

United Way of the Piedmont: Focusing on Community Impact

“Keeping Seniors Safer” is a United Way funded program provided through American Red Cross that teaches senior citizens and caregivers how to make their homes as safe as possible so that seniors can remain in their homes. Part of the program includes training on “Bags of Life,” a program which help senior citizens maintain independence through keeping valuable health and medical information in a safe place where the items can be found quickly in an emergency—in the refrigerator. Emergency responders are trained to look to the outside of the refrigerator for a “Bags of Life” magnet. The bag is placed inside the refrigerator, and the magnet helps identify where in the refrigerator the bag can be found. Each bag contains a medical history form and emergency medications.

One case manager from American Red Cross recounted a situation where a Bag of Life helped save an elderly woman who was home alone when she needed emergency assistance. A call from a local church requesting educational programs for their senior citizen group resulted in two “Keeping Seniors Safer” segments being presented to members of the congregation.

During the first presentation, the program director noticed one of the attendees listening but appearing to doubt the purpose of Bags of Life. At the conclusion of the program, the attendee told the presenter that she did not care to take one of the bags because she did not think it was needed. Persistence on the part of the presenter resulted in the reluctant attendee taking a Bag of Life home with her that day.

A few months later the program director returned to the same church to present the remaining segment of the program. The attendee from the Bag of Life program came up and requested a word with the program director. She stated that she was hesitant to take the Bag of Life, but decided to take it because her 80-year-old mother resides in her home. She completed the medical history and other information as instructed, placed the Bag of Life inside the refrigerator door, magnet on the outside of the refrigerator door and sticker on the front exterior door of the home. The lady said that she assumed the Bag of Life would just be a fixture in the refrigerator alongside the salad dressing and butter.

A few weeks later, the woman’s mother called her stating she was having medical issues and 911 had been called. As she pulled in her drive, the ambulance and medic unit were parked and running. Rushing inside, she observed one paramedic administering medical care to her mother. The other paramedic was seated at the kitchen table, reviewing her mother’s medical information from the Bag of Life to their worksheet. The woman’s mother was safe because the paramedics had information about her condition and all medications she was prescribed. That day, the Bag of Life proved to be more than just a fixture in the refrigerator. It helped ensure the safety and well-being of a senior citizen in her own home.

Bags of Life allow responding paramedics to act quickly and safely in emergency situations because vital information such as medical history, allergies, physician and contact information for the closest relative are kept in a central location. This program helps senior citizens and caretakers maintain independence through education and preparedness. For more information on Bags of Life, please call (864) 583-8000.

In addition, the Bag of Life allowed her, as the daughter, to also maintain her independence while serving as primary caretaker to her mother.