

Neighbor to Neighbor & “Stranger-Friend” Advocacy at End of Life

A Community Reflection Guide

“We do not have to be caregivers to be caring.”

At the end of life, the most meaningful advocacy does not always come from family, clinicians, the care coordinator, or formal caregivers. It comes from the person next door. From someone sitting behind you. From a volunteer. From a fellow human who simply notices. It’s not always a clearly defined role or position. **Often, it is simply, *presence***

What Self-Advocacy Is

Self-advocacy at the end of life requires courage and honesty with oneself and others. It is the act of naming one’s threshold between burden and benefit. It is the freedom and confidence to choose how one navigates the end of their life.

Neighbor-to-Neighbor or “Stranger-Friend,” Advocacy is the quiet act of standing alongside someone at the end of life as a caring human presence within the community. It does not replace family or clinicians, and it is not about directing care or having answers. Instead, it is expressed through attentive listening, validating what the person says matters, and offering steady companionship so they do not feel alone. At its heart, this kind of advocacy affirms acceptance, belonging, connection, legacy, and dignity by ensuring a person is heard, witnessed, and accompanied. **It may be more communal than individual.**

The Power of Witness

At the end of life, people can sometimes feel reduced to diagnoses, charts, and decisions. A caring human presence restores personhood. Through simple acts of witnessing—acknowledging fear, listening deeply, reflecting what matters, allowing space for courage to emerge, and honoring the quiet “silence between the stories”—a neighbor or stranger-friend helps ensure the person is truly seen and heard. In this way, presence itself becomes a form of advocacy by **making visible the invisible.**

When Systems Feel Large

Healthcare systems often move quickly, and conversations can become technical and urgent. In these moments, a neighbor or a stranger-friend does not challenge clinical expertise but gently grounds the situation in humanity. Being a presence, they help remind the person that they still have agency—that they can ask for time, say no, choose comfort, and prioritize a peaceful end. Sometimes the most meaningful form of advocacy is simply slowing the moment so a person can remain connected to what matters most. A neighbor’s role is not to challenge expertise, but to gently **anchor the conversation in our shared humanity.**

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What is most often remembered

At the end of life, people rarely remember the clinical details. They remember whether they felt alone, had “unfinished business,” or felt their life mattered. Neighbor-to-Neighbor and “stranger-friend” advocacy is an often-unspoken commitment: **“You are not alone. I am here as a fellow human being.”** And sometimes, that is the most powerful form of advocacy a community can offer.

