



Fellowship Square

Staying Active During COVID - Dasha Soldatenkov

This year has brought with it many challenges. In the face of the pandemic, life as we knew it has changed drastically. Though a trying time for all of us, many have adjusted to a new way of living, and Fellowship Square residents are no exception. Many of our residents are resilient in the face of these challenges and we'd like to introduce one such example:

Dasha Soldatenkov, a Hunters Woods Resident, moved to the United States when she was eleven years old from Moscow, Russia. Her family is comprised of her parents and a younger sister. Since coming to the US, Dasha has lived in Maryland, Delaware and now Virginia where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from George Mason University in 2005 having taken classes in Sociology, Criminology, Psychology and Russian.

Upon graduation, Dasha started her journey in social work and volunteering for her community. During her time volunteering for Russian communities, Dasha was "interviewed in many Russian media outlets" and described as "the best volunteer for Russian Cultural events." Earlier in her career she worked as a telehealth technician, a rehab aide for physical therapy, a home health aide, and she taught courses for candidates pursuing their Personal Care Aide (PCA) certification. In 2014, Dasha continued her healthcare education as a certified nursing aide and a certified telemedicine/telehealth professional. In 2020, she proudly received her telemedicine/telehealth professional (CTTP) certification from Global Health Access Institute. Not only has she worked in health care, she has also worked in retail for twelve years holding managerial positions throughout.



Dasha is one of the youngest residents at Hunters Woods Fellowship House. She moved into the community in June of 2020, at the age of 39, after having volunteered for Fellowship Square multiple times and was named volunteer of the year in 2014. She explained how an 'invisible disability' has hindered her since early adolescence has continued to present challenges for her everyday life. Her early educational career was spent among groups of 5 or 6 other students where she says she felt like an 'oddball.' "It's like the quote on Forest Gump. Life is like a box of chocolates — you don't know what you'll get," and Dasha made it clear that you cannot judge a book by its cover.

Dasha described how she is close to her parents and appreciates being able to live with people of different backgrounds and cultures at Hunters Woods Fellowship House. She likened Hunters Woods, and Fellowship Square as a whole, to a family. "They are there for you." Dasha told me, further saying, "Without the staff, there would be no Hunters Woods — all [staff] go way beyond their responsibilities to help resident life thrive." Dasha shared that there is a small community of other residents from Russia at the Fellowship House and they would get together frequently before the coronavirus pandemic.

Due to ongoing pandemic, many changes have been implemented at the Fellowship Houses for the safety and protection of all residents and staff. Although Dasha misses getting together for activities and events, she is familiar with the many technological advances of today. She uses technology regularly to stay in touch with her family and is an avid proponent of telehealth and the important services it can bring to individuals isolated in their home or who do not have access to transportation. She describes the evolving environment as a “virtual world” that includes “social distance caring for each resident.”

Dasha has embraced the implementation of new programs at the Fellowship House which include food deliveries and a variety of virtual activities and meetings to keep residents informed. She is still able to volunteer and helps with translation for some residents with limited English to Russian. Other volunteer roles she fills include finding sponsors and grants for different activities, bringing music and entertainment to Hunters Woods Fellowship House, and advocating for her fellow residents. Dasha, as well as the other Fellowship Square residents, continue to show just how resilient they are every day – they make Fellowship Square a truly special place to live.

~ Credit: Interview by Tatiana Cherry-Santos, Intern