

## Villages are Thriving Thanks to Resident Effort and Ingenuity

By Lynne Feldman,  
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New door sweep installed by Village Neighbors volunteers. *"Bert went over & beyond [with] the repairs on my exterior doors. I am thrilled."*  
 Image courtesy Village Neighbors.

The vast majority of older people in Western Mass want to "age in place," or continue living in their homes and communities for as long as possible. To achieve this goal, people can seek support from their local aging network. This includes Councils on Aging, senior centers, LifePath (an Area Agency on Aging), private businesses and workers, and friends and family. However, some people find that it can be hard to find help for certain kinds of tasks, like home upkeep, running errands, and working with home technology. Past generations had larger extended family groups—nieces, nephews, adult children and their spouses, grandchildren—to shovel driveways and rake leaves, provide rides or bring a bag of groceries, or move and set up a new cable TV. Older people may worry that not being able to manage these tasks will mean they will have to move in with a relative or into assisted living or a nursing home. Today, with families being smaller and more spread out, community residents may need to band together to support one another with these types of activities. This is where Villages come in.

Villages are groups of residents who come together to make helping neighbors with small tasks safer, more convenient, and easier. Residents can volunteer to help, knowing that the Village will ensure that the people who most need their help can get it, and knowing they will receive training, instructions, and insurance coverage against liability. People, usually those aged 60 and over, can request help from the Village knowing the volunteer has been vetted and trained, and without having to "call in a favor." Instead, the person needing help calls the Village phone number, which is operated by a volunteer call manager. The call manager takes the request for help and assigns a volunteer able to help with the task. If they can't help with a particular need, they will refer the person to LifePath or a trusted professional.

Usually, people requesting help need to enroll as a "member." Some Villages charge a membership fee, while others fundraise

to cover program costs. The Villages in our area are strictly volunteer organizations, with any fees or fundraising going to pay for insurance, computers and phones, printing brochures, and other direct costs. In many Villages, residents can be both members and volunteers, depending on their abilities and needs. For example, someone may no longer be able to clean gutters, but can cook or provide companionship for someone else. With the help of the Village, this person can give and receive valuable services that help them to age in place while remaining active and enjoying socializing and meeting new people.

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In our area, there are several Villages in operation, thanks to the hard work of their founders, board members, and volunteers. They are:

- Valley Neighbors, serving Whately, Deerfield, and Sunderland, MA. They offer transportation, tech help, companionship, social opportunities, grocery shopping, light home and garden chores, and small repairs. Free. [ValleyNeighbors.org](http://ValleyNeighbors.org) or 413-453-9057.
- Northfield Neighbors at Home, serving Northfield, MA. They offer transportation, tech help, companionship, social opportunities, and lending a hand around the house or yard. Membership fee of \$60 individual; \$90/household. [NeighborsAtHome.org](http://NeighborsAtHome.org) or 413-200-8183.
- Petersham Partners, serving Petersham, MA. They offer transportation, home repair and maintenance, companionship, grocery shopping, and assistance with opening, reading, and sorting mail. 978-724-0078.
- Village Neighbors, serving New Salem, Leverett, Wendell, and Shutesbury, MA. They offer transportation, tech help, home repair and maintenance, companionship, social opportunities, and grocery shopping. Village Neighbors also offers a comprehensive newsletter outlining the many available options and activities. Free. [VillageNeighbors.org](http://VillageNeighbors.org) or 413-345-6894.

Amherst and Northampton also have Villages.

One of the biggest challenges Villages face is an ongoing need for board and committee

members and volunteers. If you live in one of these towns and have a little or a lot of time available, please consider getting involved. Volunteers who have a variety of skills are needed for tasks such as driving, light carpentry and home repair, home technology, shopping and cooking, or companionship. Those with

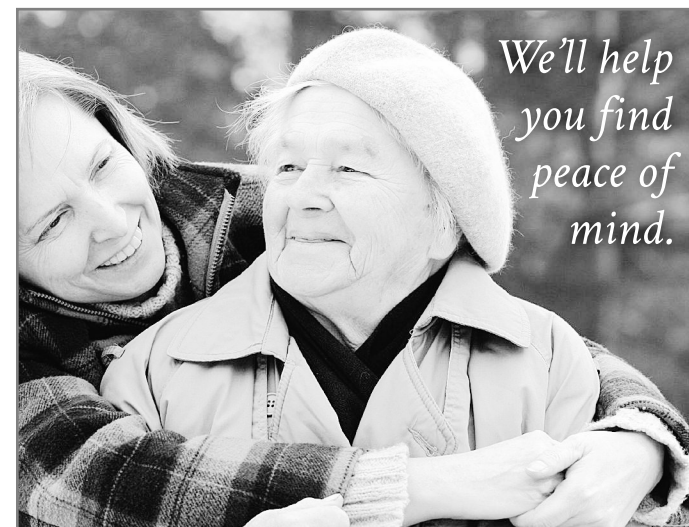


Rebuild of rotting front stoop. *"This is a wonderful organization and much needed, [because it is] difficult to find people who are willing and capable to solve problems."* Image courtesy Village Neighbors.

leadership, organization, marketing, finance, or management skills, or those who have new ideas, should consider joining a Village board or committee. Since these are for town residents, by town residents, they can only succeed in their mission if enough people get involved to help.

If you live in a town not served by one of the existing Villages and you are interested in helping form a Village, please call us at 413-773-5555 x2215, or contact your local Council on Aging to ask if others are working on a Village or would like to meet to discuss the idea. LifePath maintains a mailing list of those working on Village projects in the area and shares information about learning, networking, and funding opportunities with those interested. (Some Villages are partially funded by the Community Foundation of Western Mass, LifePath, the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, and others.) [Vtvnetwork.org](http://Vtvnetwork.org) is the standard resource on the Village Model and is a great starting point also.

By taking the lead in creating aging-in-place programs in their towns, residents are helping to ensure the safe and happy lives of their neighbors, and all of us, as we age.



*We'll help you find peace of mind.*

*You care so wholeheartedly and do so much, but sometimes it's hard to do it all.*

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