

## Seniors Helping Seniors

October 2015

Bronx River Houses resident Angel Morocho, 70, had a long career as a cook and taxi driver. Now in his retirement, he has the most rewarding job of his life, as a senior companion with Henry Street Settlement's Senior Companion Program.

"I like to keep my mind busy and be a very active person," Morocho said. "I like to help people; I like to help my community. So many people, most seniors, they really need some company. I hear many stories about seniors being alone."

Morocho is one of 105 senior companions in the program, which is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Senior companions, who must be at least 55 years old, may qualify for a tax-free stipend if they meet the program's income requirements. While helping fellow seniors live independently in their homes, and accompanying them on light shopping trips and social activities like museum outings and trips to farmers' markets, friendships flourish.

"I take care of them, make sure they take their medications on time; go to doctor appointments, optometry, general doctor, the dentist; go to the pharmacy to get medication with them, sometimes I watch TV and we have conversation. They are both very sweet and very funny," Morocho said. "

The Senior Companion Program provides an opportunity for healthy older adults to make independence a reality for their senior peers," said Program Director Rachel Hughes, LMSW. "Companions get to give back and contribute to their communities while providing a much-needed free service to seniors."

Each senior companion visits two to four seniors, spending between 15 and 40 hours a week with them. Morocho is a companion to two gentlemen, ages 76 and 77, who live a couple of blocks away from him at Bronx River Houses. He sees both clients four hours a day, Monday through Friday, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Together they participate in the activities and meals provided by the Bronx River Senior Center. On a typical day, Morocho will have breakfast with his morning client at the Senior Center and then have lunch and play dominos with his afternoon client.

During monthly training sessions, companions get informed about topics like health issues, including diabetes, asthma, and Alzheimer's; services such as Access-A-Ride, Medicare, Medicaid, and end-of-life documents preparation; and mental health, including depression and anxiety. Morocho shares what he learns with his clients as well as with friends and other seniors in the community.

Twice a year, Henry Street Settlement throws a party to recognize the companions' commitment and community service and many of the senior companions have formed friendships with other companions in the program. "I'm feeling like people really appreciate what I do. I have so many friends from volunteering, I meet so many different types of people," Morocho said.

Senior companions assist seniors throughout all five boroughs. Half of the senior companions live in NYCHA developments, as do many of the seniors they serve. NYCHA staff members supervise companions at six NYCHA sites: Van Dyke Houses, Reverend Randolph Brown Houses, Red Hook East, UPACA 6, Cassidy-Lafayette Houses, and Ravenswood Houses. Program Director Hughes said that Henry Street Settlement wants to expand the program to other NYCHA developments in the future.

"The Henry Street Settlement Senior Companion Program is a win-win program: it helps our seniors by providing friendly visits as a means of breaking social isolation, and it helps the senior companions by giving them a way to give back to their community through a senior helping senior peer support model," said Nora Reissig, Director of NYCHA's Family Services Department.



Bronx River Houses resident Angel Morocho, 70, says that he loves spending his time helping fellow seniors and his community.

*Photo courtesy of the NYCHA Journal*

*For more information about the Senior Companion Program and to see if you are eligible to volunteer, call the program at 212.477.0455 or visit [www.henrystreet.org/programs/senior-services/senior-companion-program.html](http://www.henrystreet.org/programs/senior-services/senior-companion-program.html).*