

Social interaction — it's a good thing!

Most of you out there will be able to relate, in one way or the other, to the story I am about to tell.

About 13 years ago, a family friend, at the age of 72, was admitted to the hospital because she was deeply depressed. She lived alone; she was also living with an undiagnosed disease, obsessive compulsive disease.

There was minimal research, at that time, about the disease; therefore, her compulsive behavior was accepted by family and friends, but she was always looked upon as being different.

Today, I would classify her as a healthy, normal adult.

Her husband died at the age of 52 leaving her to raise six children on her own.

Though I did not know her when the children were young, I can reflect on her stories and see who they are today; I know she did a wonderful job.

As most stories go, the children left the home, became adults, and left good ol' mom behind. Though she would continue to play a role in each of their lives, she became more and more inclined to stay home without going out and getting involved.

My friend continued to isolate herself from others. She even stopped going to the grocery store. She became what most people would become without any interaction with the outside world — depressed and unhealthy.

Thankfully through the local home-delivered meals program, the meals driver noticed her deterioration and sought help for her. That is how she ended up where she was 13 years ago, the hospital emergency room; the family was hastily called in to help evaluate her status.

Though it was a very difficult decision, at the age of 72 she would be moved to a retirement living community, where she has thrived ever since. Her new living community provided her with a balanced diet, physical activity, and social outings such as bingo, chapel, singing and dancing, movie nights, etc.



**Center
Stage**

Erin
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Now at 85, she is the social butterfly of the community. She has even taken on the responsibility of being the coordinator of resident e-mail system, ensuring all the residents receive e-mail from their loved ones.

It is a classic example of what all research tells us, that feelings of lone-

liness and depression are reduced, and morale increased, by positive interaction with others.

Social interaction is a key to healthy living. It is vital to a healthy community. I see it every day in the health of Sheridan County.

Our communities thrive because our social networking thrives, thanks to organizations such as the Senior Center, the YMCA, the Tongue River Valley Community Center, and many other wonderful organizations creating social integration.

If you or someone you know struggles

with loneliness, has lost independence with the loss of a driver's license, or has become confined to his home, I encourage you to seek the many resources we have in our communities.

The Sheridan Senior Center is a good place to start to find those resources. It is able to provide meal programs, both congregate and home-delivered, transportation seven days a week, homemaking and personal care services, Day Break Elder Care services, volunteer opportunities, family caregiver services, and weekly exercise and leisure activities.

It is amazing what a meal with friendly faces, an exercise class with others, a visit with a friend, or a bit of fresh air going to the grocery store can do to help increase sense of well-being. If interested, call the Sheridan Senior Center at 672-2240 or Tongue River Community Center at 655-9191.

Erin Kilbride is executive director of the Tongue River Valley Community Center.

Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.