

Waiting for a friendly visit

Age Concern Counties Manukau is appealing for volunteers to become visitors for some of the region's senior citizens. Romy Udanga finds out why a visit is so important.

The mobility chair sets the mood in the room. It faces the main door, as if waiting for a visitor.

Sitting in it is 81-year-old Myrle Kahi whose attention is divided between the television and the door.

Her eyes brighten as a shadow falls on the opaque glass door, only to flick back to the television as the shadow passes.

You can almost hear her unasked question: Will somebody come to visit me today?

Myrle has been living alone in an Otahuhu home for the elderly for two years. She's quite happy with the neighbourhood because the people are friendly and they hold a meeting every fortnight and even celebrate Christmas together.

And while one of her five sons takes her shopping almost every week and the "grands sometimes call" – Myrle has 19 grandchildren,



Birthday wish: Age Concern client Myrle Kahi asks visitor co-ordinator Margaret Ayris when she is going to have a regular visitor so she'll have somebody to talk to apart from her budgies Patrick and Wally.

Photo: NEIL DUDDY

29 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild – she would love to have a regular visitor.

"The day is never-ending. I don't know what to do with myself."

A bit deaf but wanting

conversation, she has no one to talk to about her visit to Graceland in 2002 to mark Elvis Presley's 25th death anniversary.

And anxious about the results of a recent cheek-tissue biopsy, she

says there's no one to help make her feel better.

"I am hoping for better company than Patrick and Wally," she says of her green and gray budgies.

Myrle finds it difficult

to get around. "I used to drive, I can't drive now. I really miss driving."

She turned 80 last Friday. And her birthday wish?

"I wish I had a regular visitor that I can look forward to."

Age Concern Counties Manukau visitor co-ordinator Margaret Ayris says regular visitors improve life for people like Myrle.

"On winter days stuck at home and without any visitor, you do feel down. It is better if you are younger because you can turn to a hobby but there is no craft or hobby at their age. It's the disability of age.

"All you look forward to is social interaction."

Age Concern Counties Manukau has 85 seniors on its books who want visitors.

It's now looking for volunteers between the ages of 18 and 83 to become accredited visitors and to link with lonely older people.

"Visitors provide older people with increased social support, social connectedness and social interaction," Ms Ayris says.

"Volunteer visitors can come from all walks of life, ethnicities, ages ... and some work full-time, some do not.

"What's important is they care about other people and are willing to give some time to them."

People who'd like to volunteer as visitors can call Sandy on 279-4331 ext 800.