Samuel’s Story

Inspiring Hope in Isolated Seniors

Even before the pandemic, because Samuel* was hospitalized and then homebound in January 2020, he and his wife, Vanessa, knew the pain of isolation and depression, as well as the hope that connection and counseling can bring. The need for that connection grew all the more urgent when, in March 2020, Samuel was diagnosed with COVID-19, in addition to many comorbidities, and began a months-long journey in and out of hospitals.

“He was crying a lot and very distressed,” said Susan, program manager and therapist in the Bronx with VNS Health’s geriatric mental health treatment services program, which provides mental health services to medically fragile homebound seniors suffering from depression. “It was so hard for his wife to be his only person.”

“The things you do might seem small, but they are not small to us,” says Samuel’s spouse, Vanessa.
The beginning of the relationship VNS Health was rocky. Samuel didn’t want to talk, and Vanessa’s anger, she says, kept her from letting anyone in. “But Susan never gave up on us,” says Vanessa. Susan came back week after week, by phone during the height of COVID-19 and in person after vaccinations. As time went on and Samuel progressed, Vanessa was grateful for Susan’s care. “We need you to keep checking up on us,” Vanessa said. “The things you do might seem small, but they are not small to us.”

Susan continued with regular mental health check-ups for Samuel and served as a sounding board for Vanessa, in addition to connecting the couple with meal delivery resources and COVID-19 testing (Vanessa, asymptomatic, tested positive in 2021). Susan even helped Samuel register to vote, and he cast a ballot for the first time in the 2020 presidential election. “I was mad at the world and pushed away at first,” Samuel says. “But everyone needs somebody to talk to. Susan inspires me with our conversations.”

*Patient and family names have been changed to protect privacy.*