

Friendships Reflect Our Worth

By Katie Wade, senior director for creative engagement for Front Porch

As Maya Angelou so aptly stated, “A friend may be waiting behind a stranger’s face.” We all start as unfamiliar others before finding ourselves on a unique path to friendship. Each path to friendship is a one of a kind experience, with specific scaffolding forming the bonds beneath the friendship: perhaps it’s the phase of life we find ourselves in, or the prism of our personal experiences, or our sense of humor. We join together in many interesting ways, some to be expected and others from delightful surprises.



You know what all friendships *do* have in common? Friends put in the work to show up for each other. Contrary to the romantic comedy trope, we don’t just trip and fall into relationships. No, quite the opposite. We make conscious decisions to make time in our schedules for friends, to show up during hard times, to listen with open minds, and to hold those relationships in gratitude. Friendship is two people saying: I think you are worth the effort. Give that a moment of thought. Recall the last time you spoke to any friend in your life, no matter the context for the conversation, and remember – *they think you are worth the effort of friendship*. Worth making time for. Worth remembering to ask about your sister or how the garden is coming along. Worth reflecting how your presence in this world matters. Whew, that is strong stuff! This is one of the reasons friendships are so critical to our lives. They are a mirror of our value, our place in the world; their very existence is proof that we matter.

One of the nonprofit programs I work with, Social Call, thoughtfully matches older adults and volunteers for weekly phone or video visits. Occasionally volunteers and older adult participants remark that this is an unlikely start for a friendship. In part, this is because 70% of Social Call matches are intergenerational. How radical in our age-segregated society! One volunteer said of her new friendship, “Lawrence and I continue to connect and deepen our friendship. Age is irrelevant and what counts most is authentic connection through shared values, kindness, and giggling :)” With the distance between age groups in our society, it’s easy to think we might not have a lot in common with someone much younger or older than us. Ah, but the friendship scaffolding is unique for all! Bonds form for many reasons that have nothing to do with age and sometimes the age difference is a place of connection in and of itself. Whether the age difference is beside the point or the whole point, cross-generational friendships are delightful mirrors of the value we each bring.



Click the image above to read the Social Call Zine.

Another way Social Call supports unlikely friendships is that volunteers and participants live throughout the U.S. and connect virtually. They would never show up to the same book club or wait at the same bus stop every morning; there is no opportunity for chance encounters. As one volunteer noted, “Social Call has allowed me to connect with someone that I may have never really got the chance of meeting, and truly have gained someone in my life that I care for and enjoy talking to.” There is nothing quite like forming a friendship with someone who lives many miles away and still makes the time to connect regularly. I have to say, it feels extra special, like the excitement of having a pen pal!

Finally, one of the pieces of scaffolding that seems to underpin every Social Call relationship is gratitude. I’ve never met a more grateful bunch than the staff and members of Social Call. Every piece of feedback, every reflection on the weekly visits, every quote, is built on a deep sense of gratitude. Gratitude for the unique individual they are matched with, for the genuine sense of connection they build together, for the shared moments of vulnerability, intimacy, and humor. Social Call is proof that gratitude can provide long-lasting, sustainable fuel for meaningful relationships.

Would you like to volunteer to visit with one of our participants? Find out more about volunteer opportunities for Social Call by clicking here.

This month, during National Friendship Month, I invite you to reflect on the meaningful relationships in your life. What is the scaffolding that binds you to those relationships? Is it connection over

similarities or differences, is it the effort you put in to maintain the friendship, is it how they remind you that you are worth the effort? Get specific about what you appreciate and send a note of thanks to those friends. To be sure, the gratitude will feed you as much as them.

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