



## The UPLIFT Journey

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Connecting with people who share similar interests, engaging in stimulating activities, and accessing resources that enrich our lives is essential to maintaining our health and well-being. With this secret to healthy aging in mind, a group of Sarasota residents supported in their efforts by [Deborah Gauvreau](#) from [The Patterson Foundation](#) originally began developing a village in Sarasota. Why a village? Well, [villages](#) are an asset to any community. They are community-based networks of members and aligned organizations engaged in supporting aging interdependently and maintaining the well-being of its members. Villages promote neighbor-to-neighbor support and community connectivity, enhance interdependence and healthy living, and provide various practical services through recreational, social, educational, and cultural programs.

Through the early findings of Sarasota Village's Exploratory Team, there was an emerging need for a regional umbrella organization to create economies of scale, perform administrative functions, leverage resources, and support communications for member villages throughout the region. In conjunction with interest from villages in the broader Suncoast region, this emerging need evolved into the [UPLIFT Florida Network](#) (UPLIFT), formerly known as Suncoast Villages.

UPLIFT's mission is to improve the well-being of individuals and communities via a network of villages and organizations supporting them. As a 501(c)(3), UPLIFT aims to be a networked resource supporting individuals desiring to thrive in a community while maintaining their well-being. UPLIFT will fulfill three "hub" functions:

- *As an administrative entity*, UPLIFT will provide the 501(c)(3) for existing villages across the state that wish to join UPLIFT and organizational support services to help villages get started.
- *As a networker*, UPLIFT creates relationships with nonprofits, governments, businesses, and other organizations to strengthen services for people wanting to live and thrive in community.
- *As an innovator*, the hub will explore new strategies, services, and alliances with like-minded nonprofit organizations and participating villages.

At the start of the new year, UPLIFT turned its attention to identifying core priorities, engaging and partnering with our community, and developing villages. The latter, especially, is what UPLIFT is all about.

For 2022, UPLIFT will focus on the following key areas:

- launching and supporting the growth of UPLIFT villages;
- developing and implementing operational functions of the hub organization to support village; development and strategic relationships;
- expanding revenue streams to enhance and achieve financial sustainability;
- and building and strengthening UPLIFT's CallConnect Program to improve the well-being of communities UPLIFT serves.

UPLIFT is ready to take action toward accomplishing its mission of establishing a network of Florida-based villages with supporting networks of service providers and funding partners to improve the well-being of individuals and communities throughout Florida.

A key to achieving our mission is establishing strategic partnerships at the local, regional, and state level. UPLIFT recognizes the significance of bringing service resources together to serve our target populations. Our work is to connect individuals with needs ranging from transportation to social connection to more complex services. UPLIFT and its member villages aim to be partners and integrators and not competitors. We've already begun conversations with several organizations to explore mutually beneficial relationships. An example of an early strategic partnership was the 2021

CallConnect Pilot program which tested the viability of a social call program connecting volunteer callers and participants with the opportunity to build meaningful connections. [Senior Friendship Centers \(SFC\)](#), our fiscal sponsor, participated in the pilot. There are ongoing conversations to improve and expand the program.

As UPLIFT continues to learn, share, and connect with and from our community, in May, we look forward to presenting at [Florida Blue's 2022 Community Health Symposium and Sapphire Awards](#) themed: Big Issues in Health: A Focus on Health Equity. UPLIFT's session titled, Healthy Aging for All Floridians – A Fresh Approach, will address the profound impact of Florida's age shift and share how UPLIFT's work, partnerships, and villages can help people connect and age in community while improving equity and outcomes.

To accelerate the process of developing villages, UPLIFT is having a virtual statewide sharing session on March 22 at 9 am for individuals who have expressed an interest in the villages movement in Florida. We encourage all those who want to attend to email Emile Gauvreau, UPLIFT Board President Emile Gauvreau at [revgauvreau@protonmail.com](mailto:revgauvreau@protonmail.com).

At UPLIFT, we encourage you to imagine living better and stronger together in community and invite you to join us in our efforts to build innovative, community-based solutions that empower community members of all ages to live enriched and purposeful lives.