

How to Find
Community in
Retirement



SILVER RIDGE

A PREMIER PROGRAM BY PYRAMID HEALTHCARE

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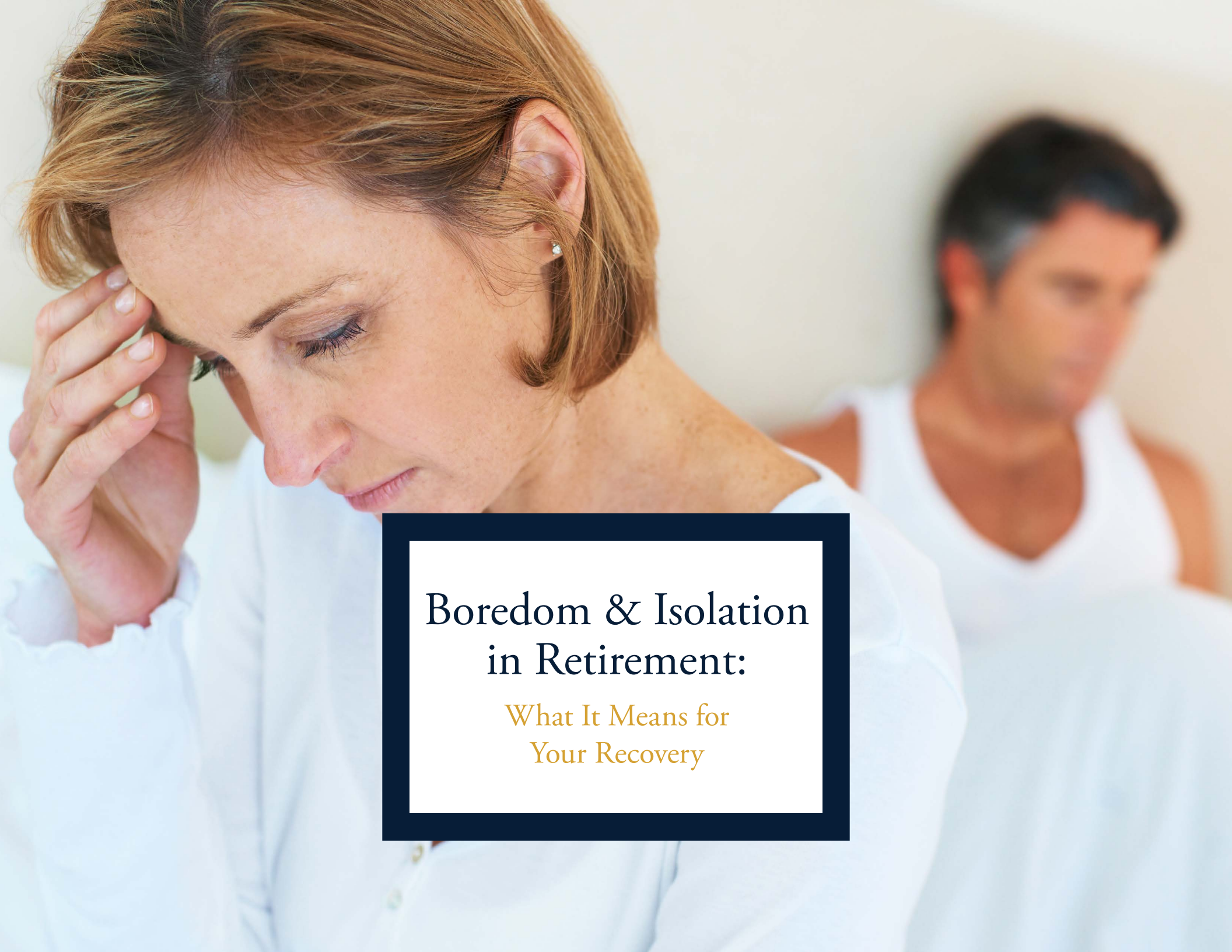
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Introduction

Retirement can be tough for people in recovery. There's a lot more downtime to fill, and you no longer have the daily human interaction that work provided. Boredom and isolation are major concerns in both retirement and recovery, and they can lead to substance abuse and relapse. At the same time, many retired individuals feel a lack of purpose and meaning in their lives, which can also put addiction recovery at risk.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration identifies four major dimensions of recovery: health, home, purpose and community.¹ In addition to good physical and mental health and a stable place to live, successful recovery requires a sense of purpose and a sense of community.

You can use your strengths and values to find a sense of purpose through giving back to the community. Giving back opens the door to healthy, supportive relationships in recovery and gives you opportunities to make your community a better place.



Boredom & Isolation in Retirement:

What It Means for
Your Recovery

Social relationships are central to good health and well-being. It's a particular problem among aging Americans due to reduced finances and often-limited social opportunities.

Social isolation is a major factor for substance abuse, addiction and relapse, according to a study published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology*.² Feeling estranged from others more than doubles the risk of relapse and makes it difficult to develop a "recovery identity," which is essential for successful long-term recovery, according to the study.

Isolation isn't just a relapse risk. According to a study published in the *Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences*, social isolation also increases your risk of cardiovascular disease, infectious illness, cognitive problems and heightened inflammatory responses to stress.³ The overall mortality rate of socially isolated people is higher than that of people who have a sense of community with others.

On the other hand, a 2016 study by the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University cites new research that's finding increased social connectedness affects us at the cellular level to improve healing, health and well-being.⁴ Being an active member of a supportive community reduces stress, combats boredom and improves your quality of life.





Self-Care Is the First Rule

Self-care is one of the most important foundations of recovery. Taking good care of yourself promotes better physical and mental health, which in turn enhances your recovery identity, helps to keep your mood stable and fosters healthy lifestyle changes.

When most of us think of self-care, we think of getting plenty of exercise, eating healthy food, and getting adequate sleep. And indeed, these are the fundamental aspects of self-care. But they're not the only ones.

Being part of a community is an important piece of the self-care puzzle, as is engaging in activities that enhance your spirituality.

Spiritual endeavors, which involve reaching beyond yourself, are also an essential aspect of self-care. Altruistic activities help you relate to a higher, transcendent power, and this goes a long way toward promoting self-love and self-worth and maintaining long-term abstinence.

Why Give Back to the Community?

The Baylor University study cites a large body of research showing that helping others has a number of benefits for people in recovery. For example, a 1999 study found that helping others improves psychosocial adjustment, and a 2004 study found that serving others promotes long-term sobriety through a variety of pathways. A 2003 study and a 2013 study both found that people in recovery benefit more from helping others than they do from receiving help from others.

Other studies show that giving back to the community:

- Increases your interest in others
- Reduces narcissistic behaviors
- Promotes healthy lifestyle changes that benefit sobriety

A 2007 study published in the journal *Clinical Psychology Review* found that involvement in personally rewarding activities like religious pursuits and service to others strengthens group ties and improves self-esteem and self-worth. These, in turn, promote long-term abstinence.⁵

Giving back to the community in retirement gives you a feeling of being part of something bigger than yourself. It brings purpose and meaning to your life, enhances your spirituality and improves your self-confidence.



Identifying Your
Strengths & Values
to Find Purpose in Retirement

Purpose in life gives you a reason to get up in the morning, and it's a major motivating factor in your life. Your purpose guides the decisions you make in your life, and fulfilling it is your contribution to society.

Finding purpose requires asking some questions that can be hard to answer without a little digging:

- Where do I belong?
- What gives me a feeling of fulfillment?
- What makes me feel engaged?

There probably aren't simple answers to these questions, and you may not know where to begin answering them. Identifying your strengths and values improves your self-awareness and makes answering essential questions like these easier.





What Are Your Strengths and Values?

Strengths and values are similar, and sometimes, they overlap. But they're not exactly the same thing.

Your strengths are your inherent talents, abilities, knowledge and skills that are authentic and energizing. According to the University of Kent, when you're using your strengths, you feel authentically you, and you find yourself in a state of flow.⁶ This means you:

- Feel a sense of energy and engagement
- Lose your sense of time, because you're so engrossed
- Quickly and easily learn new information and approaches
- Demonstrate a high level of performance
- Are drawn to do the things that play to your strengths, even if you're tired

Your values are your personal principles and standards of behaviors. They reflect your beliefs about what's important in your life and they help drive your everyday decisions.

When seeking to identify your strengths and values, it's important to remember that addiction causes changes in the physical structures and chemical functions of the brain. It leads to self-destructive thought and behavior patterns, which may have led you to do some things during the course of your addiction that you're not proud of. Don't let your past thoughts or behaviors negate your list of strengths and values. Perhaps you were unkind during your addiction, but that doesn't mean that kindness isn't one of your strengths.



Identifying Your Strengths

According to the VIA Character Institute, which was founded by Dr. Neal Mayerson and Dr. Martin Seligman, two early pioneers of positive psychology, the 24 primary strengths fall into six broad categories:⁷

- **Wisdom:** Love of learning, perspective, judgment, curiosity and creativity
- **Courage:** Bravery, perseverance, honesty and zest
- **Humanity:** Kindness, social intelligence and love
- **Justice:** Teamwork, leadership and fairness
- **Temperance:** Self-regulation, prudence, humility and forgiveness.
- **Transcendence:** Spirituality, hope, humor, gratitude and appreciation of beauty

To help you identify your strengths, ask yourself these essential questions:

- What am I good at?
- What do I enjoy doing?
- What do I learn quickly?
- What subjects did I find easy in school?
- What subjects do I most enjoy talking about, engaging with or studying?
- What activities give me energy?
- What activities put me into a state of flow?

Identifying Your Values

When you're living your life according to your values, you're generally content and satisfied. You live authentically, which means that you feel like your true self. But when you're not making decisions and living in a way that upholds your values, it can be a source of unhappiness. To help you identify your values, think about:

- A time when you felt happiest: what were you doing?
- A time when you felt particularly proud of yourself: what were you doing?
- A time when you felt fulfilled: what were you doing?

Make a list of values you were living by during these times. These may be things like honesty, success, creativity, health, comfort, learning, belonging, integrity, friendship, ambition or wealth. Whatever qualities are deeply important to you are your values.





Ways to Engage
with the Community

Once you've identified your strengths and values, finding ways to engage with the community that draw on your strengths and honor your values becomes easier.

There are endless opportunities for giving back to the community, depending on your strengths and values, your interests and your personality. Here are just a few options that you can consider.

Volunteer at a School

Public schools are underfunded and always in need of volunteers to help out at all grade levels. As a volunteer, you may engage in a number of activities, from reading with or tutoring students to helping teachers with administrative tasks or class preparation.

School or district websites usually have a portal for volunteers where you can look for volunteer opportunities and apply for them. Before you can volunteer, you'll likely need to pass a background check.



Join a Chorus or Choir

If you have golden pipes—and even if you don't, but love to sing—consider joining a chorus or choir. Search online for "join a choir [your city, state]" and see what comes up. Even mid-sized cities will likely have municipal choirs or local choruses that are always looking for new members. You may or may not need to audition.

Choirs and choruses often perform at schools, hospitals, retirement homes and other community entities to bring a little joy and light into others' lives.





Volunteer at a Hospital

Hospital volunteers can serve a number of needs in the hospital community. Delivering reading materials to patients, volunteering in the gift shop and visiting patients just to talk and brighten their day are some of the tasks volunteers perform. Volunteers are trained through the hospital and assigned duties based on interest and preference. You'll need to prove that your immunizations are up-to-date, and you may be required to pass a background check.

Become a Mentor

Mentors help tutor and support the growth of children of all ages in all subjects. Mentoring is a long-term relationship that helps young people develop into healthy young adults. Mentors serve as role models, offer a sympathetic ear, give advice and help others find solutions and opportunities that help them achieve their goals. Mentoring programs are offered through schools and other community organizations.

Get Involved in Politics

Local politics are a gold mine for volunteers, from working the phones on a campaign you support to offering clerical, technical or administrative support for a grassroots organization. Your local city government may have committees that need your help, or you could sit on a board of directors for a local organization. Depending on your experience and expertise, you may even consider running for local office, such as city council.

Volunteer for a Hotline

Hotlines are generally manned by volunteers, and working on one can help you improve countless lives. Almost every city has a suicide hotline, and many have homework help hotlines, help lines for children or teens in crisis, LGBT crisis hotlines or hotlines for people who are struggling with loneliness. Just perform an online search for "hotline volunteer," and you'll see numerous opportunities.

Help Displaced Animals

Animal shelters are always in need of volunteers to care for animals, help out with fundraising or assist with administrative and clerical tasks. Contact your local shelter and see what opportunities are available. If you love animals, you may also consider working with a pet therapy training program to certify your own pet, which you can then take to visit children's hospitals, schools, nursing homes and hospices.

Become a Docent

Docents are volunteer guides who work in galleries, museums, zoos, historical landmarks and other public and private institutions. As a docent, you'll conduct tours and answer visitor questions. Docents are well-trained by the institution and gain a great deal of knowledge about its history and collections. Docents interact with a diverse group of people.

Build with Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity is a highly rated charity that builds houses for the poor using primarily volunteer work. If you have experience in construction—and even if you don't—volunteering for this organization can be extremely rewarding. Most cities have a local Habitat for Humanity chapter, and they're always looking for volunteers for ongoing projects.



Coach a Team

The YMCA and other youth-oriented organizations are always on the lookout for coaches for soccer, baseball, basketball and other team sports. They also engage volunteers to teach swimming lessons, exercise classes and health workshops.

Give Lessons

Maybe you're a master painter or a talented pianist or guitar player. Imparting your knowledge and skills to others is a great way to give back. Put the word out that you're giving lessons, and help others hone their skills and realize their own potential.



Work With Refugees

Local literacy councils, churches and resettlement organizations offer numerous opportunities to help re-settle refugees and acclimate them to our culture. If your city is a resettlement center, volunteer opportunities will include helping families learn English, collecting household goods and setting up refugee families in their new homes. It may also include offering transportation and other practical help and helping refugee families navigate agencies like the healthcare system or the school system.

Join the Red Cross

The Red Cross consists largely of volunteers who respond to local and national emergencies, from helping a family recover from a house fire to traveling to an area hit by a natural disaster to offer support and services on the ground. You can train and volunteer in disaster relief and preparedness, or you can work behind the scenes in an administrative role or as a CPR or first aid instructor.

Join the Peace Corps

Around seven percent of Peace Corps volunteers are retired people. Joining the Peace Corps requires at least a one-year commitment, which you'll spend in one of 60 countries. You must be a U.S. citizen, and depending on the program, you'll likely need a college degree. After a period of training, you'll be deployed abroad. There, you'll engage in diverse hands-on opportunities to help fight hunger, promote agricultural growth, help communities thrive, educate in schools or communities or work on environmental issues.



Resources for Finding
Volunteer Opportunities

In addition to local volunteer job boards, you can find local opportunities through these national organizations:

- **The AARP Volunteer Opportunity Board** matches your interests with a wide variety of opportunities for giving back.⁸ The AARP website also has a volunteer interest form you can use to find volunteer opportunities with your state's AARP program.
- **Idealist** lets you choose exactly the types of volunteer opportunities you're looking for, or you can scroll through a list of a wide range of opportunities in your location.⁹
- **VolunteerMatch** asks for your city and state, and it generates a list of volunteer opportunities in your location or puts you in touch with national organizations that engage volunteers in their local programs.¹⁰
- **The HandsOn Network** is the volunteer arm of the large non-profit Points of Light Institute, which is inspired by President George H.W. Bush's Daily Point of Light Award for those who've made a difference in their communities.¹¹ On the HandsOn Network, you can search for opportunities by type or location.
- You can also contact **organizations in your area** directly, such as the Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts or your local food bank, city mission or women's shelter.



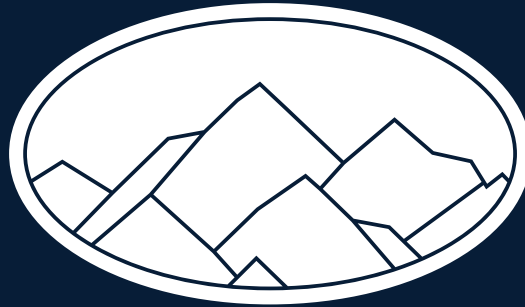
Giving Back Is Good
for You and for Your Recovery

Volunteering your time, talents and energy to a cause you care about can help you find a strong sense of community and fill your time with meaningful pursuits. It can help you improve your outlook on life, your self-esteem and your self-confidence. Being involved in something bigger than yourself fosters a higher level of self-awareness and spirituality. If you're retired and in recovery, volunteering may be just the thing to help you achieve long-term success while improving your quality of life on many fronts.



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