Young or old, most people need a little help now and then. An organized caring community network can provide the support needed to help people through a rough spot, or help them remain in their homes.

INCLUDED IN THIS KIT:

1  Overview
2  The Basic Steps
7  Online Calendar Resources
8  Sample Survey for Developing a Caring Community Network
How to Build A Caring Community Network

Overview

The Problem
At some point in our lives, many of us might face difficult circumstances – from aging-related challenges to major life events like having a baby, battling illness, caring for a frail family member, or recovering from loss. Often these events mean we need help with small tasks such as preparing meals or running errands, or we may need more support for particularly challenging situations. Sometimes people lack sufficient family support in times of need. Meanwhile, others would be happy to lend a hand – but may not know help is needed, nor how to help.

The Solution
A neighborhood support network can help in numerous ways, including organizing people to provide meals when needed, helping one another shovel snow, sharing offers to drive someone to church or the grocery store, arranging walks for a neighbor’s dog, even identifying a good handyman who will offer discounts in the neighborhood. It also might involve more connections among trusted neighbors, including those who are frail, supplementing the support they receive from family. When friends and family help each other together, everyone feels good.

Time Commitment
Several hours a week for a few months to form caring community teams and get things started. After that, you’ll need a few hours per month (or more as you choose) to help neighbors and organize occasional community get-togethers.

Special Considerations
Once you get this project rolling you will need to stay committed and be prepared to ramp up activity on short notice. For example, a neighbor might go in for emergency surgery and suddenly need to rely on your caring community for help.

Who Can Do This?
Everyone.

Great Reasons To Do This Project
- Help neighbors who could use a little support
- Strengthen neighborhood and community bonds
- Build a network that will be there for you when you need it
- Coordinate services or activities together; you may be able to get group discounts
- Have fun engaging with others in your community

Visit CreateTheGood.org for more opportunities, tools and ideas to help improve your community.
The Basic Steps

Step 1: Learn Your Community’s Wants And Skills

A survey is a great way to identify what members of your community need and how they’d like to help. See the sample survey in this guide. This survey was developed by members of Prairie Crossing Volunteer Corps, in Prairie Crossing, Grayslake, Ill., to capture specifics after an initial community discussion.

To begin such a conversation in your community, you might start with a neighborhood gathering like a potluck dinner/picnic, block party or other fun get-together. Let people pitch in by bringing an item and inviting nearby neighbors to attend, as this strengthens community bonds. After that, you might ask whether people would like to meet and discuss developing caring community teams. Such a discussion can help inform a survey. Use the attached survey example as a guide – feel free to shorten or edit it based on what you feel fits, and what’s doable in your community.

Step 2: Assign Team Leaders

Use your survey results to determine the sort of caring community your neighborhood wants to build. Ideally, many community members will express desires and also offer to help. For example, you might have one neighbor who is so busy with caregiving that he doesn’t have time to run out for groceries or mow his lawn. Based on survey results, identify the main things people want and decide on a few teams to cover those things. Organize those who want to help into those teams, based on what people say they want to do. If you have nurses, carpenters or aspiring chefs among your group, some team assignments may easily fall into place. Identify someone who can lead each team. Examples of tasks that can be assigned to teams include:

- Driving
- Handyman services
- Food prep and drop off
- Personal connection and support
- Navigating health and community resources
- Pet care
- Yard care
- Social events

Based on survey results, you might also reach out to local businesses or community colleges to seek ideas about addressing certain identified needs (e.g., discounts on home repairs, shared exercise classes, discussion groups, how-to classes.)
STEP 3: Engage Your Team Members And The Broader Community

Your next step is to invite your teams to get to know one another better, and start building stronger connections across the community. This will set up your teams to know when help is needed; collaborate well when a need arises; and offer help in a way that’s most comfortable to the person in need. Once you’ve identified teams, hold a get-together to discuss how the teams might implement some easy ideas from survey results.

Your survey might offer ideas about what people want, such as discounts on coordinated home heating/air conditioning service, or maybe a walking club or book group. Or you might invite people to help plan and contribute food/games for a community-wide get-together (neighborhood barbeque, July 4th parade and games, sand-castle/snow-sculpture contests, etc.). Whatever you do will help people know one another better.

You’ll need a way to communicate with the community about these activities. If there’s a community newsletter of some sort (e.g., a list serve, or monthly flyers) you might use that. If that’s not available, figure out an easy way to share information across the community.

Ask whether there’s someone in the neighborhood who would agree to manage an online group, or post flyers at key corners, elevators, or a local community location. You might also consider developing a local phone list, including info about special skills.

Your team members might also think about ways to stay connected to specific people in the neighborhood. Some might already know lots of people and offer to stay in touch with them. Others might suggest there are a couple people on their block they’d like to get to know better. Again, go with what people think will work.

Step 4: Offer To Help

As you build connections across the community, you may find that no one needs special help initially. That’s fine. You might start with a project that benefits a larger group of neighbors (e.g., helping one another
prepare for emergencies), or a nearby cause (e.g., reading to youth.) Check out www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to for a host of ideas. You also might find that some teams are busy initially, while others are not – so you might need to cross-pollinate. Sometimes an event – like a lengthy power outage – can create a more pressing need for outreach and service among community members and can be a catalyst for recruitment.

Invite your neighbors to join various projects, and also tell them whom to contact if they need a hand. As many people are more comfortable with those they know and trust, it’s also helpful for individual team members to put the word out to neighbors they know best. And, when your team does learn of someone who might need assistance, the person they know best should offer and arrange help – if they’re interested.

Examples of people who might need help include:

- Someone with reduced mobility due to a broken foot
- A neighbor caring for a frail loved one
- Someone who recently had major surgery
- An individual who might appreciate a regular stop-by from a trusted neighbor
- Parents who recently had a baby
- Someone who needs a hand with minor repairs, or moving something heavy
- A neighbor who recently lost his/her spouse

It is crucial that the person or family you are helping fully understands what to expect. Again, working through someone very close to the recipient, make sure it’s clear what tasks your teams are offering to do, how often they’ll be around, age range of the volunteers and, for special projects, what expertise they have. Someone may want some of what you’re offering but decline other services. Always respect those desires and requests.

You’ll also want to establish a clear and consistent way that recipients can identify volunteers. Some caring communities use T-shirts with a simple logo or badges. Such a system gives added comfort to the recipient and reduces the chance that someone unaffiliated with your community could slip into a recipient’s home undetected.

Visit CreateTheGood.org for more opportunities, tools and ideas to help improve your community.
STEP 5: Start Helping

If the need you’ve identified is easily met with your established teams, that’s great. If the need exceeds the capacity of your teams, ask additional neighbors, friends, family and other community members to help. Often, people rise to the occasion for a special need. Be sure to make all those requests in a way that’s comfortable to the person you’re helping.

If your volunteers see a need that is outside the scope of your teams – for example, your group may not be able to provide round-the-clock care – make sure they know to tell you about it. That way you can discuss additional options with the person being helped – e.g., local service agencies, help from family, etc.

If you need additional help within the scope of what you can do, consider personally approaching people to ask. If the need requires extensive scheduling, you might find it easier to use an online calendar, so community members can schedule things like rides, meals or errands. See more information about online calendars in the Tip Sheet in this guide.

As you and your teams work to help someone through a tough time, it is important to remain sensitive to the person you are helping. Most of us are particular about how we run our households and, while people likely will appreciate what you are doing, make sure your teams are respectful and always honor the individual’s privacy. Establish a clear expectation that people are not to repeat what others tell you, nor share anything that’s heard or observed while helping out.

Also be sure to reflect people’s preferences in the way you offer help. For example, someone recovering from illness might be too tired to socialize, or a new mother might not want anyone to wake the baby, so you could put a cooler on the porch in which to leave meals. Or, a family caregiver might have complicated needs and responsibilities, so you might have to go with the flow.

At the same time, the person you are helping should feel comfortable asking for specific things. Be sure to reiterate that your teams are there to do whatever the person needs (within reason, of course).
STEP 6: Build On What You’ve Started

Once you’ve started helping others in your community, discuss amongst your teams what’s working, and what you might like to do differently. Reach out to the person or people you’ve helped and ask for their honest feedback. Stay alert to the capacity of your team to help – keeping expectations in line with people’s abilities and time. Discuss how you might improve or adjust your caring community approach.

Continue to be alert to neighbors who could use a hand. By now, everyone in the network should be aware of what you’re doing and alert to opportunities to help. Be sure people know who’s on each team, so they know whom to ask.

Remember, even small projects – like repairing a railing on a porch, or sharing dinner once/week with a neighbor who lives alone – can mean a lot to the person who benefits, so don’t think you have to mobilize your entire network for every situation. The important thing is to nurture the sort of caring community your neighborhood envisions and can support.

STEP 7: Inspire Others On CREATETHEGOOD.ORG!

TELL US WHAT YOU DID!

We want to hear stories about how you helped give back to your community. www.CreateTheGood/stories. You just might inspire others to do the same.

SHARE FEEDBACK

We are always looking for feedback on our materials, so please let us know how this guide was helpful or additional information you wish we could have included. Share lessons learned and other tips for others who are organizing caring communities at www.aarp.org/community/groups/CreateTheGood

KEEP UP THE GOOD!

Remember, whether you’ve got five minutes, five hours or five days, you can make a positive impact in your community. And if you have more time, consider organizing another service activity, finding local opportunities and posting your events at www.CreateTheGood.org.
Online Calendaring Options
Caring Support And Information

Depending on your situation, one of the three sites listed below may help you to arrange caring supports. If you choose to use one of these tools, you’ll need an email address and password for access, and will then follow a series of questions and prompts to customize your site.

**CaringBridge**
www.caringbridge.org

This free, customizable site helps connect family and friends during a serious health event. It’s a good tool for keeping friends and family informed about a person’s condition and for visitors to leave messages of love and support. Users can sign up to be notified when the journal is updated with new information. You can also have your customized website turned into a CaringBook, a professionally printed book.

**Lotsa Helping Hands**
www.lotsahelpinghands.com

You can use this website to create a free, private, web-based community to organize family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues – a family’s “circles of community” – during times of need. Easily coordinate activities and invite and manage volunteers with an intuitive group calendar. Communicate and share information using announcements, message boards, and photos.

**CareFlash**
www.careflash.org

Share caregiver experiences with others who are seeking knowledge, resources, and insights into providing the best possible care for their senior loved ones. Once you register, you can set up a private, personalized Care Community to help organize a care team, assign roles to each care team member, share photos, post supportive messages, maintain a care calendar, report on scheduled events, chart recurring health readings, and more.

As you review these options, please consider privacy issues and be sure that the person you’re helping is comfortable with this approach.
A group of volunteers has organized a task force to examine ways to create an environment in our community that will permit us, our friends and neighbors to choose to remain in our homes as we age or need extra assistance due to injury, illness or physical condition. This survey is designed to collect information about the likely need for services in our community in the near future. For now, the questions address services in three areas: home maintenance and repair; health and wellness; and daily living and convenience services.

We are hoping you will respond to this survey. In the first part, please indicate whether you feel that you would benefit from particular services now, and if not now, 5 years into the future. The second part of the survey includes a few more open-ended questions that will help us better understand what people in our community are thinking on these issues. Survey responses may be confidential if you wish, but if you are willing to include your name and contact information it will permit follow-up questions and discussion.

To the extent survey results or comments are published, that will be done without identifying information, unless your permission is obtained.

Name (optional) __________________________________________________________

Address (optional) ______________________________________________________

Telephone number (optional) _____________________________________________

E-mail address (optional) ________________________________________________

Please return your survey in the enclosed pre-addressed envelope. Feel free to include notes, and use the back of pages or extra sheets of paper if you would like.
A. Home Maintenance & Convenience Services

1. Would you be interested in having the following services automatically and reliably provided? (Mark √ if yes.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>In 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Min. twice annual inspection and report on repair needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer A/C inspection, winter furnace inspection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Plumbing, water heaters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sump pump system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report &amp; recommendations for how to get the needed work done</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General handyman services such as light &amp; battery replacements,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stuck windows/doors, opening/closing problems, blown fuses &amp; outlets,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minor carpentry repairs, things you don’t know how to do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

2. Would you like to have recommendations you consider reliable, on repair needs and providers, regarding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>In 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roof repairs &amp; replacement; incl. gutters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exterior repair, sealing, painting windows,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doors, trim, porch, steps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walkway, driveway maintenance, incl. snow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>removal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior renovations, incl. painting, floor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>replacement, projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major electrical work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furnace, water heater, other equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>replacements &amp; repairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
B. General, Health, Social Wellness Services

3. Are you interested in the following daily living and convenience services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>In 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meal preparation or meal service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation at your convenience (local)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping, groceries, library books, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry, dry cleaning, other services with time intervals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular house cleaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

4. Health & wellness: Are you interested in the following services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>In 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First response/on call to determine a course of action for health events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy home health care/social worker: regular attention to regular needs; administer medications; bathing; supervise diet; etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical &amp; occupational therapy (at home)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical/dental/specialist referrals Help with selection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical equipment: procurement for &amp; return after temporary use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of health insurance claim &amp; other forms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

5. Social & educational activities: Which of these services are you interested in?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>In 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General get-togethers, coffee, tea, breakfast club, potluck, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies and crafts, done in groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group games: bridge, chess, scrabble, various other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group music, playing instruments, singing, listening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature outings, bird watching, seed collecting, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study &amp; discussion groups: books, history, philosophy, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminars, workshops, presentations set up by/for the group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
How to Build A Caring Community Network

- How-to classes, computer, internet, specialty cooking, exercise, etc.  
- Entertainment trips, theater, concerts, movies, excursions, etc.  
- Volunteering for various causes  
- Other:  

Notes:

6. Organized physical activities: Are you interested in the following services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>In 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled and tailored group exercise programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking groups (indoors and outdoors)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiking, biking, x-country skiing (with supervision &amp; help if needed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming &amp; water exercise groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

7. When you consider remaining in your home at a point in time where you will require assistance, what issues and concerns are foremost in your mind?

8. Are there services, not included in those listed in this survey that you would like to see provided? If so, what are they?

9. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up survey, interview or discussion about these issues, concerns and needed services?  
   - Yes  
   - No  

Visit [CreateTheGood.org](http://www.CreatetheGood.org) for more opportunities, tools and ideas to help improve your community.
Demographic Information

1. The size of your household now is: 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 or more ___

2. Do you anticipate that changing within three years? ___ If Yes, to how many people? ___

3. (Please respond with numbers for as many as apply to your household.) Is your age within the range of:
   under 55 ___ 55 - 64 ___ 65 - 74 ___ 75 - 84 ___ 85+ ___

4. How long do you hope to live in this community or nearby?
   For the rest of my life ___ 1 - 4 years ___ 5 - 10 years ___ Over ten years ___

5. Do you use email? ______ Do you use the Internet? ______

Notes:

Thank you for completing this survey. The summary of responses will greatly assist our future discussions of what is important to the community.

If you would like to contact the (name of neighborhood group) about its purpose, feel free to phone (name) at (#) or email (name) at (email address)

(Date survey is sent)

Special thanks to Prairie Crossing Volunteer Corps, of Prairie Crossing, Grayslake, Ill., for developing this survey example.
Additional Resources

AARP Caregivers Resource Center
www.aarp.org/caregivers

AARP Online community group discussions
www.aarp.org/online-community/groups

Eldercare Locator
www.eldercare.gov

Project Compassion
www.project-compassion.org/index.php

National Alliance for Caregiving
www.caregiving.org

Faith in Action
www.fianationalnetwork.org

National Family Caregivers Association
www.nfcacares.org

National Respite Locator Service
www.respitelocator.org

AARP Online how-to kits on home safety, medication management and more
www.CreateTheGood.org/how-to

Special thanks to Prairie Crossing Volunteer Corps, of Prairie Crossing, Grayslake, Ill., for contributing to this toolkit.