

# Social Services is here to help you

*Written by Peter Salmans*

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In light of the recession, it is a good time to be aware of aid and volunteer opportunities offered by the town's Social Services department.

Many of those services are aimed at helping Darien's elderly.

Olive Hauser, director of Social Services, said in a recent interview that, according to a group study by the Community Fund of Darien in 2006, 98 percent of the 57 participating Darien seniors want to stay in their current homes as they age.

Aging in Place, a program developed after the study by the Community Fund, went on to identify, "handyman services, transportation, fostering communication and preventing isolation" as the three most important types of aid for Darien seniors to be able to stay in their homes.

Social Services' latest initiative, the half-priced taxi voucher program, is just a month old. Senior citizens and the disabled are eligible for vouchers, which are purchased in advance and are good for participating taxi services.

Hauser said those who have already used the vouchers have cut the cost of using a taxi in half and have found them very easy to use.

Gallivant van services have provided transportation in Darien for years, but the taxi voucher program will afford participants more freedom of choice regarding where and when to travel.

The Gallivant takes seniors and the disabled most places in Darien, Norwalk and Stamford, and is available Monday through Wednesday from 9 to 4 and Thursday and Friday from 9 to 3. Vouchers are available at the Darien Social Services office, room 109, at Town Hall. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:30.

Seniors who want help with yard work, cleaning, or other types of handiwork should contact Aging in Place at 202-2912.

Social Services also has programs for families and other age groups. The back-to-school program has been especially active recently given the economic downturn. The back-to-school program provides those in need with newly purchased school supplies, backpacks, and a gift certificate to Payless Shoes.

Last year, 40 children received backpacks, school supplies, and a gift certificate — more than past years. Hauser anticipates the back-to-school program will help even more students this year, and welcomes all requests for assistance and donations.

Financial assistance programs are also busier than usual. These programs provide rent rebates for eligible seniors and the disabled and help eligible people pay fuel, utilities, rent, and some other bills.

Last year, fuel was particularly expensive. Some Darienites might also have trouble heating their homes this upcoming winter, particularly during the recession.

But with access to several different funds, Social Services is able to meet most Darienites' needs. "Unless we don't know them, there isn't anyone who has gone cold," Hauser said.

Hauser urged all Darienites in need of help to contact Social Services. She added that all assistance is provided confidentially. "We hope people feel comfortable coming here," Hauser said. "We wish that there be no stigma for asking for help."

Hauser continually praised the community's support, as well as assistance from the Community Fund, Board of Education, Person-to-Person, the Salvation Army, the Depot teen center, and others.

Hauser said the Friendly Visitor's program, in particular, could use more volunteers. Someone is needed to help coordinate the program, and more volunteers are needed to visit the elderly.

For more information about these or other programs run by the Social Services department, call Hauser at 656-7328, e-mail her at [ohauser@darienct.gov](mailto:ohauser@darienct.gov) or visit the Town Hall Social Services office. Volunteers and donations are always appreciated, she said.