

## **IOG: Senior Companion / Respite Aide Program**

The Institute of Gerontology's Senior Companion/Respite Aide (SC/RA) program allows the District's seniors to assist their fellow senior citizens through volunteerism. The program helps to preserve the independence of residents of the District of Columbia, supporting low income and disabled older persons 60 years and older with high quality and compassionate volunteer service. SC/RA volunteers receive a stipend and benefits, which help to improve their economic conditions and maintaining a sense of self-worth.

Now heading into its 46<sup>th</sup> year and with more than 80 senior volunteers, SC/RA is facing funding cuts ahead of the next fiscal year. So why is this this program of so much importance? Because it fulfills a civil service amongst our growing aging population - one that after a lifetime of experience, still finds itself the growing, forgotten majority.

SC/RA improves the lives of fellow seniors who need assistance to maintain dignified and independent living in their homes and communities. Senior Companions serve older adults with disabilities or with terminal illnesses for 20 hours a week. Companions assist senior clients in essential ways, including offering companionship to isolated older adults, assisting with chores, and adding richness to their clients' lives.

Respite Aides provides in-home assistance to seniors living alone and provides support to the care-giving families. This service helps the individual and/or family deal with the challenges of independent living in older adulthood.

Ms. Cornelia Mack, 78, is a seventeen-year veteran of the Senior Companion program, and cares for a wheelchair bound client. Some of her duties include taking her clients on daily walks, grocery shopping and to church. Ms. Mack also looks after two other seniors outside of IOG's program: "Just because I volunteer through Gerontology, the volunteering does not stop. And as long as I have health and strength in my body, if there's help needed, I've got to help."



Senior Companion Volunteers and Respite Aides serve their clients for four hours a day, Mondays through Fridays and receive a stipend through UDC's Institute of Gerontology,

which is grant-funded. One of the challenges of the program is the 40 percent loss of funding provided by the DC Government. As a grant-funded program, this means that the number of participants will have to be reduced; a gut-wrenching prospect to seniors who both give to and receive from the programs, and many of whom are low-income residents of the District.

Another volunteer, Ms. Marshelia Thompson, 80, has been a Senior Volunteer with the Institute of Gerontology for four years. She serves as a home companion to a wheelchair bound client, aged 79. Some of her responsibilities include assistance with medications, paying bills, reading, and filling out forms, escorting to doctor's appointments, and preparing meals. Ms. Thompson participated as Mistress of Ceremony for the 43<sup>rd</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Senior Volunteer Recognition Program.



Ms. Marshelia Thompson explained: “Being a part of this program has really helped me and my client. I enjoyed visiting my client daily, which kept us both busy doing everyday activities. Since joining the program, I have participated in various UDC in-house workshops, like the Spring 2025 Hybrid Chronic Disease Self-Management Workshop, and the Fall Prevention Awareness Week 2025. Whenever I attend a workshop, I like to take some of the information back to my client. I also attend the Nutrition and cooking demo on Monday's, which has changed my diet and has me eating much healthier.”

“This program has served D.C. in huge ways and has been very impactful on the city,” explains Dr. Lillie Monroe-Lord, Director. The goal of service is to have people age gracefully at home and not have people in institutions and nursing homes. For more information on the Senior Companion Program, please contact James Lee, Senior Program Coordinator, [jlee@udc.edu](mailto:jlee@udc.edu) or for the Respite Aid Program, please contact Mirielle Mbakop, Senior Program Coordinator, [mireille.mbakop@udc.edu](mailto:mireille.mbakop@udc.edu) or call (202) 274-6697.

Next time you encounter a senior? Thank them for their service. Thank them for their

life. Visit the Institute of Gerontology [online](#) for more information.