



611 Broadway, Suite 510 • New York, NY 10012-2608 (212) 260-6200 Fax: (212) 260-2962
December 10, 2008

Attention: Antonio Whitaker
Director of Legislative Affairs

Dear Mr. Whitaker & Mr. Weprin and Members of the City Council's Finance Committee,

This letter is to serve as testimony on behalf of Visiting Neighbors and the proposed funding cuts from DFTA slated for December 31st and the devastating effects they will have on our elderly clients.

Everyone at Visiting Neighbors is responding with fear, disbelief and dismay over the proposed elimination of our Friendly Visiting and Intergenerational programs.

While we certainly understand the budget crisis, and the difficult choices the city faces -- it appears that those who are the most vulnerable -- the frailest and oldest homebound elderly -- have been chosen as the most expendable, and have, in essence, been written off to die slow and painful deaths hidden behind the locked doors of their apartments.

To say that friendly visiting is not a core service is absurd. Perhaps some people do not realize the comprehensive range of services covered under this very large umbrella.

Here are some of the unsung services provided by VN's professional staff and friendly visitors that are covered under the umbrella term "friendly visiting":

- Volunteers, recruited, trained and supported by Visiting Neighbors' professional staff, provide companionship, emotional support, encouragement and mental stimulation to isolated seniors. They help seniors regain or sustain their will to live, build morale, prevent depression and despair, rebuild their self-esteem and enable them to connect with the outside world.
- Volunteers provide eyes and ears for the staff, alerting the professional staff immediately to any change in a senior's mental or physical condition or to their surroundings, helping to avert many emergencies by early intervention
- Volunteers help seniors with errands and shopping, and escort them to medical appointments, providing emotional support and an arm to lean on. Shopping

"Neighbors Helping Neighbors" Since 1972

VISITING NEIGHBORS IS FUNDED IN PART BY THE NYC DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING, THE NYC DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND GRANTS ADMINISTERED BY THE NEW YORK STATE OFFICE FOR THE AGING

Recipient, Governor's Community Service Award

includes both routine grocery and pharmacy trips as well as special needs, such as a heater, a fan or a coat.

- VN's professional staff monitors all senior clients to ensure that they are getting the help they need to survive safely as they struggle to remain independent.
- VN staff helps seniors deal with anxiety, denial, frustration, anger, depression and panic attacks, and helps seniors with substance or alcohol abuse issues get the help they need.
- VN encourages seniors to eat properly, to take care of their health, to exercise to the best of their ability, to see their doctors, and to take medications as prescribed.
- VN provides health advocacy when seniors are hospitalized, ensuring that proper discharge planning is in place and that hospital staff is not taking advantage of a frail senior. Staff visits seniors who are hospitalized to provide support as they face difficult diagnoses, and to provide encouragement to get well and return home.
- VN helps ensure that seniors fully disclose their health needs and living conditions, and are made to understand diagnoses and medical procedures so they can give informed consent and get appropriate help.
- VN provides counseling on end-of-life issues, and helps seniors complete health care proxies, living wills and other documents expressing their wishes.
- VN makes reliable referrals to free and low-cost services, and follows up with the seniors. This includes a wide range of services including in-home help, legal and financial assistance, and more.
- Volunteers help seniors with reading and understanding mail, organizing important papers.
- Volunteers help seniors care for pets, taking them to the vet or caring for them if a senior is hospitalized.
- VN performs safety checks of seniors' apartments, helping to prevent falls, the leading cause of loss of independence and institutionalization.
- VN provides supportive counseling as seniors face loss, bereavement, adjustment to increasing limitations, increasing need for interdependence, learning to accept services, dealing with denial of increasing frailty, and personality changes.
- VN gives seniors a safe place to freely express themselves, and gain acceptance.
- VN helps seniors address longstanding and often unresolved family issues and dynamics.
- Volunteers accompany seniors to the emergency room, and stay with them as they face difficult or frightening procedures.
- VN alerts seniors to scams and frauds, potentials for crimes and abuse. If a senior is a victim of a crime or abuse, we refer them for appropriate counseling.
- VN provides seniors with necessary forms for entitlements, such as rent reductions, heating assistance, etc.
- VN intervenes in landlord/tenant issues to prevent harassment and to help seniors get services they need, including repairs. When needed, we refer seniors to pro bono legal assistance.
- VN assists with minor home repairs, such as changing light bulbs and securing loose wires.

- VN celebrates special occasions, such as seniors' birthdays and holidays, letting seniors know they have not been forgotten. Our volunteer "elves" deliver donated gifts during the Christmas/Chanukah season, and spend time with the seniors, who otherwise spend the holidays alone, watching the rest of the world celebrate as they watch their TV. The "elfing" program was started when VN noticed a dramatic spike in the number of accidents and hospitalizations during the holidays, because the seniors felt that no one cared, and that it didn't matter to anyone whether the senior lived or died. Once the "elfing" program started, there was an immediate decrease in accidents and hospitalizations to near-normal numbers. For most of the seniors, these are the only gifts they receive.
- Volunteers escort seniors to cemeteries, houses of worship, senior center programs and on other special visits, providing emotional support and a trustworthy companion. The psychological benefits to the seniors of a visit to a museum or the theater with their volunteer are enormous.
- And, of course, Visiting Neighbors provides vital socialization and recreational opportunities, including seniors going out for walks, and small socialization groups so seniors can interact with others in a safe, nurturing setting, and get the mental stimulation they so desperately seek.

With regard to the proposed elimination of DFTA's intergenerational programs, there will be no opportunities for seniors and youth to interact in productive and healthy ways.

I would like to highlight for you some of the impact our intergenerational program has on our homebound and frail seniors:

- Vital support with errands and shopping during daytime business hours when most adult volunteers are working and unavailable
- Someone to escort them to medical appointments who provides a steady arm to lean on and emotional support
- A chance to make a new friend and extend their family
- A chance to make a positive difference on a young person's life
- An opportunity to feel valued and share their wisdom and life experiences
- Someone who keeps extra eyes and ears on their condition to alert professionals promptly so emergencies can be averted
- An incentive to see their doctors, eat their meals and take care of themselves
- An opportunity to stay emotionally connected, alert and mentally stimulated
- Someone to share hobbies and interests with

For a low-income homebound senior, these are "core" services. Vital, life-sustaining services such as these must be considered "core" services or perhaps another term is "required." Without them, they will be forced into nursing homes, or they won't even make it that far. Most of the seniors we serve are just above Medicaid-eligibility criteria, but cannot afford to pay privately for help on an ongoing basis.

Our frail seniors struggle valiantly to survive independently, but DFTA and the City is turning their back on them because they are no longer mobile enough to go to a senior

center for congregate programming. These seniors are frail, isolated, frightened, vulnerable and proud.

Before the recent cuts, we received \$103,351 from DFTA for our Friendly Visiting Program, and \$63,352 for our Intergenerational Program. This represents approximately 35% of our agency's budget. These prevention-focused programs are extremely cost-effective, and ultimately save money by reducing the need for more expensive interventions, and ultimately the cost of nursing home care.

To put it bluntly, DFTA and the City gets a lot of bang for its buck with our programs. They won't be able to replace what we do, or how we do it. It takes years to establish trust and the skill set required to help this diverse and vulnerable population. DFTA's case management programs refer to us on a regular basis as do hospitals, home health agencies, Visiting Nurse services and many organizations in the communities we serve. No one will be able to help these seniors. The stage is being set for disaster. The City will be disgraced as news becomes public about seniors who formerly received services that have been eliminated as "non core" are found dead on the floor of their apartments.

My goal is to convey the urgency of this situation. These seniors cannot wait nor can this issue be put on a back burner. Restore our funds so we can continue to do our essential work. The holiday season and the winter months are particularly hard for our seniors.

We are all counting on all of you! I have enclosed copies of letters from just a few of our seniors expressing their concerns. Help us turn this ill-conceived decision around to come to a more positive outcome.

Sincerely,



Dr. Cynthia Maurer
Executive Director

Dec. 8, 2008

Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg
CITY HALL
New York, N.Y. 10007

Your Honor,

I am an 80 year old senior, with a legal disability for thirty years. I am alone for eight years, since the death of my husband.

I feel extremely fortunate to have been helped by the Visiting Neighbors. They accompany me to doctors' appointments, shop for groceries, and will send volunteers for companionship, if needed.

Most important — Although in reality I am alone, I never feel alone because Visiting Neighbors has been like "family," always there for me with a helping hand. I feel "blessed" because of their presence in my life.

Please, don't take away the only family I have — Thank you —

Sincerely,

Hilda
45 Christopher St.
New York, N.Y. 10014
Phone: 212-257-1000

cc: Visiting Neighbors
Christine Quinn

L

Ms. Ruby
11.20.08

①

Dear Hayer Blomberg
My Name is Ruby Lee.

I am a Senior Citizen
75 Years old I live alone

My health is not that good,
My knee is not that good

I cant walk that good,
I cant walk that good.

Osteoporosis Arthritis
in My back Sometimes I

Cant walk it hurts So
much I have to sit if I dont

I will fall, I cant see in my
right eye I had Surgerst

Major Degeneration
With the help of Visiting

Neighbors I manage, they are

L

Ms. Ruby

②

I understand there is a budget,
Cut and one of the areas they

Plan to cut is Services to Seniors
Seniors cant fight back, Some

are not strong they just sit and
wait for some to help them,

that some one is Visiting Neighbors
they are always there to help

Volunteers are well train
they take the Seniors Shopping

to the Dr. for walks,
Companionship so they could,

talk to them they really do
nice things for the elderly

I count on Visiting Neighbors.
to take me to the Dr, Seniors

Shopping I always get to have

L

Ms. Ruby

③

The Volunteers are well train
Dr Cynthia Maurer

Executive Director
She did a good job she trai

her staff well they are
very kind,

Very kind,

Please Mr Hayer
If you really care about the

Elderly with the help of Go
Keep Visiting Neighbors open

do it for the Seniors
so they could live a little

bit longer,
Thank you Mr Hayer

God Bless you
Ruby

Visiting Neighbors
12/16/08

Oh you are truly remarkable people, you
staff, Board of Directors, and Volunteers!
I was, am, deeply moved by the kindness,
caring, generosity you've lavished on me
and, I dare say, on many others in this
holiday season.

How especially sweet it is to know you are
there during quiet and tough times.

Ever so gratefully, I am
Bernard (call me Bud)

To the Staff, the Board of Directors,
and all the Volunteers at Visiting
Neighbors --- my

Best Wishes for a

Merry Christmas

and a

Happy New Year

Thanks too, for all that you
do to enhance our lives, planning
trips, providing visits by
volunteers and remembering us
at Christmas time.

You are like Santa Claus all
year long! Many thanks, indeed! Love
[Signature]



Banner Day

December 10, 2008

Entered Visiting Neighbors,

It was a most pleasant surprise to receive your most generous gifts.

At a time when so many people are unable to shop for themselves or for others, it was a heartwarming gesture of caring.

Hopefully, the other recipients were as pleased as my sister, Celia and I, Linah were.

We wish a Merry Christmas, a happy Chanukkah, and a very bright New Year for all of you!!!

We thank you for thinking of us.

Sincerely,
Celia and Linah

12-10-08

To the Visiting Neighbors,

I am writing this note to tell you how much your holiday gifts were appreciated.

Each gift that I opened was surprising & exciting. I also found them useful.

It was so thoughtful & generous of all the people involved to give their time to make a difference for an elderly person like me.

I wish you a happy Holiday & New Year.

Thank you so much.

Mildred

Thank you
for

Always

Remembering
me



Jessica
77 Bleecker St. Apt.
New York, NY 10012

...and best wishes
for the new year.

Love

Jessica D

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 842 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeremy Woldrop

Address: Assistant Commissioner - District Development

I represent: Department of Small Business Services

Address: _____

▶ *Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms* ◀