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#### Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Newsroom" (2020). *Newsroom*. 1861.  
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/newsroom/1861>

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## Georgia Southern telephone reassurance program helping seniors during trying times

June 16, 2020



*The ROAD Foundation presents a check to Love In Action for their telephone reassurance program. The program will help older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.*

Sometimes a simple phone call can improve a person's day. The Senior Companion Program at Georgia Southern University is aiming to improve the days of many older adults in the area as a part of the new Love In Action telephone reassurance program, which is funded by a grant from Rockin' Out Alzheimer's Disease Foundation (ROAD).

"The telephone reassurance of the student callers will not only be an opportunity to brighten someone's day, but also creates a social tie, which research shows improves health and longevity," said Love In Action Director, Deb Blackburn. "I am also hopeful that this intergenerational contact will give some students a new appreciation for older adults."

The program will begin by calling the 300 people on the Senior Companion Program waiting list and offer this service, which can be vital during the COVID-19 Crisis. Older adults are among the most vulnerable people in the midst of this pandemic. The telephone reassurance program will allow the Senior Companion program to provide assistance to seniors who have been on their waiting list, as well as others in the community.



*Tanaja Armendariz*

Sociology major Tanaja Armendariz, who was one of the first students to call people the program, has enjoyed the experience of getting to know more older adults.

“My favorite part is calling them or their families and just explaining what the program is about,” Armendariz said. “I like just letting them know that there are people out there who are willing to help in any way that they can. I guess I like giving people hope.”

Darron Burnette, who is the Chief Financial Officer of ROAD, started the foundation in 2012 in an effort to raise money in memory of his mother who had Alzheimer’s disease and passed away that same year. ROAD has given money it has raised to a variety of organizations related to Alzheimer’s research and the treatment of people with dementia, including multiple groups at Georgia Southern. He said the COVID-19 pandemic created the opportunity for ROAD to support the Love in Action program.

“During COVID-19, we were trying to figure out how we could help people out there,” Burnette said. “We felt like there was an immediate need for us to seek out the Senior Companion Program because of their involvement through the telephone.”

ROAD co-founder and Chief Executive Officer, Chandler Dennard, said the Senior Companion Program aligned perfectly with ROAD’s vision, which is to help senior citizens with dementia, as well as caregivers who are caring for dementia patients at home.

“According to the Alzheimer’s Association, 83% of the help provided to older adults in the United States comes from family members, friends or other unpaid caregivers,” Dennard said. “Nearly half of all caregivers who provide help to older adults do so for someone living with Alzheimer’s or another dementia, so looking at that statistic this program fits perfectly. The money will provide the necessary resources for the program to thrive and to continue to impact the community.”

Burnette said he hopes the Love in Action program can expand later this summer and raise awareness for other projects ROAD is doing to help Alzheimer’s patients and other homebound people. In addition to the Love in Action program, ROAD also has a Caring Closet in Statesboro that provides personal hygiene supplies for dementia patients at no cost.

“We do hope that we’ll have the opportunity at some point to spend more time to go out and provide some supplies for the seniors who are out here facing this disease,” he said. “They don’t have to be dementia-type patients. Some just are elderly, but the older you get, the higher-risk you are for developing some type of dementia.”

Armendariz said Love in Action has strengthened her belief in the value of helping others in need.

“I’m just hoping to reach the people who are in need of help and get them the services they need,” she said. “People should never be isolated and kept away from resources they need. What I will take away from this experience is a positive attitude, and I’ll always lend a helping hand.”

The Senior Companion Program is administered through Georgia Southern's Center for Social Gerontology housed within the Department of Sociology & Anthropology. For more information, visit [cbss.georgiasouthern.edu/gerontology/community/senior-companion-program/](https://cbss.georgiasouthern.edu/gerontology/community/senior-companion-program/)

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