

FROM THE DESK OF

LINDA CONZENTINO & LAUREN PIOTROWSKI, ZOOM COORDINATORS

Bridging the Cultural Gap

A pregnant mother waits on her porch for a ride to her prenatal doctor's visit. She doesn't have a car. She speaks Spanish and her doctor's office is 8 miles away.

A retired veteran buckles his seatbelt and makes his way towards Coatesville. He's decided to add volunteer activities to his weekly schedule and while he drives, a news story about the migrant caravan plays over the car radio.

The driver arrives at the address given to him by the ZOOM program coordinator—he'll be helping a mother get to an important prenatal visit.

The pregnant woman sees a ZOOM car pull up, she walks outside, opens the door, gets in.

"Hola, Maria! Como estas? Did I get it right?"

"Hola, Jerry! You did. Thanks for picking me up today. I found a copy of that photo I was telling you about."



It's that simple.

ZOOM pairs volunteer drivers with clients who need rides to medical appointments at partner nonprofits. This includes patients who miss out on important visits to community medical centers and testing at area hospitals.

Outside this car, the world will tell each of these individuals something about the other, that most likely is not true. The news will strike fear into both of them in different ways.

Inside the car, they've learned to trust. They've had a look into a life not their own, and they've learned the protective walls they've worked so hard to keep them safe are not always needed.

Not every ZOOM driver is a retired veteran. Not every rider is a Latino mother. But every driver, and every rider are different from one another in many ways—culturally, socioeconomically, linguistically.

In the passenger seats of volunteers' cars, we believe ZOOM riders are receiving sincere, compassionate, person-to-person support. The simple act of sitting alongside someone and meeting one of their needs without any sense of obligation, has the potential to reduce feelings of being alone. It also greatly increases feelings of acceptance, self-worth and even happiness. This shows when we solicit feedback from ZOOM riders; their deepest gratitude is usually for their volunteer drivers, not just the rides.

Outside of ZOOM, these two individuals might never meet. ZOOM is solving a community problem, through transportation, and helping everyone involved to build bridges instead of borders.

The ZOOM program has benefited greatly from the efforts of Linda Conzentino, who has accepted a new position in Project ONE at Family Service. We are pleased to welcome Lauren Piotrowski as the new ZOOM Program Coordinator, and look forward to an exciting future for the program.

FAMILY SERVICE
OF CHESTER COUNTY