



# Connecting People with Alzheimer's with Kids

*by Linda Holloway*



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UNIQUE FOCUS ON NURSING HOME ELDER, THE INVISIBLE AND FORGOTTEN SEGMENT OF OUR SOCIETY



Bessie's Hope has the solution for two societal issues that involves two disenfranchised populations---“forgotten” nursing home elders and “at-risk youth”. Sixty percent of nursing home residents across the country receive NO personal visitors. On the other end of the age spectrum, a growing number of youth are slipping into an abyss of hopelessness and violence.

After over 23 years, Bessie's Hope is still the only organization in the entire country with this mission---to enhance the lives of these “forgotten” nursing home elders by cultivating mutually rewarding relationships between the elders and volunteers of all ages from youth groups, adult groups, families, and individuals. Bessie's Hope provides education and training for all these volunteers, so as to enable meaningful interaction with elders of all levels of cognitive functioning, including advanced Alzheimer's Disease. The organization coordinates with elder care facilities to schedule the volunteers' visits and facilitates the interaction between the elders and volunteers. From preschool through high school, Bessie's Hope coordinates with schools to integrate the experience into a service-learning project. A number of residential treatment centers for teens who have behavioral issues partner with Bessie's Hope. These youth have the opportunity to experience compassion and respect for self and others, as well as the feeling of being needed and valued. Because of Bessie's Hope and the relationships with the elders, the teens are able to make the choice to leave the rut of hopelessness, to which they have become so accustomed, and take the steps toward becoming responsible, compassionate and productive adults.

Without Bessie's Hope, hundreds of nursing home elders would receive no 1:1 visitors. Without Bessie's Hope, there would be no organization that would provide the training for families and individuals and the placement within the nursing homes, so as to impact the alarming statistic – 60% of nursing home elders receive NO personal visitors. There would



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be no organized, structured program that gives kids of all ages the education and training to engage in the opportunity to see and feel the significant difference they have the power to make in someone's life.



Nursing home and assisted living elders spend so much of their time just waiting, and Bessie's Hope volunteers give them something to look forward to. Bessie's Hope activities engage all the elders on the level at which they can participate, because all activities are done "with", not "to" or "for" them. All volunteers are trained to interact with their "grand-partners" at the varying participation levels. In the case of visiting with residents who have Alzheimer's Disease, Bessie's Hope volunteers are trained to be "present" with the elders in the elders' reality.

The elders benefit from: sharing their wisdom, telling their stories, feeling included as an active participant, feeling respected for their life experiences, enjoying the youthful energy from the youth groups, enjoying the loving touch of all the volunteers.

If you are looking for community service hours for an entire group of children or teens or for hours for individual teens; for a service learning project for your students; for a team-building community service project for an adult group; for a special bonding experience for your family; for a special volunteer experience for yourself that will change your life----Bessie's Hope provides everything to make this easy and rewarding for you. As a second grade boy said, "my class will never be the same." 303-830-9037; [www.bessieshope.org](http://www.bessieshope.org); DVD to view programs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ml4Glo0xCd0>



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