

# Community Building: Reaching Out to Elders

By Judy Pritchard, Lead Educator at Home Base Learning Center



One of the worst aspects of this pandemic for nursing home residents must be the fact that they cannot have visitors, not even close family members. To help ease residents' fear and loneliness, this project will have you examine forms of communication that are allowable, what makes a quality card or letter, and how to determine where your communication should be directed.

- Regardless of your chosen communication method, you want to make sure that you are engaging your new friend, never being patronizing or dismissive, and truly inviting back and forth communication!
- I suggest written communication first, in order to establish a connection with your friend that they may look at repeatedly and cherish. Unlike a phone call that cannot be re-visited, cards and letters can be read and re-read; particularly helpful if your friend has memory issues. Save phone calls for later, if your friend would like to receive them!
- What makes a quality letter? No, just signing "Your Friend" to a cute card does not cut it, unless you are 5!
  - Tell your friend a bit about yourself, and why you are writing.
  - In advance, think up interesting and authentic questions to ask your friends about themselves and their lives. These questions should invite answers that are of interest to both of you!
  - Asking great questions may provide an opportunity to actually establish a lasting rapport/relationship with an inter-generational friend!
- Check out nursing homes in your area, or in an area far away from you. The former may allow you (with your parents' permission) to visit your new friend if you "click"; the latter may be of special interest to you both about what is going on somewhere else in the country.

## Sample Questions:

- Who was president when you were my age?
- Did you ever do something as a teenager that you really regretted?
- What was your favorite music as a child? What about now?
- What was the most interesting/frightening/unusual event of your lifetime?
- What kind of job/career did you have? Did you find it meaningful?
- Many elderly people have memories of long ago that are much more clear than recent memories. Let this color the kinds of questions you ask.