

"DEAR FRIEND" PEN PAL PROJECT

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LETTER WRITERS

Thank you for participating in the "Dear Friend" Pen Pal Project! This project is part of Aging Well Whatcom's work to promote connection and support between generations.

HOW IT WORKS

- Community groups and individuals write notes, cards or postcards to residents of assisted living and skilled nursing facilities, Meals on Wheels recipients, and other elders who are more likely to be socially isolated.
- Notes and cards are mailed to the Chuckanut Health Foundation or dropped off at a community partner site.
- Chuckanut Health Foundation distributes letters in batches to the receiving facilities and organizations.



WHY INTERGENERATIONAL LETTERS?

While interaction across generations has always been important, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased isolation among older adults. The "Dear Friend" Pen Pal Project grew out of the recognition that letter-writing is an actionable, meaningful, and safe approach to building connections during this time when opportunities for in-person interactions are more limited.

The [Aging Well Whatcom Blueprint](#) includes vision statements and strategies in six key areas that will build community culture, physical infrastructure, social supports and services to ensure that everyone in Whatcom County can age well. **Intergenerational Community** is one of the six Blueprint areas.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Notes should not be addressed to a specific person, but simply start with "Dear Friend."
- Notes and cards should not include the date. It may take longer than normal for notes and cards to be delivered, so leaving off the date will help readers feel special even if there is a delay in delivery.
- Many letter receivers will not be able to write back. If letter writers are interested in possibly hearing back, they can include their full name and return address in the letter (letters may be separated from their envelopes).
- Individuals or groups of any age can write cards or letters.
- Individuals or groups can write as many letters as they would like—or just one.
- Avoid religion, politics, and personal views. Since we don't know exactly who will receive letters, it's best to leave out sensitive topics.

TIPS FOR WRITING TO OLDER ADULTS YOU HAVEN'T MET

- **Start with "Dear Friend"** to make the receiver feel special and cared for.
- **Be brief.** Your note doesn't need to be long, and in fact sometimes receiving a long and involved letter from an unfamiliar person can feel strange. Remember, even a quick greeting makes someone's day brighter and can be re-read over and over again.
- **Write it by hand.** This gives your message a personal touch – no one has your handwriting but you!
- **Make it neat and write slightly larger than you normally would.** Make sure your recipient can read the wonderful words you write them!
- Sign your note or card with your first name so your reader knows it's coming from a "real" person: YOU!
- Add "Dear Friend Pen Pal Project" after your name. This will help the recipient understand why they are getting a letter from you!



SEND COMPLETED CARDS AND LETTER TO:

[Chuckanut Health Foundation](#)

1500 Cornwall Ave, Suite 201
Bellingham, WA 98225

OR

Drop them off at a community partner site:
the [Whatcom Family YMCA](#), [Art & Happiness](#),
and [WECU location night drops](#).

Please clearly mark the envelope
"Dear Friend Pen Pal Project".

Please help us document
and improve the "Dear Friend"
Pen Pal Project!

We'd love to receive stories, photos, comments,
or suggestions from our letter writers.
Your feedback about how to improve
the project is appreciated!

BE KIND AND THOUGHTFUL

- Try to write in a way so that anyone who receives your letter will feel that it is meant especially for them.
- You want your note to be personal, but not all about you! Remember that writing a letter is an act of generosity and kindness.
- Write a wish you have for your reader, or words of encouragement. Let them know that they matter and that someone is thinking of them.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF!

- Where do you live?
- Who is in your family (including pets)?
- Where do you go to school or work?

MARK THE SEASONS

- What is your favorite thing about the current season and why?
- What seasonal changes are happening outside in nature?
- What is the weather like?
- What does this season remind you of?

HOLIDAY GREETINGS

- Send wishes for a happy holiday.
- What is your favorite thing about this holiday?
- How are you celebrating it this year?

BE CREATIVE!

- Use your creativity, imagination, and talents to make your note fun and unique!
- Draw a picture, decorate your note with bright colors or add other personal touches.
- Include a joke, poem, photo or quote.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? Contact us at
AggingWell@chuckanuthealthfoundation.org

NOTE: Please be aware that the Chuckanut Health Foundation may photograph or photocopy some of the cards and letters as part of documenting this project. If cards or letters are photocopied, names will be removed. Writers who submit cards and letters do so with permission for Chuckanut Health Foundation to photograph or photocopy them.