



Building Your Community

Caring for Older Adults

The need: Older adults gave decades to their families and communities, but many now spend their days alone, struggling with tasks that used to be easy and feeling forgotten by a fast, youth-focused world. A little time and respect from young people means more to them than you might imagine.

“Wrinkles should merely indicate where smiles have been.” — Mark Twain

“A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they shall never sit in.” — Greek proverb

“The longer I live, the more beautiful life becomes.” — Frank Lloyd Wright

FACILITATOR NOTES

Time. about 60–90 minutes, run in one sitting. Works in a classroom, youth group, or club. Option A needs no setup; Options B and C use real service arranged ahead of time.

Service today. Pick one option in Serve below and set it up before you begin.

Warm-up (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR NOTES

Keep this quick, short answers are great. Read the questions together.

- Who's an older person who has mattered in your life? What do you appreciate about them?
- What do you think changes about daily life as people get much older?
- Why do you think older adults can end up isolated, even when they have family?
- What's something older people have lived through that you'll never learn from a screen?

Learn (10–20 minutes)

Getting older brings real challenges that are easy to miss when you're young. People who once ran households and held down jobs may find that driving, stairs, cooking, or even a phone update have become hard. Friends and a spouse may have passed away. Children may live far off. The world moves fast and digital, and many older adults feel a step behind, and unseen. None of that erases who they are: people full of stories, skills, humor, and decades of hard-won wisdom. What they most often need isn't fixing. It's time, respect, a little practical help, and someone who treats them like they still matter, because they do.

An older adult near you might be:

- Living alone after losing a spouse, with long, quiet days and few visitors.
- Struggling with tasks that used to be simple: errands, yardwork, a confusing phone or remote.
- Full of stories and skills that no one has asked about in years.

A closer look. A woman in her eighties lives alone. Her husband passed a few years back, her kids are scattered across the country, and most days the only voice she hears is the television. She was a nurse for forty years, she can tell you about storms and weddings and a whole town that doesn't exist anymore, but nobody asks. Then a couple of teenagers start visiting on Sundays. They help her sort the mail and figure out her phone, but mostly they just listen to her stories. She lights up. They walk away realizing they got more than they gave.

Why older adults get overlooked. Older adults often slip out of view for ordinary reasons. Families spread out across the country. Old friends pass away or can't get around. The pace and technology of daily life leave a lot of seniors feeling left behind. And a culture that prizes youth and speed can quietly treat older people as if their best days, and their usefulness, are behind them. They aren't. Spending time with an older person isn't charity; it's a two-way street. They get connection and respect, and you get stories, perspective, and wisdom you can't find anywhere else.

How youth can help. Caring for older adults is mostly about showing up with time and respect. Youth can:

- Visit and listen: ask about their life and really hear the stories. Being heard is a gift.
- Help with tasks that have gotten hard: errands, yardwork, carrying things, tidying up.
- Bridge the tech gap: patiently help with a phone, tablet, or TV remote so they can reach family.
- Bring energy and respect: a card, a song, a game, a cheerful visit to a care home.

Keep these in mind.

- **Respect, not pity.** They're adults with full lives and real wisdom, not helpless. Treat them that way.
- **Listen more than you talk.** Their stories are the treasure. Ask questions and let them go.
- **Be patient.** Things may move slower; slow down to match, and never make someone feel rushed.
- **Consistency means everything.** A visit they can count on beats a one-time appearance. Don't promise what you can't keep.

Serve (30–60 minutes)

Today you'll put this into practice in a real service activity. Here are ways to do it:

Option A — Make an older adult's day *(no cost, no prep, works in any setting)*

With your family's or mentor's okay, reach out to an older person in your own life, a grandparent, an older neighbor, a family friend. Call or visit just to talk: ask about their life, listen to a story, and let them know they matter. If you don't know someone, make warm cards for residents of a local care home. A little attention and respect is free to give, and to someone who feels forgotten it means the world.

Option B — Lend a hand and some company *(low cost, a bit more effort)*

Pair a visit with practical help: rake a yard, run an errand, sort the mail, or patiently walk an older adult through a phone or tablet so they can video-call family. Keep the company as important as the chore. The help opens the door, but the conversation is the gift.

Prepare ahead. As the facilitator, you'll arrange ahead of time the visit and the helpful task (with a senior center, care home, or an older adult in someone's life), so the company and the help are set up.

Option C — Become a regular friend to a senior *(more effort; ongoing care)*

Through a local or national nonprofit, a senior center, a care home, a visiting program, or a group like Meals on Wheels, build a regular friendship with an older adult: same day, same friendly face, week after week. Listen to their life, share yours, play a game, write down their stories. Friendship across generations gives them connection, and gives you perspective you'd find nowhere else.

Prepare ahead. As the facilitator, you'll connect ahead of time with a local or national nonprofit that serves older adults and set up the group's regular visits. JustServe.org can help you find one and make the connection.

Before you go (all options): Visit older adults only in public or supervised settings, like a care home or senior center, or with your mentor or a trusted adult present, never alone in a private home. Let staff or family guide any physical help, and never assist with medical needs, medication, or anything you aren't trained for. Respect their privacy and their choices.

Reflect (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR NOTES

After serving, talk through a few of these together, then give everyone quiet time to write.

What's a story or piece of wisdom an older person shared that stuck with you?

Was anything surprising about spending time with someone much older?

Why might your time and attention matter more to an older adult than the chores you did?

How was this a two-way street, what did you get out of it?

Then finish one or both sentences:

An older person I want to spend more time with is...

One way I'll show older adults more respect and attention is...
