

A Volunteer Team of Grandmas Dispense Street-side Wisdom to Those Who Need a Considerate Ear



Welcome to the “Grandma Stand” where volunteer elders offer to lend an ear to anyone beset by troubles.

Anyone can walk by the purple lemonade stand and sit down across from a real grandmother to chit-chat, ask advice, or just vent a little to someone who’s seen it all.

The idea was dreamt up by the New York City reporter Mike Matthews, who recommended a female coworker call his grandmother for a talk. The coworker, whom he described as a guarded Brooklyn hipster, admitted it was the “weirdest thing that anyone’s ever said,” to her. Nevertheless, she called Matthews’ grandmother—95-year-old Eileen Wilkinson, and was so impacted by the connection after separating with her boyfriend of 5 years, that the two had chats every week for years.

The difference that Wilkinson’s empathy and years of wisdom made for Matthews’ coworker gave him the idea of opening a “Grandma Stand” on the streets of Brooklyn.

“I have no idea how many people she talked to through those years, but at least a thousand,” Matthews said. “She had never had any hesitancy caring and just being present with whoever sat down on that chair.”

Wilkinson passed away at the age of 102, but her legacy at that booth took on a life of its own.

Now in McKinney, Texas, a team of volunteer grandmas rotate counselor roles behind the same style of purple lemonade stand that Matthews first used with his grandmother and laptop.