

NBRC Senior Companion News



NEW YEAR ~ SAME KIND HEART

While January often brings talk of resolutions, diets, and gym memberships, it's also a perfect time to pause and appreciate what's already good; which, of course, includes each of you! Senior Companion volunteers give something far more lasting than any resolution: kindness, patience, and a friendship that brightens someone's day.

Every visit you make, every smile you share, and every story you listen to adds up to something bigger than you might realize. You're not just helping a client with conversation, or reaching their chosen goals; you're helping them feel valued as a person. That's a gift you repeat every day.

This year, instead of asking, "What should I change?" maybe ask, "What can I continue?" The compassion, humor, and steady presence you offer are already making life better for your companions. Keep doing what you do best—showing up, listening, and caring from a patient heart.

If you really need or want a "resolution," maybe make a promise to yourself that you'll pause each day in 2026 to notice one thing that you're grateful for. Maybe it's a hot shower, a loyal pet, a shared laugh, a favorite song, having enough to eat, or a special friendship. Being grateful for what we have is often the first step to improving our lives. Simple joys like remembering that volunteering doesn't just help your companion, it nourishes you, too.

So, here's to another year of kindness that doesn't need to be reinvented. You're already doing important work, just keep shining in that quiet, steady way you do. ■

Inside This Issue

Page 2: Training: Active Listening

Page 3: Test Your Knowledge

Page 4: Growing Together

Page 5: Stretch Your Brain —
Sudoku and
Unscramble Words

Page 6: Jan./Feb. Birthdays
Paid Days Off
Awareness and
Celebration Days

Join Us



If you know someone who would make a caring SCP volunteer, please have them contact:

Melissa Slama
melissas@nbrc.net

707.566.3005



North Bay
Regional Center



AmeriCorps
Seniors

A YEAR OF LISTENING

The Art of Being Fully Present

One of the greatest gifts we can offer someone is our full attention. Whether you're visiting a friend or chatting with clients at your day program, active listening is at the heart of true communication. It's more than just hearing words, it's being fully present and showing care, interest, and respect through both what we say and how we show up.

Verbal Listening Skills

Active listening starts with your words, tone, and timing. Try using open-ended questions like, "How did that make you feel?" or "What do you enjoy most about this?" to invite conversation. Short affirmations such as, "I see," "That sounds interesting," or a gentle laugh can encourage someone to keep sharing. Paraphrasing (repeating back the main idea in your own words), shows understanding; "So you're saying you felt proud when that happened?" It lets the speaker know you're really paying attention.

Avoid interrupting or jumping in with advice unless it's asked for. Sometimes the best help you can give is simply letting someone express themselves. Silence can be a powerful part of listening, too. It gives people time to gather their thoughts and feel safe opening up.

Nonverbal Listening Skills

Our bodies speak just as loudly as our words. Face the person you're talking with, keep gentle eye contact, and nod occasionally to signal that you care about what's being said. A relaxed posture and a warm expression help put others at ease.

If the person you're visiting struggles with speech or uses few words, nonverbal cues become even more important. A touch on the hand, a shared smile or simply sitting together can communicate understanding and connection. If your companion is nonverbal, please read to them from appropriate content, talk about your day, go on group walks, and sing familiar tunes. Pause frequently and look at them and judge if they are reacting positively. If not, gently ask if they want a favorite story or a song. Learn their preferences. Most importantly, keep trying and be aware of and open to their non-verbal cues.

The Reward of Listening

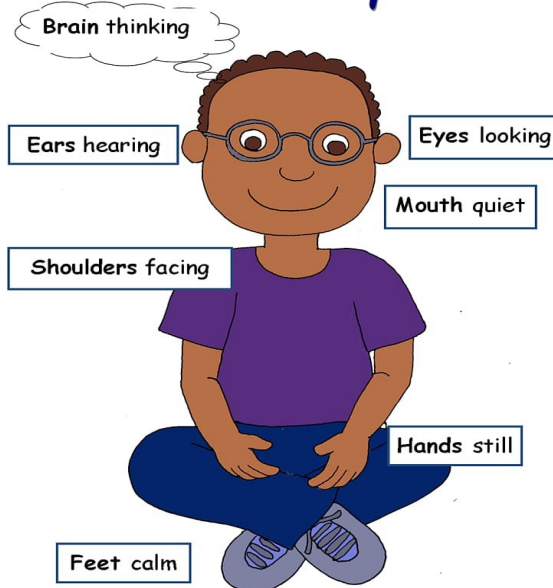
Active listening builds trust, eases loneliness, and strengthens the bond between companions. It turns a simple chat into something healing.

So this year, let's make it "The Year of Listening." Slow down, tune in, and let others know through your words and attentive presence that you are really listening and they truly matter.



ACTIVE LISTENING

Be a Whole Body Listener



Quick Listening Tips for Every Visit

Be fully present.

Put distractions aside (no phones, no clock-watching). Give the individual your undivided attention.

Listen with your eyes, too.

Maintain gentle eye contact, smile and not to show understanding. Body language often says more than words.

Reflect and clarify.

Repeat back what you heard or the meaning of what you observed in your own words: "So you were saying..." or "I'm guessing you want me to sing more?" This shows you care about THEIR opinion and you want to be sure you understood them correctly.

Embrace silence.

Don't rush to fill every pause. A little quiet gives space for deeper sharing.

Respond with empathy.

Simple phrases like, "That must have been hard" or "I'm glad you shared that with me" help others feel valued and understood.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. When practicing Active Listening, your main goal is to:

- A. Be thinking about what you want to say next
- B. Offer advice as soon as possible, even if not requested
- C. Understand what the other person is expressing
- D. Keep looking away from them and talk to others

2. Which of the following is a VERBAL listening skill?

- A. Nodding and smiling
- B. Maintaining eye contact
- C. Repeating or paraphrasing what someone said
- D. Sitting quietly waiting

3. Sometimes silence is golden because:

- A. It helps the listener appear wise like an owl
- B. It gives the speaker space to think and share
- C. It shows you're not interested
- D. It keeps them in the dark

4. Appropriate listening skill might include:

- A. Reading aloud or singing songs that fit someone's mood
- B. Checking your phone messages while the individual is talking
- C. Talking louder to fill awkward moments
- D. Closing your eyes and pretending to be asleep

5. When reading a story or singing to someone, Active Listening means:

- A. Watching their expressions and body language to see what they enjoy
- B. Finishing quickly to stay on schedule
- C. Avoiding eye contact to stay focused
- D. Reading the same thing every time, no matter what their mood

6. You can show understanding by saying:

- A. "That must have felt good," or "I can see why you'd feel that way."
- B. "You shouldn't feel that way."
- C. "That reminds me of my own story."
- D. "Anyway..."

7. True or False: Active Listening means agreeing with everything the person says.

☐ TRUE

☐ FALSE

8. When unsure what someone enjoys, the best approach is to:

- A. Keep doing what you always do
- B. Ask questions and try new things, and observe their reactions to learn their preferences
- C. Assume they like what you like
- D. Avoid trying new things



Receive 1/2 hour training credit
by sending your answers to:
lbordner@nbrc.net

Let's Grow Together

A new year brings new chances to grow, not just in gardens or windowsills, but in our hearts, our friendships and in our communities. Growth doesn't always mean big leaps or big changes. Sometimes it's about small, steady steps that make a life a little greener, warmer, and kinder for everyone.

As Senior Companion volunteers, you know that growth happens every time you share patience, laughter, or a listening ear. Companionship itself is like tending a garden—it thrives with care and attention. Every visit, every smile, every story you share plants another seed of trust and joy.

This year, why not bring that spirit of growth to life, literally? Growing something together is a wonderful, easy way to connect with people you serve. Indoor plants bring color and calm to a room and watching them thrive can lift spirits all year long.

Here are a few plants that are simple and fun to grow indoors:

Spider plants: they are forgiving and cheerful, they send out baby “spiderettes” that can be shared and replanted.



Succulents: they need only occasional watering and come in delightful shapes and colors.



Pothos or Philodendron: have beautiful trailing vines that grow quickly, even in low light.



Herbs like basil or mint: they smell wonderful and can brighten up mealtime.



African violets: will bloom beautifully on a sunny windowsill with minimal care.



Work Together:

Choose a plant, or even invite your companion to help you choose a plant. Together, you can name it, water it, and watch it grow. Over time, it becomes a gentle reminder of your shared moments; proof that care and consistency create beauty.

Like plants, people flourish when they feel noticed, valued and nurtured. So here's to a year of growing together with your companion, in patience, kindness and joy.



Easy Plant Care Tips for Beginners

Start Small

Choose one or two low-maintenance plants to begin with. Even a single cheerful pot can brighten a room.

Water Wisely

Most houseplants prefer to dry out slightly between waterings. Touch the soil, if it feels dry an inch down, it's time for a drink.

Let There Be Light

Place plants near a bright window, but avoid direct, hot sunlight. North or Southeast-facing windows are perfect for gentle light.

Feed Occasionally

A little plant food every 2 weeks to a month during the spring and summer helps keep them strong and green. Skip feeding in the winter when some plants rest.

Check In Often

Just like people, plants “communicate.” Drooping leaves, pale color, or slow growth are ways saying they need a little attention.

Celebrate Progress!

New leaves, blossoms, or even roots in water are signs your care is paying off. Take a photo to mark your shared success. Maybe even keep a plant diary with photos and your client's first name on the cover.

Remember, the joy comes from more than growing; it comes from sharing your experience.

STRETCH Your Brain

Sudoku Directions:

Use each number 1 to 9 just once within each row, column, and block.

UNSCRAMBLE WORDS

How many words can you make out of the letters in the word: **EXPECTATIONS**

(Total possible words of 3 letters or more = 1009)

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. A gold star sticker is placed on the left side, between the second and third lines from the top. The star has a slight shadow beneath it. There are ten lines in total, creating nine equal spaces for writing.

<https://wordfinders.com/solver/#results>



A

	3		1			8		2
		7	9		2	5	1	
1	2	5	3	7				9
	9	1		2	3		6	8
3		4	8	6				5
	6				5		3	4
9		8		3	7	4		
7	5		6	9		2	8	
2					1		9	7

B

		1	7	4		9		5
5	3	8	9			1		4
7				8	5		6	
	4	3			7		1	
8		9		1		4	3	7
	6		5	3	4	2		
		5	2		1		4	3
	1	6		5	8	7	2	
4		2		6		8		

Upcoming Paid Days Off / In-Service Dates

In-service dates are subject to change

NAME OF HOLIDAY	DAY OF HOLIDAY	DAY YOU TAKE OFF
New Year's Eve	12/31	Wed—Dec 31
MLK Jr. Holiday	3rd Mon. in Jan.	Mon—Jan. 19
IN-SERVICE	JANUARY	Thu—Jan 29
Presidents' Day	3rd Mon. in Feb.	Mon—Feb 16
IN-SERVICE	FEBRUARY	Thu— Feb 19

JANUARY 2026

A Few Celebration Days

- 1/1 New Year's Day
- 1/2 World Introvert Day
- 1/7 Palestinian Martyrs' Day
- 1/12 National Pharmacist Day
- 1/16 Religious Freedom Day
- 1/19 Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- 1/19-26 Cervical Cancer Prevention Week
- 1/21 Maternal Health Awareness
- 1/24 International Day Of Education
- 1/27 Holocaust Memorial Day

Read more about the topic in the digital version of the newsletter by clicking the links provided.

Awareness Topics

- Dry January
- National Poverty Awareness
- World Braille Day 1/4
- National Slavery and Human Trafficking Awareness
- Glaucoma Awareness
- National Mentoring Month
- National Oatmeal Month

Is there something you'd like to learn more about? Let us know: lbordner@nbc.net



Senior Companion Program

North Bay Regional Center
520 Mendocino Ave
Santa Rosa, CA 95401

Email: infoSCP@nbc.net
Phone: 707.566.3005



North Bay
Regional Center



AmeriCorps
Seniors

HAPPY
BIRTHDAY!



January 2026

Rkia M----- 1/1

February 2026

Luz C ----- 2/21

Shhh...the answers are below!

A

4	3	9	1	5	6	8	7	2
6	8	7	9	4	2	5	1	3
1	2	5	3	7	8	6	4	9
5	9	1	4	2	3	7	6	8
3	7	4	8	6	9	1	2	5
8	6	2	7	1	5	9	3	4
9	1	8	2	3	7	4	5	6
7	5	3	6	9	4	2	8	1
2	4	6	5	8	1	3	9	7

B

6	2	1	7	4	3	9	8	5
5	3	8	9	2	6	1	7	4
7	9	4	1	8	5	3	6	2
2	4	3	8	9	7	5	1	6
8	5	9	6	1	2	4	3	7
1	6	7	5	3	4	2	9	8
9	8	5	2	7	1	6	4	3
3	1	6	4	5	8	7	2	9
4	7	2	3	6	9	8	5	1