Honoré de Balzac, a French novelist and playwright, once said, “Solitude is fine, but you need someone to tell that solitude is fine.”

Few emotions are more severe than loneliness. The aging population is one group that is oftentimes subject to neglect, both by society and those who are expected to care for them. One can only imagine what it must be like for these seniors to live without any family to visit and bond with them.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, women make up 70 percent of the senior home population, and 46 percent of them are without children. Of those with children, seniors find it difficult to maintain a relationship with their adult children once they start their own families, much of their attention is consumed by their spouses and kids. Moreover, over 50 percent of seniors who are in senior homes do not have a relative to visit them, and 66 percent of the women in senior centers are widowed. The number of people the elderly come into contact with daily is often limited, and they long to see a new and refreshing face.

Elder loneliness is becoming a growing reality for numerous individuals. The number of elders in senior homes is expected to double by the year 2030, one-third of whom will have a disability or illness. That means that in the next twenty-five years, there will be about 72 million seniors in senior care communities.
This problem impacts those outside of the elderly realm as well. Louis Valerio, Chairman and CEO of Progressive Financial Services and GlamourGals Executive Board Member, relates his first hand experience of life behind the walls of senior living:

My parents were forced out of their home of 60 plus years due to various illness and accidents. As a weekly visitor, I witnessed the constant loneliness of so many residents. My parents were the lucky ones, but until the day my mom died this April, she always missed her home, friends, and daily routine.

The first step in aiding senior citizens and confronting elder loneliness is spreading awareness about the reality of this situation and encouraging others to become a part of the solution. One way that teens and young adults can apply themselves is by volunteering at senior centers.

At the GlamourGals Foundation, Inc. a not-for-profit organization, teens are inspired to provide ongoing companionship and makeovers to elderly women in senior care. The goal is simple, but the results are life changing.

Valerio conveys that the little things, such as a warm conversation or a piece of shared advice, have a huge impact:

I believe that through volunteerism and commitment to change, younger generations have the power to remind every senior citizen that they are appreciated. I have witnessed the excitement on a senior citizens’ face when a young girl rushed to a woman she had developed a special bond with to get advice on a dress design for her upcoming prom. Regardless of age, people can connect because they share one commonality — a longing for companionship.

This problem is significant because age and time are two things that are inescapable. However, people of all ages, especially young adults, can make a difference by volunteering a little bit of their time to provide elders with companionship. If we do not commit ourselves to filling the void between both ends of the age spectrum, there will be a never-ending cycle of indifference.
This article was written by Vashti Barran, Kira West, and Heeyoung Yoo who are Event Correspondents for the GlamourGals Foundation, who will host “GlamourGals Makeover” on June 20, 2012 during S.H.E. Summit Week. S.H.E. Summit Week, taking place June 18-24, is New York City’s first “women’s week,” with 35+ events designed for, by and about women to inspire each other in work, life & everything in between. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit shesummitweek.com.

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