

Information from Service Coordination **Community Connections and Social Relationships**

There is not one single “right” way for people to connect to their communities. Some relationships happen quickly, others will grow over time, and some will always require someone to help nurture the relationship along. Flexibility can be the key to making connections work. Remember that connections can vary from those casual relationships that you develop with the employees at your favorite eatery or the grocery store you use, to strong friendships. All relationships can add to your life.

There are many ways to develop these connections and relationships. Here are some ideas to help you become more involved in your community. Friendships often develop when you share an interest with other people. Think about what interests you and connect to others based on them. For example, if you like baseball, go to games and sit in the same area each time. People tend to sit in the same area and you could meet some fellow baseball fans and start a connection to them. Crafts are another interest that provides a fun way to meet others. Many craft stores, libraries, and recreation commissions offer inexpensive or free classes.

The key is to do something you really enjoy or something new you are interested in learning. Become an active member of a group that interests you. There are many interest groups that focus on a specific activity or hobby. Arts and crafts, baking, bird-watching, camping, coffee drinking, collecting, cooking, games, fishing, movies, music, sports, trains, travel, hiking, biking, walking, and yoga are a few of the activities that have groups. Religious groups, like churches, synagogues and mosques, have committees that run the organization, groups for spiritual growth and opportunities to volunteer.

Most communities have civic groups, neighborhood associations, political clubs, and volunteer fire companies. There are also places to join recreational and exercise groups like the YMCA, JCC, Senior Centers, and county recreation commissions. All connections will not start lasting, deep friendships. If you need assistance with something, you may gain a “friendly acquaintance” with the teller at the bank or the meat manager at the grocery store. Most people like to be helpful and these relationships help make your life better. It is just plain nice to be noticed by people at the places you go to often.

In the same way, you can make connections by helping others. Working on a garden with a neighbor or shoveling snow for them is a way to start a relationship. Walking around your neighborhood, sitting on your front porch or playing with your pet, are all good ways to start getting to know the neighbors. Or, you could invite them over for an open house or a potluck dinner. Think about this as a step-by-step process. One outing is not usually enough to start a relationship. You can sit in the same area at sporting events or the gospel concerts at the park. Have coffee at the local coffee shop at the same time on the same day of the week. Go to the same grocery store, video store or card shop to become well known. Take a scrapbooking class and sit in the same seat each time. Make sure you smile and are friendly with the people around you and they will usually be friendly back. Some activities cost more than others do. Think about what you can afford to do often enough to start relationships. There are many free activities if you look around for them. Try checking out the library or the local “Welcome” center.

Many restaurants have racks of brochures on local places to visit and activities. Information is available in many places if you keep your eyes open. Make sure that you are part of the give and take of a relationship. When you give of yourself, you will not have to worry about being a burden to others. Listen to others as well as talking yourself. Remember special occasions, like birthdays, and send cards. Volunteer to help with setting up or cleaning up after activities. These actions confirm your involvement with other people in the group.

Some great ways to get involved in your community include:

Exercise

- YMCA
- JCC
- Local gym
- Exercise clubs
- Area sports leagues
- Outdoor activities

Civic Groups and Volunteerism

- Get involved in a cause ...

Interest Groups

- Cooking class,
- Music group
- Theatre groups

Religious Affiliations

Local Community Events

- Cultural events
- High school/ college sporting events
- Theatre productions

Parks and Recreation Departments

Please note: These fact sheets are designed to provide general information only and are not a substitute for the assistance of a Service Coordinator.