



Luke Mirra, 17, has been helping Eileen Gallagher, 90, for more than a year, and they recently cleaned up her Floral Park garage. Seniors pay the teens \$20 to \$25 an hour.

# Lend a hand, *make a friend*

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Special to Newsday

**S**ix or seven years ago, Jeanine Springer's arthritic knees kept her from getting down on the floor in her Stewart Manor home to clean the molding along the bottom of her walls. But she remembered a time when there was a local solution to such a problem.

"Growing up in Garden City, there was a nonprofit that

helped seniors with household chores that's now defunct," said Springer, 62, a retired disability services worker. "So I hired a kid on the block and paid her \$15. I said, 'Someone has to resurrect that old program.'"

That someone was her. By summer 2025, Springer

## 'Hire a Neighborhood Kid' program links senior citizens to teens who can help with chores

launched Hire a Neighborhood Kid Services for Seniors. The Stewart Manor-based nonprofit, also called HANK, pairs teens with seniors in Garden City, Floral Park and Stewart Manor to help with household chores, such as vacuuming, gardening, snow removal and technology support, among

other tasks. Teens also can provide seniors with regular visits that combine household help with conversation and companionship.

Springer said the program not only helps seniors to age in place and maintain their independence, but also provides teens valuable life lessons.

There are currently 70 seniors and 40 teens in the program.

Seniors pay teens \$20 or \$25 an hour, Springer said, adding that they typically work from one to three or four hours weekly. Teens can also volunteer and include the work experience on a high school resume for college applications. "While seniors get the help, teens get basic [work] experience," she said.

See HIRE on E12



HANK founder Jeanine Springer visits Lucy Ballow, 78, in Stewart Manor. Ballow values the conversations she has with HANK's teens, saying, "It's nice to be around young people."

# Bridging a generation gap

HIRE from E11

Both seniors and teens are carefully screened and undergo background checks. Teens are "handpicked and matched to seniors" based on their location, skill base and willingness to learn, she said. Since its launch, the program has matched 120 seniors and teens and logged 600 hours of "chores and chats."

## ORIENTATION SESSION

Springer said teens are required to have working papers and attend a one-hour orientation, where they learn communication practices with seniors, such as the importance of face-to-face contact and polite greetings, and review safety and training procedures along with program rules.

**"I would not have interacted with this person if it were not for HANK."**  
— Daniel McHugh, 19, who helped a senior organize his photos

"We have parents at orientation because the kids are minors, and the parents have to agree with the job the kid is doing," she said, stressing that the tasks are appropriate and safe for teens to perform. "We wouldn't ask a teen to climb a ladder to trim a 14-foot shrub with an electric hedge cutter," she said.

Emily Nabors, a gerontologist and associate director of innovation at the Washington, D.C.-based National Council on Aging's Center for Healthy Aging, said intergenerational relationships can help seniors

maintain a sense of purpose and connection while giving young adults insight into aging.

"Relationships between older and younger adults can help combat stereotypes and misconceptions by providing insights into what life is like as an older person," Nabors said. "It isn't sitting on rocking chairs knitting (although that may be a favored hobby). Most older people have the same basic needs and interests as young adults: getting out in the community or using technology to spend time with family and loved ones and doing the

things they enjoy."

Nabors said those regular visits can allow teens and seniors to connect through conversation.

## MAKING A CONNECTION

"A young person's regular visits offer the opportunity to form deeper relationships through meaningful conversation in which older adults can share their advice and life experiences," she said. "HANK Services' model of bringing older adults and younger people together in a practical everyday setting offers a low-

key, low-pressure chance for connection."

Eileen Gallagher, 90, acknowledges that her knees and shoulders are not what they used to be. The widow and great-grandmother, who dislikes chores piling up, welcomes the extra help around her Floral Park home.

When the retired special education teacher, whose grown children live mostly out of state and abroad, noticed her rose bushes needed trimming and her impatiens needed planting, she contacted HANK Services for Seniors after she came across a flyer at her local library.

In late spring, Gallagher was matched with Luke Mirra, 17, a Floral Park Memorial High School senior.

"I couldn't plant my impa-



Brendan Gullace, 16, gardens with Ballow. "It makes you feel good that you can help," he said.

tiens like I always did, so Luke planted the flowers, put out the patio furniture and trimmed the rose bushes," she said. "He is very willing. I tell him what to do, and he does it. In the winter, he'll be shoveling snow. I think he has blossomed since he has been with me because I've taught him a lot of skills."

When Mirra first signed up with HANK, he thought he'd drop out of the program to "do other things, such as Boy Scouts, studying and school clubs. I didn't think it would be for me," said Mirra, who had never worked with seniors before.

But 13 months later, he said the job had "opened a whole

world" for him. "It has built my confidence and taught me responsibility and self-reliance," he said. "It's the first real money I've made, and it has taught me how to save and spend."

The job not only taught Mirra about himself but also helped bridge the generational gap.

"I always knew I was doing a lot more [than chores]," he said. "It really shows what a small act can do. A lot of things we think are easy are impossible for older adults [to do]. It makes you feel good that you can help."

Chronic conditions, such as

arthritis and reduced bone density, can affect an older adult's mobility, making tasks like yardwork and reaching for items stored on a high shelf challenging, Nabors said.

"Most of us want to continue living in the homes and communities of our choice as we age," she said. "Yet our needs change as we age and require different types of support."

Roughly, three-quarters of older adults say they prefer to remain in their homes and communities as long as possible, according to a 2024 AARP Home and Community Preferences survey.

Lucy Ballow, 78, wants to do



Mirra helps Gallagher in all seasons. In spring, she said, "Luke planted the flowers, put out the patio furniture and trimmed the rose bushes."

## HANK connect

If you live in Garden City, Stewart Manor or Floral Park and would like to hire a teen to help with household chores, call Hire a Neighborhood Kid Services for Seniors at 516-760-9884 or visit [hankservices.org](http://hankservices.org).

just that. The retired Stewart Manor travel agent said health challenges have made tasks around her home increasingly difficult. HANK teens have helped her with jobs such as transplanting shrubs and dividing and replanting bushes.

"With health issues, everything has become difficult, and the program has helped me accomplish more," she said.

Although well-meaning relatives suggest she sell her house and move into an assisted living facility, Ballow plans to stay put.

"I like watching the young kids in the neighborhood, and the kids from HANK are personable. While they are working, they share their experiences with me," she said. "It's nice to be around young people."

## BUILDING A BOUNCY HOUSE

For Michael Volpe, of Garden City, the program provided similar help. Last spring, the retired aviation safety analyst turned to HANK for help with gardening and getting his house ready for his grandchildren's party.

"Could I have done this myself?" Volpe asked. "Yes, but I don't have the stamina and patience at 73."

Chris D'Amato, 18, of Floral Park, helped him set up a bouncy house and arrange tables. D'Amato, a freshman at Centenary University in Hackettstown, New Jersey, said he developed new practical skills like painting, planting flowers and shrubs along with refining his snow shoveling technique. He said he also gained insight into the lives of older adults.

"They really like people to talk to," said D'Amato, referring to older adults. "From both sides, people complain about each other [the young about the old and vice versa]. . . a lot of people generalize that maybe seniors are slow, but we can't generalize."

Daniel McHugh, 19, and a St. John's University sophomore, started working with HANK last summer. The Garden City South resident helped a retired older adult put down a rug and rearrange light furniture in his new apartment.

On one visit, McHugh was asked to organize some framed pictures. As he worked, the senior explained who some of the people were in the photos and shared stories about them.

"There were family members and friends. . . . It was the history of his life, like a slideshow, and it was a touching moment," McHugh said. "I would not have interacted with this person if it were not for HANK. Besides him sharing personal anecdotes about his life, seeing how his life progressed and seeing things he can do and those things he struggles with . . . having to peek into his life and help him out is just a great thing."