

Opinion

A safety net for Stamford seniors

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Kate Sullivan and Barbara Remondino prepare to deliver bags of groceries to seniors isolated in their homes on April 22 in Stamford. Local government and seniors aid organization SilverSource have partnered to provide weekly food deliveries to seniors in Stamford to help keep them fed and at home during the COVID-19 crisis.

May was Older Americans Month and at no time in our country's history have our senior neighbors been more on our mind than right now in the midst of our current health care crisis. They have been labeled a most at-risk population because of their age and often co-existing medical conditions, which make them more vulnerable to this virus.

It is heartwarming that right in our own community we have been seeing people pitch in to help seniors across Stamford. And since we have been telling those over 60 to follow the governors guidelines and "Stay Home and Stay Safe" since the pandemic began, this assistance is more vital than ever before.

SilverSource is well-experienced in taking care of the needs of older adults in our community. We have done so for more than 100 years. True to our mission as a nonprofit, we provide a safety net to seniors in need to keep a roof over their heads, the heat and lights on, food on the table and ensure access to essential medical care.

We know, the calls come in to SilverSource every day – from the grandson in Illinois whose online grocery service for his grandmother stopped delivering, to the 88-year-old mom whose caregiver was just hospitalized. These are our neighbors, our parents, our grandparents, and they have never been more alone or afraid than during the current COVID-19 crisis.

Stepping up to expand our mission, we have assembled an unprecedented task force of staff and volunteers to take care of those who are having such difficulty, especially now. Here are some examples of our present-day work. A team of SilverSource and Stamford Together community volunteers are part of a remote well-check program to call more than 13,000 seniors and connect them with support services, ensure they have groceries and their prescription medications, and reduce their feelings of isolation.

The need for food and essential items has been tremendous and is still increasing. To meet the ever-growing demand, we converted part of our offices into a pop-up food pantry/distribution center to support older adults with grocery deliveries of essential items. Volunteers are making front-door/contactless deliveries to make sure seniors have enough food to last for about 7-10 days at a time. Since March 1, SilverSource and Stamford Together community volunteers have delivered groceries enough for nearly 60,000 meals.

Our social work team continue to serve “at-risk” elderly residents. We continue to offer financial support to meet urgent needs around housing, heat, health and hunger. Additionally, we are still providing financial support and access to delivery of prescription medication along with free transportation to essential medical appointments (dialysis, chemotherapy, etc.).

We are getting very positive feedback from those on the receiving end of our help, and it is extremely rewarding to know that our efforts are making a real difference. In the words of one Stamford senior, "SilverSource's kindness, genuine concern, time and tireless efforts during this devastating pandemic are greatly appreciated! I am truly thankful."

As they say, "it takes a village" and none of this would be possible without our "village." This includes our staff and volunteers, our board of directors, our community partners and our donors, whose steadfast commitment, tireless effort and ongoing support have made it possible to do what we do and keep seniors safe and at home. I am extremely proud to lead an organization that has a history of doing great work, is always evolving to meet the changing needs of older adults with innovative programs, and has the creativity and flexibility to solve serious problems — especially during these most challenging times.

We all would like to know when life will return to normal again, and what to expect when we do. Unfortunately, there are still so many unknowns. But one thing I can say for sure is that SilverSource will continue to draw strength from its history, partnerships, experience and volunteer network to expand the safety net we provide to Stamford seniors — and, as always, we welcome your support.

Kathleen Bordelon is Chief Executive Officer of SilverSource in Stamford.