



STATE OF NEW MEXICO
Aging & Long-Term Services
Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham
Katrina Hotrum-Lopez, Cabinet Secretary
Sam Ojinaga, Deputy Cabinet Secretary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 15, 2020

Needed: Letters for Long-Term Care Residents

As the holiday season approaches, Aging & Long-Term Services asks letter writers to help spread cheer

NEW MEXICO – As cases across the nation surge, New Mexico’s Aging and Long-Term Services Department [ALTSD] is asking the community to help rekindle the holiday spirit within the state’s 300+ Long Term Care facilities (LTCs are comprised of Assisted Living Facilities and Nursing Homes).

“There are approximately 11,000 people living in Long-Term Care facilities right now. Many have been unable to see or be with family, to leave their facility, participate in activities, or share a meal over the past nine months. While we know COVID-safe practices are a critical way we can protect this vulnerable population, we also know the isolation our LTC residents experience is devastating.

“We have a simple ask- can you take a few minutes to write a letter? From the artwork of a toddler to the experiences of a fellow senior- these letters mean so much to their recipients. It’s a simple way to bring joy, hope, friendship, a smile- all of these things can be accomplished with one letter,” said ALTSD Cabinet Secretary Katrina Hotrum-Lopez.

Since the start of the pandemic in New Mexico ALTSD has been collecting and distributing letters to LTC residents, homebound seniors, and adults with disabilities as part of their [Create & Connect Campaign](#) (#CreateAndConnect). Through the emergency food distribution project and bulk boxes filled with letters, they’ve distributed approximately 5,000 letters to seniors and disabled adults since April 2020.

“I am proud of our state and our ombudsman program for finding ways to uplift and provide hope to our seniors during this pandemic,” said State Ombudsman Zack Quintero. “Connection with our holidays, traditions, and communities have been especially difficult during COVID-19. Through these letters we show that New Mexico is in this together and we will get through this as one people.”

In preparation for the holiday season, ALTSD staff and volunteers across the state are already collecting letters for their local long-term care residents. Interested letter writers can either reach out to one of the groups below, or send their letter(s) to ALTSD by Friday, December 18, 2020 (letters collected after Dec. 18th will still be distributed to facilities, just may not arrive in time for the holidays):

ALTSD

Create and Connect Campaign

8500 Menaul Blvd. NE, Suite B-350

Albuquerque, NM 87112

Partners in Lifelong Independence and Healthy Aging

PO Box 27118 • Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502-7118

505-476-4799 • Toll-free 1-800-432-2080 • www.nmaging.state.nm.us

ALTSD has a goal of getting letters into the hands of 4,000 people currently living in nursing homes or assisted living facilities in the Albuquerque Metro Area.

The following efforts in Doña Ana County, Truth or Consequences, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe have been led by volunteers and partner agencies in the state:

DOÑA ANA COUNTY

In Doña Ana County, SW Regional Ombudsman Coordinator Rosa Torres and local ombudsman Andrea Ferrales-Narvaez (Ombudsmen are resident advocates) are working with local community groups and volunteers to collect their goal of 1,000 letters, socks, and individually wrapped candy canes in time for the holidays.

“This is a beautiful way for us to show them we care and that they’re not forgotten- that message is especially important right now during the holidays,” said Torres.

Together, Torres and Ferrales-Narvaez, have reached out to local government organizations, retail outlets, churches, daycares, the public school system, community groups, hospitals, and White Sands Missile range requesting the community write letters. Ferrales-Narvaez, who works for the Doña Ana County Sheriff’s Department saw an opportunity for Sheriff Kim Stewart and her deputies to participate as they currently network with NM Aging & Long Term Services, through their Amigos de DASO program.

“This is a great opportunity to reach out to a very isolated population in our county this holiday season. If we can help put a smile on one face with this program, I would consider it a success for the Sheriff’s Office,” said Sheriff Stewart.

For more information about the Doña Ana Holiday Letter campaign contact Rosa Torres at Rosa.Torres@state.nm.us

VETERANS HOME IN T OR C

The State’s Department of Veterans Services [DVS] is collaborating with ALTSD to launch Create and Connect VETS. The Department will be working with volunteers and staff to get letters to residents living at the nursing home.

“Many residents at the home may be spending the holiday season alone because of visitation restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said DVS Secretary-Designate Sonya L. Smith. “Worse yet, many may have strained family relations, or no family at all. Operation Holiday Cheer is a great way to brighten a resident’s day, and letting them know there is someone out there who appreciates what they’ve done for our country and is thinking of them this holiday season.”

Cards should be mailed to:
The New Mexico State Veterans Home
992 South Broadway
Truth or Consequences, NM 87901
Attn: Operation Holiday Cheer

For more information about Create and Connect VETS, contact DVS Public Information Officer Ray Seva at Ray.Seva@state.nm.us

ALBUQUERQUE, ANNUNCIATION CATHOLIC SCHOOL

In the Albuquerque area, Create & Connect Youth Ambassador Dhavina Kholwadwala has sent out a school-wide message to her teachers and peers at Annunciation Catholic School asking them to participate in Create and Connect by writing a letter, or multiple letters, for LTC residents.

Kholwadwala wrote, "What I am trying to do now is to have all of the kids here at Annunciation help make a positive impact in the world by making Christmas letters or cards for these seniors. These can be super simple, like just folding a piece of paper and writing a letter on it. You can add stickers, drawings, anything you want! You can get as creative as you like in your card. You can even buy a Christmas card from the store and write a note in there!"

SANTA FE, CÉSAR CHÁVEZ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Rosario Torres, a volunteer ombudsman, employed by César Chávez Elementary School encouraged her school to support the Create and Connect campaign by asking the student and teachers to engage their families spread hope and love to long term care residents. They are collecting their letters today and will be sending them to a Santa Fe-based Long-Term Care facility in time for the holidays.

Writers are encouraged to share their letters by tagging @NewMexicoAging (on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram) and using the handle #CreateAndConnect. Letters for seniors are collected year-round by the department. Volunteer organizations, schools, private businesses, and faith-based organizations are encouraged to participate in the campaign or reach out to facilities in their region to adopt the facility and provide letters.

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