



The Upbeat

Finding Your Purpose

January 2023, Volume 8



Welcome to the January 2023 issue of Upbeat!

This issue's theme is Finding Purpose. What better time than a brand new year to focus on our purpose in life—not in the past or the future but right here, right now. Whether you believe “we are all here for a reason” or that there is no reason until you make one, having a purpose in life infuses our days with joy, motivation, and a deep sense of fulfillment.

Having a purpose in life can be especially important as we get older. Society may tell us that we are no longer useful or relevant, but it's simply not true. Every moment of our lives is just as important and meaningful as any other. Every stage of life holds unique opportunities to learn and grow.

In this issue we cover many topics. You'll read articles about a new, inspiring definition of elderhood; the health benefits of having a strong purpose in life; and why volunteering is a surefire way to lend greater purpose and happiness to our days. Last but not least, we showcase one of our Allies, Danielle Zenus, an inspiring woman who finds deep purpose in life by helping older adults age successfully and in honoring the memory of her son, Aaron.

In my own work as an occupational therapist, I've seen how a sense of purpose helps people to thrive. A 97-year-old woman whom I worked with attributed her ongoing independence to volunteering twice a week at a skilled nursing facility. A gentleman in his 80s who walked his grandson to school rued weekends when he had “less to do.” Other adults I've worked with have found purpose in quiet reflection or education. There's no one recipe: only you know what works best for you.

As we exit the holiday season and enter the depths of winter, I hope that this issue of Upbeat ignites some fires in your heart and mind for what purpose 2023 might hold for you. I'd love to hear about what fills your life with purpose this year and always! Write to me and/or send a photo anytime at newsletter@assuredallies.com.

Wishing you a cozy and fulfilling winter,

Dr. Anna Annecca, OTD, OTR/L
Clinical Operations and Development Leader

Elderhood is Full of Promise—and Purpose



By Katharine de Baun. Katharine is passionate about promoting Successful Aging in her job as content manager at Assured Allies.

In her new book “Ageism Unmasked,” author Tracey Gendron refashions a too-often-forgotten idea: there is a vital purpose for our later decades, should we be lucky enough to live a long life. She reframes “old age” as “elderhood”, a distinct developmental stage in the human lifespan that, just like childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, opens up new opportunities and calls us to accomplish a unique set of developmental tasks.

So what are the opportunities and life tasks that open up like a treasure chest once you reach elderhood (it’s a stage, not a number, but most of us probably reach it by age 60 or so)? I’ve outlined five aspects below. As you read this list, see if anything resonates or sparks an idea about your own life and the personal growth that 2023 might hold for you.



You’ve never been more unique. Older adults are more diverse than any other age group. Your health history and the sum total of your individual experiences, learnings, habits, and life choices make you a marvel to behold! One 85-year-old volunteers at a local food bank and has early-stage dementia while another runs marathons. One 76-year-old travels the world while the other finds the world in a windowsill garden. Elderhood is a time to celebrate your uniqueness: you are irreplaceable.

You strive for authenticity in your own self and your relationships. You are less willing to engage in people, things, or activities merely for show or status. Your circle of friends and acquaintances may be smaller, but each relationship will tend to be more meaningful.

You may feel a pressing need to reflect on the different experiences and roles you’ve played in your life and to integrate them into the person you are still becoming today.

You embrace vulnerability. It’s easy to think, when at the peak of our physical and mental powers, that we are invulnerable, able to solve any problem that life throws at us. As we age, however, it is much more difficult to sustain this illusion. Our bodies and minds are aging; we all rely on the care of others. Learning how to embrace our own vulnerability with grace and strength helps everyone—at any age—accept and even celebrate our interdependence.

You focus on being and becoming more than doing. We spend so much of our adult lives racing from one thing to the next, getting ahead in our careers, raising families, and living by the clock. As we get older, the present moment tends to blossom into a kind of richness and depth, a timelessness that was harder to attain when we were younger. At long last, we’re not trying to “get” anywhere. We are here!

You see the big picture. You’ve lived through a lot. You have gradually made peace with the fact that you won’t be here forever. And maybe as a result of your accrued experience and wisdom, you start approaching what some call gerotranscendence, or the ability to look beyond the limits or needs of your own life to achieve a greater understanding and compassion for the needs of all.

Volunteer to Help Others—And Yourself!

By Assured Allies Editorial Staff

Volunteering is a surefire way to fill your life with purpose. If you're interested in helping but unsure how to start, this page provides inspiration and resources to get you going.

Older Volunteers in The News

Old Ladies Against Underwater Garbage: Tired of the trash she kept encountering in Cape Cod ponds, Dr. Susan Baur, 81, kickstarted the group “Old Ladies Against Underwater Garbage.” The group dives weekly from May till September, picking up golf balls, beer cans, Gatorade bottles, and even, once, a garden gnome. “One of our secret weapons is we don't care what we look like. We are encased in black stuff, we can drag stuff out of the pond,” said Bauer in a CBS Boston profile about the group.

Th!rd Act: Environmental activist Bill McKibben launched the non-profit Th!rd Act to foster “a community of experienced Americans over the age of sixty determined to change the world for the better.” From the comfort of your living room you can attend one of their virtual events and get involved in one of their current campaigns at www.thirdact.org.

Award-Winners: Google “older adult volunteer awards” to find dozens of inspiring stories like that of 82-year-old Thelma Smith, who earned the AmeriCorps Senior Services Award in 2022 for over 7,800 hours of service in the Utah County Senior Companion Program. Her words are a testament to the powerful benefits of volunteering: “I was so lonely after my husband passed. Having someone to visit and get to help has helped keep me healthy and sane. I have met some sweet ladies and they have taught me so much. They have given me a new life.”

Ponder Point

Too often, older adults are portrayed as a “burden” upon society. This is deeply misguided on at least two levels. First of all, if we stand by the value that caring for each other is one of the highest forms of human achievement, then those who receive care are providing others with invaluable opportunities, not burdens. Secondly, there are legions of older adults who volunteer to care for others, as you can see on this page!

Older Adult Volunteers Wanted!

These websites match older adults with volunteer opportunities.

AARP's Create the Good: Search for volunteer opportunities by keyword and zip code. <https://.createthegood.aarp.org>

AmeriCorps Seniors: Get matched with an organization dedicated to helping others. www.americorps.gov/serve/ameri-corps-seniors

GetSetUp: Volunteer to teach at GetSetUp, which offers live online classes for older adults on a variety of topics—work, fitness, technology, cooking, and more. www.getsetup.io

Golden Volunteer: Search for volunteer opportunities based on availability, location, interests, friends, and preferences. www.goldenvolunteer.com



Finding Purpose for Your Health

By Assured Allies Editorial Staff

Why is it important to find your purpose?

In his bestselling book “The Blue Zones,” Dr. Dan Buettner discovered a strong correlation between health, longevity, and life purpose. Purpose in life also correlates with better sleep quality, reduced risk of hypertension and inflammation, delayed physical disability, enhanced cognition, and lower mortality, findings that have been confirmed across studies encompassing thousands of older adults. While the exact biological mechanisms remain unknown, the correlation makes intuitive sense: feeling that one’s life is meaningful beyond oneself—that one is needed, wanted, and appreciated—is deeply vitalizing and rewarding.

Quick Wins



Take any small step. If you’re struggling to find your purpose, you might be stuck in that blah or meh feeling that some psychologists call languishing. To find your oomph, try small wins. Write or walk for five or 10 minutes. Clean out and organize a kitchen drawer. Arrange some flowers in a vase. The momentum you gain can lead to bigger projects. Try it!



Call a friend to say hi. Living a purposeful life is highly correlated with being connected to a strong social network. Likewise, feeling connected to other people can remind you of what you value in life and jumpstart your purpose.



Reach out to help someone else (or volunteer). Research has shown repeatedly that by helping others we improve our own mental health and feel more satisfied and engaged in life.



Join or start a book group. Even if it’s just with one or two friends, reading a book and discussing it together will give you a shared sense of meaning and broaden your mind. And it doesn’t have to be a whole book: discuss a chapter, a short story, or a single poem.



MemberSpeak

What gives you purpose in life?

“I am thankful that I am still here and able to go to church each Sunday. My church means a lot to me; that is what gives me purpose.”

Janis D., 94.

For our next issue, we’re looking for members to answer the question, “What’s new in your life?” Please reach out to your Ally to send in your answer or email us at newsletter@assuredallies.com.

We’d love to hear from you!



A Passion to Help Older Adults: Meet AgeAssured Ally Danielle Zenus



By Katharine de Baun. Katharine is passionate about promoting Successful Aging in her job as content manager at Assured Allies.

AgeAssured Allies are experienced aging professionals who help our members age successfully in whatever place they call home. Each brings purpose and passion to their work with older adults, as you'll see in this interview with Senior Ally Specialist Danielle Zenus.

What do you most enjoy about helping our members age in place?

I have always wanted to help people, and this is my dream job. I strive to be an active listener and an advocate for those who need one. The joy I experience in providing service every day to our members and their families is more than I could have hoped for.



Danielle and her son Aaron in 2016.

One of the most rewarding parts of my job is seeing over and over again how the smallest things make a big difference. The check-in calls and small items that we send our members, from educational resources, grabbers, sock aids, and night lights, are so appreciated. Sometimes just listening attentively to what is going on in someone's life has an impact. On one of my check-in calls, a member even said "Love you!" at the end.

That's wonderful. What other services do you provide?

I love using my "detective skills" to find resources and services available in their communities for our members all over the U.S. that they might not know about. When it goes well, this simple act can open many doors for people and support their desire to

remain independent. Recently I helped a couple, Beverly, age 87, and Donald, 88, connect to several local resources in their area—from housekeeping services to meal delivery, caregiver support, and personal energy-conserving tips—that have made their lives a lot easier, especially as Beverly's health has declined and Donald has stepped in as her caregiver. "I love your approach," he told me. "The Allies are so thorough and do their job beautifully."

You are about to celebrate your 50th birthday. Has working with older adults affected your views about your own aging?

Every life has its challenges, and aging can be one of them. I am inspired by the spirit, generosity, and wisdom of many of our members. Donald, for example, who I mentioned earlier, is a role model for me. In the wake of Beverly's health issues, Donald has taken up all of the shopping, cooking, and housework, and helps Beverly manage her medications. His spirit is undaunted. "I love being a caregiver," says Donald, "It gives me joy."

I am also inspired by Beverly, who has accepted Donald's caregiving with humor and grace. Sometimes that can be even harder than caregiving. "I love this restaurant!" Beverly tells Donald, who now cooks most of their meals. They laugh together a lot.

I am also forever inspired by my oldest son Aaron, who passed away about three years ago. He always showed kindness and compassion to all and was an avid volunteer. He spent the last two years of his life coaching Special Olympics basketball with our family.

I am so sorry to hear about your son. That's quite the legacy.

His legacy is a big part of how I view my own. I want to make sure no one forgets him, and if he is watching over us, I want him to be proud of me and my family. We created the Aaron Zenus Foundation in his honor and recently opened up a candy store in Milford, MA called Sweet Inspirations which offers employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

That's amazing! And very moving. We all suffer losses in life.

Losing a loved one can be the most difficult time in your life and yes, many of our members have experienced such losses, often many times over. Channeling that grief in a positive way can make an impact on the lives of many others. I've seen many members find a way to do that on their own, and sometimes talking with an Ally can help. The small steps you take in the face of life's challenges really do make a big difference over time.



We're Here for You

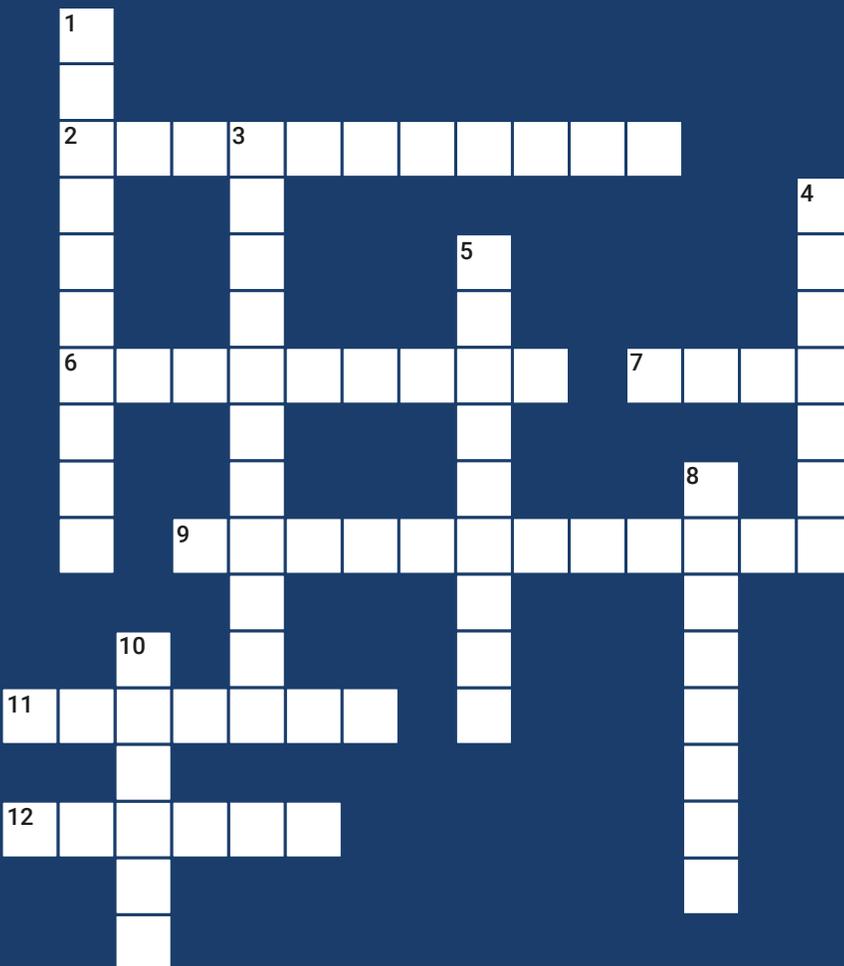
Do you need help continuing to age successfully at home?

Our team of AgeAssured Allies, experienced aging professionals, are ready to take your call Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm ET and provide you with the advice and support you need. Call our toll-free number anytime to speak to an Ally (or leave a message during non-business hours):

(866) 727-7833

Finding Your Purpose: A Crossword Puzzle

Note: All of the words refer to content in this issue of Upbeat!



Across

- 2. Feeling blah or 'meh'
- 6. A better term for "old age"?
- 7. "We don't have to get anywhere. We are _____ !"
- 9. Sweet _____ : name of a candy store that employs individuals with disabilities
- 11. Assured Allies wishes for you to have a happy one.
- 12. Winter eventually comes to an end and then it's _____ .

Down

- 1. They tend to live longer, happier lives.
- 3. An item found at the bottom of a pond by the "Old Ladies Against Underwater Garbage"
- 4. Talking to them can strengthen your purpose in life.
- 5. Join one if you're lonely and like to read.
- 8. Another item found at bottom of ponds by "Old Ladies Against Underwater Garbage"
- 10. Older adult volunteers sometimes win these.

EDITOR'S NOTE

We hope you enjoyed this edition of "The Upbeat." Feel free to share this newsletter with your friends, family and neighbors as well. We welcome any feedback, comments, or questions you may have. Please reach out to us at newsletter@assuredallies.com. If you prefer to receive this newsletter in electronic format, contact us as well.