

People, Pets and Friendly Visits

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If you have a dog or a cat, you're familiar with the way that wagging tail or contented purring can lift your spirits. And with the glow you feel when stroking or talking to your pet.

And now many people in nursing homes are enjoying the same pleasures, thanks to the volunteers for a Kensington-based program.

"Pets on Wheels" is a volunteer program in which friendly pets and their owners spend an hour with people who cannot get out.

Pets on Wheels is just one of many activities of the volunteers helping people countywide through the Mental Health Association of Montgomery County. "People Helping People" is MHA's motto. And the help is free, notes Christine Buta, MHA staff member we talked to recently.

You'll find this United Way agency along Connecticut Avenue just north its intersection with University Boulevard. For 30 years, MHA has been serving the community through efforts that include education, advocacy, and 14 kinds of direct services to people.

If you have a friendly dog or cat, are high school age or over, and have you own transportation, Pets on Wheels may be an ideal way for you to volunteer. MHA screens all pets and gives their owners training in pet therapy, which has been shown to be both fun and a way to lower stress and blood pressure, among other benefits.

If you don't have a pet but would like to do another kind of visiting, consider becoming part of another MHA service—Centralized Friendly Visitors. Volunteers of all ages visit elderly or handicapped people in private homes or nursing homes, spending about an establish a friendship and can visit and time—evenings and weekends included.

"It's a good way to get involved for people who are working 5 days a week and don't have a lot of time to volunteer," says Christine.

If you'd like to learn more about these and other services and volunteer opportunities, call MHA at 949-1255.