it, regardless of age, income, place of residence, etc. Starting in November of 2020, the Closet also began to provide free adult continence products.

During the pandemic, the Closet closed for about 3 months. We were the last to close, and the first to re-open, of all the area lending closets, and since then Ann, Marilyn, and their crew of helpers have been busily accepting donations, repairing and sanitizing items, and lending them back out to the community. The fall of 2020 saw something of a lull in requests, as many people postponed elective surgeries due to the pandemic, but since the beginning of the year activity has picked up greatly. We are extremely fortunate to have Ann and Marilyn as such dedicated volunteers!

Here's a snapshot of Closet activity since October 1, 2020:

The Closet made a total of 137 loans of medical equipment to 91 clients. Borrowers from Mae's came from Ansonia (1), Branford (2), East Haven (4), Guilford (2), Hamden (39), Madison (1), Meriden (1), New Haven (19), Newington (1), North Haven (3), Rocky Hill (1), Wallingford (6), West Haven (8) and Woodbridge (3). The most popular item by far is the bath seat (either with or without a back and arms), followed by commodes, rollators and travel and regular wheelchairs. We have also distributed a total of 155 packages of free adult continence products, totalling well over 2,500 garments, primarily to residents of New Haven and Hamden.

We also made a donation of approximately 90 walkers, canes, crutches and other mobility devices to [Wheels for the World](#), a ministry that takes these items and refurbishes them as necessary, and then distributes them to people around the world.

A couple of tips on using the Closet: please call the Closet at **(475) 414-8333** to discuss the loan of items. We can work with you to help figure out exactly what product(s) you need. All pickups of equipment are by appointment, in Hamden only at this time. Mae's cannot accept donations of "soft" items that cannot be sterilized such as blankets, pillows, and bed protectors. We also cannot accept donations of medical items such as catheter set-ups, test strips, and syringes or medical machinery such as nebulizers. We welcome donations of adult continence products and can accept open packages, but we cannot accept "loose" products outside of normal packaging. We also welcome donations of unopened Ensure.

Mae's is supported by a generous donation from the Hamden Rotary Club, a Community Development Block Grant from the Town of Hamden, and the contributions of Closet borrowers. Thank you so much to everyone involved with this project!

Had a fall? Don't crawl –
with the right **durable medical equipment**,
you can be on your feet again (and back to all your old hobbies).



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



IVCG Program Associate Anna Alber recently caught up with **KAREN YAO**, one of our most loyal and hard-working friendly calling volunteers, and a lively discussion ensued.

(The following conversation has been condensed and edited for clarity.)

Would you tell us a little about yourself?

I grew up in Ohio but I went to Yale and graduated class of 2020. At Yale I double majored in Psychology and Comparative Literature. The last half of my second semester of senior year were online classes because of the pandemic. And then I graduated through an online ceremony and transitioned to life after college, which was strange to adjust to, especially during a pandemic. I moved to NY at that time to work. Right now I'm in Ohio with my parents.

When did you get involved with the reassurance calling program and what inspired you to do that?

At that time in the pandemic, it was obviously a very chaotic time for everyone. I was a part of Yale Students for Christ, which is a Christian fellowship at Yale [and] there was this call for volunteers...I had also been taking a class called "Psychology of Prejudice" and there was so much conversation in that class about actually doing something and not just talking. Having thought about those things and having gotten this opportunity through the email, I thought "this sounds like a really great way

that I could actually help and actually contribute for a population that a lot of people don't really think about or really talk to that often." There were a lot of motivating factors, but when it boils down to it, what I really thought was that I have a duty to do something, that I have a duty to contribute whatever resources or skills I can, and that this would be a meaningful way to do that.

What has the experience been like for you?

I've genuinely really enjoyed the friendships that I've been able to make. It's also been very helpful for me in a time when so much has been changing in my life with graduating and adjusting to life after college and working and moving. Having this regular communication has been a stable constant in my life that has kept me very grounded and connected to people outside of people my age. It's nice to have perspective. The reassurance calls aren't just me reassuring them. I found that when I was going through sadness over the difficulties of the pandemic or life after college, they did so much to comfort me and to say "I believe in you. You can do it."

Would you tell us a little about the people you've been in touch with and the friendships you've developed with each of them?

One person that I really enjoy talking to is named Lillian. She's around 90 years old, so she's up there *laughs*, but I am so in awe of her. She is very active. She has so much vitality as a 90 year-old and I was like "Wow, you have more energy than I do!" It's always very invigorating to talk to her. I feel like she has a very positive outlook on things. It definitely always makes me smile. If I had a bad day and I call her, she's always very excited and makes my day better. We talk about a lot of different things because she studied law when she was younger and I'm interested in law, so we talk about books and authors that she likes, where she used to work, her family, and what she does during the week. She always asks me how my work is and encourages me to get out there as a young person. I genuinely enjoy talking with her and she always makes my day a bit brighter.

Another person that I talk to is Nancy. Nancy really enjoys having someone to talk to because every time we talk we end up talking for at least 30 minutes. She's living around other senior citizens, so she likes to tell me about what goes on in her life and her family, books, and painting.

She loves to paint. Every time I finish calling her, she says “I always really enjoy talking to you.”

I know that [the reassurance calling program] was born out of the pandemic, but now when I call I feel like it’s just catching up with a friend, so it would be so strange to me, even if the pandemic were over, to stop calling. I feel like this is probably something I will do for as long as I am able to.

What have you learned from the experience of being a reassurance calling volunteer? Has it changed your perspective in any way?

Talking to senior citizens has helped round out my understanding of what different sectors of the population are going through during the pandemic, which has been eye-opening to me. Different people have different challenges and the pandemic has hit people in different ways.

But I think it’s also been eye-opening to me in the sense that I’m kind of at this point in my life where I feel like I’m both old and young *laughs*. I know I’m young in the grand scheme of things, but sometimes I scare myself because I’ve graduated and I’m not an undergrad

anymore. Sometimes I compare myself to other people, like I haven’t achieved this yet or I’m behind in life. [...] I think talking to senior citizens has helped me have more perspective on life to know that I don’t have to freak out so much over things that are going on. It’s scary to me to grow older, but talking to them [...] has given me more courage to tell myself that it’s okay to slow down and not over-think every aspect of your progression in life.

Is there anything else you want to share about your experience as a calling volunteer?

At the beginning of last year in the early stages of the pandemic, I really had no idea what was going to happen or how the next year would go. And we still honestly don’t have much of an idea of how the vaccine distributions are going to go or how things are going to develop. Looking back on building relationships through regular calls with people is such a different experience than being in the moment and actually doing it. I guess the pandemic is just teaching me to take every day or every week at a time. [...] Looking back, it is kind of meaningful to see how far we’ve come.

Looking ahead: 5/5/21

If you happen to be around on May 5 at 9 AM and would like to hear Jane discuss the state of seniors as part of our participation in the Great Give (see page 2), please tune into WNHH radio (103.5 FM) or take a look at our **Facebook page**, where it will be live-streamed.

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