

*Building Communities
of Strength*



2020-2021 COHORT **GRANTEE SNAPSHOTS**



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Introduction

The Community Care Corps is a national program to foster innovative models in which local volunteers assist family caregivers, older adults, or people with disabilities with non-medical care in their own homes to maintain their independence. Administered by the Oasis Institute with support from the Caregiver Action Network (CAN), USAging, and the Altarum Institute with funding through a cooperative agreement from the Administration for Community Living (ACL), the Community Care Corps awards grants to local organizations across the country to establish, enhance and grow model volunteer programs. Through this national program, Community Care Corps volunteers handle non-medical tasks, provide companionship, and relieve over-burdened family caregivers.

This Community Care Corps program represents a new volunteer-based paradigm for providing services and supports to older adults, people with disabilities and family caregivers. The U.S. age 65+ population is expected to double to 70 million people by 2030¹ and each year, about 53 million Americans provide an average of 23.7 hours of unpaid care per week.² Most adults wish to remain in their own homes and communities as they age,³ but this can be challenging without the appropriate supports. Approaches such as caregiver education and skills training, respite programs, care coordination, counseling, self-care and relaxation training, and home modifications can improve outcomes and quality of life for both caregivers and care recipients, helping enable them to continue living in their homes and communities.⁴ Community Care Corps grantees implement innovative volunteer models to provide these forms of much-needed non-medical assistance to empower older adults, people with disabilities and family caregivers to maintain their independence, health and well-being, while remaining in their communities.

This publication, **Community Care Corps: Building Communities of Strength**, highlights the tremendous benefit Community Care Corps volunteers offer to older adults and their family caregivers. **Program snapshots showcase the impactful work accomplished by the first cohort of 23 grantees during their first six months of programming.** The Community Care Corps grantees applied to the program prior to the COVID-19 crisis, so the profiles of their programs lend insight into how they adapted to safely serve communities throughout the pandemic. The grantees have a lasting impact on the families and individuals they serve, as well as the volunteers they engage in their communities. We hope that these snapshots will showcase the innovative work from the first cohort of grantees and spur even more innovation for years to come.



Grantee Videos

Community Care Corps grantees created Storyvine videos about their programs. These short videos provide a window into how individuals have become involved with the program, what their role is and how the program impacted them. Click the image below to view the Community Care Corps Storyvine videos.



One-on-One Ride Support

Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut

North Haven, Connecticut

Many older adults and people with disabilities miss medical appointments and outpatient procedures due to transportation and social barriers. The Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut (AOASCC) has partnered with Trusted Ride-Certified to improve the health and well-being of older adults and people with disabilities in their area by facilitating transportation to and from medical appointments and procedures. AOASCC strives to match participants with volunteer chaperones to alleviate stress caused by transportation barriers. Instead of current transportation programs that provide curb-to-curb service, the AOASCC program is unique in that it is expanding service to door-to-door and door-through-door transportation options. In these scenarios, a driver remains in the vehicle while a volunteer chaperone escorts individuals to the door of or inside their destination.



The COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to AOASCC's initial service goal of providing in-person support for non-emergency medical treatment. Owing to safety precautions, in-person service was halted; however, volunteers were still recruited and trained. AOASCC has developed a training curriculum for person-to-person chaperone support and training for virtual chaperone support to prepare their volunteer base when in-person service can restart.

AOASCC has taken this time to redesign their Ride Scheduler to match chaperones with their clients and track the program's transportation services for enhanced coordination. They have also continued to recruit volunteers interested in providing person-to-person support once the pandemic is under control. The team meets on a regular basis to discuss and plan for the program's future direction.

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My personal attempt to get a COVID-19 vaccine appointment was futile but when I heard about the program on the news, I contacted the Interfaith Volunteers Caregivers program and they sent me to the Agency on Aging's Vaccine Buddy program, and I was so relieved. A young gentleman called, and we spoke about what I was looking for and within a few hours I had my first vaccine appointment. What a wonderful support program.

—Participant

”

Caregiver Mentorship Program

Aging Clinic of the Rockies at Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Caregiving can be a challenging and, at times, isolating journey especially for new caregivers. That is why the Aging Clinic of the Rockies (ACOR) at Colorado State University established a family caregiver mentorship program to support new caregivers. Prior to the mentorship program, caregiver supports that were available were either individual counseling with a therapist or structured educational programs for caregivers. ACOR identified that some caregivers would benefit from discussing the caregiving journey with a trained peer. To that end, the new ACOR Caregiver Support Program pairs new caregivers with experienced caregivers who have been trained as peer mentors. The peer mentors who have caregiving experience can lend support to new caregivers. The peer mentors bring insight, understanding and empathy that is valued by those just beginning their caregiving journey. The training for the caregiver mentors encompasses therapeutic relationships, helping skills, adult development and other topics relevant to supporting caregivers. Upon completing the training stage, peer mentors receive ongoing supervision, including case consultation, direct skills instruction, risk assessment and discussion of referral resources. While the new caregivers benefit from the guidance of their caregiver mentors, research suggests that the peer mentors themselves will experience significant benefits by learning new skills and supporting others through service.⁵

Due to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the ACOR Caregiver Support Program adapted its original service model to remote delivery. Mentor trainees meet with program staff for a single in-person meeting and then complete their training online via Zoom. Trainees have reported that these online sessions are engaging, and program staff have been satisfied with the outcome. Trainees have also received training on the nuances of remote service delivery.

Initially, the program was designed to last eight weeks total, with one one-hour peer mentorship session per week; however, ACOR removed the eight-session cap in response to demand for program services and has moved to offering sessions that average around 90-minutes in length. In addition to their original goals, the program is now focusing on increasing technology-related comfort for mentors and mentees and enlisting the help of prospective mentors to conduct recruitment outreach. Given the success of the model, ACOR will continue to integrate remote means of social connection into the program even after it is safe to return to in-person delivery.

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“

For the first time in I don't know how long I have someone in my life who really gets what I'm going through and who can support me in moving things in the right direction.

—Participant

”

Friendly Faces

Aroostook Area Agency on Aging

Presque Isle, Maine

Most people wish to remain in their homes, and many older adults can successfully age in place with appropriate supports. To support aging in place in its rural community, Aroostook Area Agency on Aging (AAA) seeks to increase social connection, empower individuals to live independently and improve quality of life for all they serve. The agency has provided Friendly Visiting for years to assist socially isolated and homebound older adults by providing companionship and outreach and assisting with daily activities. To enhance its programming, Aroostook AAA has recently added Friendly Helpers and Friendly Neighbors to its menu of supports. The Friendly Helpers service is designed to increase independence among older adults who need assistance but may not seek friendly visiting-type interactions. Helpers can assist with tasks and errands the consumer does not have to be present for, such as yard work, home maintenance, and setting up technology. Friendly Neighbors consists of volunteers identified as go-to individuals for information and referrals, resources and services. Because many individuals do not know which services to consult or where to find what they are looking for, these volunteers serve as the first point of contact for community members in need to find out about and connect to community services.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the vision for the Friendly Visitors and Friendly Helpers services provided in-person, daily contact. The Friendly Visitors program has transitioned to providing regular phone calls (currently called Friendly Callers), and the only in-person service offered is assistance for medically necessary appointments. The Friendly Helpers program has adapted from in-home activities to assisting with bill paying and technical support for virtual community services and programs.

Aroostook AAA has received many referrals for individuals in need of support and are engaging volunteers in a multitude of ways through the “Friendly” programs. Volunteer assistance has also been requested with COVID-19 vaccine appointments. While Aroostook AAA altered activities and services in the interest of volunteer and consumer safety, its goals and objectives to combat social isolation remain constant.

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Social isolation is a real problem in Aroostook County, and it has only increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. Aroostook County residents face a unique challenge that can increase social isolation. For example, many do not have access to reliable internet, limited transportation options, weather constraints, and more. The Aroostook Agency on Aging is very excited to provide the Friendly Volunteer services to Aroostook County people as there is a great need, but also generous kind-hearted people who go over and above to help others in need.

—Program Leader

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Leveraging Faith Community Support

Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio

Cincinnati, Ohio

To respond to the need for social, emotional, and health services for older adults and caregivers in the Cincinnati area, Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio (CCSWOH) has implemented a range of supports that include classes for caregivers, in-home assistance and virtual support groups for caregivers and their families. CCSWOH aims to address older adult needs, provide meaningful social interaction for individuals and their caregivers, and empower individuals to maintain their health and well-being while caring for older adults. To do this, CCSWOH has implemented the evidence-based Powerful Tools for Caregivers curriculum, designed to help caregivers reduce stress, communicate their feelings, locate resources and make tough decisions. CCSWOH also offers support groups and connects caregivers with self-care resources through Catholic Charities.

Due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19, CCSWOH has conducted virtual leader trainings and caregiver and family classes for the Powerful Tools for Caregivers program. Since the support groups were intended to be digital-friendly—with a mix of in-person and virtual attendance—all have successfully adapted to an online format or a blended meeting model. To help caregivers more easily participate in virtual meetings, CCSWOH is in the process of leveraging funds to reimburse caregivers for technology trainings. Additionally, the organization has retooled its host of in-person services for respite and companionship to focus on phone support. CCSWOH has developed a parish model for services, including Powerful Tools for Caregivers, Caregiver Support Groups and Respite for Caregivers, in which the parishes partner with the agency to match volunteers with community members in need. This community-based programming matches the missions of both the agency and the parish communities being served.

Recruiting volunteers has been a challenge during the pandemic, given that church services are in low attendance, where CCSWOH typically recruits volunteers. Still, CCSWOH has focused on virtual volunteer recruitment and working with local parishes to publish appeals in their bulletins and e-newsletters. Implementing a new volunteer database management system has been a vital part of keeping in touch with volunteers and creating a smooth onboarding process. To facilitate volunteer onboarding during these difficult times, CCSWOH has also developed online e-learning modules to train volunteers and is working with the Archdiocese of Cincinnati to implement additional online trainings and streamline the background check process. All of these efforts ensure sustainability and will help these programs continue to grow moving forward.

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One caregiver reported that they found the ability to connect with other caregivers virtually has been a lifeline for them during the pandemic and has turned out to be a really easy way to reach out to others that they would not have considered in the past and look forward to continuing in the future.

—Program Leader

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Sowing Seeds of Friendship

Catholic Community Service, Inc.

Juneau, Alaska

Geographically isolated communities often lack options for in-home and personal care assistance, which leads to older adults not having the ability to access necessary supports. The Catholic Community Service (CCS) Juneau's Friends of Seniors program seeks to support older adults to enable them to live safely and fully within their homes. CCS Juneau's volunteer program is designed to deliver non-medical support while fostering a reciprocal relationship between volunteers and participants. The mutual volunteer-participant relationship is intended to encourage older adults to seek assistance while helping them feel part of the larger community and recognizing their contributions. Participants are invited to share their experiences and expertise to support this mutual sharing, which can also help alleviate the stigma associated with asking for help, and ultimately preserve independence.



Although the COVID-19 pandemic has posed some obstacles, volunteers have successfully been trained as Friends of Seniors. Volunteers have engaged participants to build on their interests, experiences and roots to foster meaningful relationships and enhance comfort with requesting support. The program has offered a range of services, including, but not limited to, companionship visits, food preparation, equipment delivery, housekeeping and technology support. Juneau has fared relatively well during the pandemic, so the program has elected to maintain volunteer in-home visits while following precautions informed by city mandates and public health recommendations. They have developed an emergency planning service and documented a plan for each participant should protocols change.

As a result of their efforts, the Friends of Seniors program has observed ongoing, meaningful relationships between volunteers and clients exceeding their own expectations.

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“

In our household Friends of Seniors has been very beneficial. My husband looks forward to the volunteer coming over all week and they enjoy talking about various topics that spur research and more conversation. My husband loves to share and likes to be challenged. Our Friends volunteer keeps him engaged and is a wonderful addition to our lives.

—Caregiver

”

Community Social Service Hub

CBVFR Auxiliary, Inc.

Corolla, North Carolina

Research has proven that social isolation and loneliness can have a serious impact on health and well-being, while social engagement can contribute to better physical and mental health. The Carova Beach Volunteer Fire & Rescue Auxiliary, Inc. (CBVFR) serves as the social service hub of its small rural beach community, which is accessible only by 4x4 vehicles. CBVFR provides essential support via engagement activities, recreation, holiday events and crisis assistance to the community's residents. Through this project CBVFR seeks to identify the most at-risk older adults aging in their homes in the community who may be reluctant to seek help or may not know what community supports are available to them. Building on its standing in the community, CBVFR has established itself as the centralized point of contact to receive referrals about older adults in need of home-based assistance and to help them connect to those services to address their critical needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only led CBVFR to adapt its core strategies for client engagement and volunteer recruitment, but it has intensified client need. CBVFR had originally planned to reach out to at-risk older adults in congregate settings to foster informal fellowship, but quickly shifted its strategy to focus on word-of-mouth and social media for client referral. The overall community has observed a heightened awareness and sensitivity for the well-being of older adults. To facilitate formal volunteer training, program staff has adapted the evidence-based Gatekeepers program, developed by the University of Washington, for individual and virtual training. The program has also instituted a virtual book club and used social media to further establish community familiarity.

In the future, CBVFR plans to build on its social media infrastructure to foster health education and communicate other educational information for at-risk older adults. The program has also identified an online version of the Mental Health First Aid program to pursue further volunteer education. CBVFR is focusing on building cohesion, trust, and familiarity to cultivate a culture of health and wellness in its physically remote beach community.

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Mr. B has been in our community for a long time, pre-dates many of us here, and has been a bit of an isolated mystery. Since our program has formed, a volunteer has visited at least monthly, and their reward each time has reportedly outweighed their effort. Mr. B is nearly 100 years old and lives alone. He is reported to “beam” when his visitor arrives to sit and talk. Stories of his wild buffalo roaming the beach when it was unpopulated in the 1970s, to his personal reflections on living through three wars—World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War—are fascinating and clearly an important part of his life’s memories.

—Program Leader

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Clackamas Cares—Service Links for Older Adults

Clackamas County Social Services, Inc.

Oregon City, Oregon

Older adults cite having help with home maintenance and access to health and social services as positive contributors to quality of life. To respond to these needs, Clackamas County Social Services, Inc. (CCSS) trains volunteers to provide home maintenance, companionship, systems navigation and support group facilitation to support aging in place and to decrease social isolation among older adults, people with disabilities and family caregivers. Home maintenance services help promote in-home safety so that individuals can safely remain in their homes and frequent one-on-one social interactions decrease social isolation and loneliness for individuals and caregivers. The systems navigation element of the CCSS model helps individuals navigate health care and other services to receive appropriate support and maintain their independence.



The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant changes to the Volunteer Connection program. The first virtual service implemented by Clackamas Cares was a telephone reassurance program. Monthly supervision and continuing education sessions support volunteers and build on their knowledge of community resources. To further facilitate a virtual transition, volunteers conducted a screening survey on internet devices and services among family caregivers, which brought to light several issues that CCSS has resolved, including limited knowledge of how to use internet devices. Volunteers are becoming virtual system navigators, and the program is creating an internet training program for volunteers to use with their assigned clients.

Given their adaptations, CCSS plans to expand recruitment for Clackamas Cares and is ready to move into a hybrid model of virtual and in-home services. Additionally, CCSS has a Memory Café, a virtual Support Group, and a virtual Living Well with Chronic Disease course in the works.

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I call a man and I have to admit, I feel for him and being all alone during such a strange time in all of our lives. Sometimes all you need is a friend to talk to about your day. The familiar voice on the other end definitely cheers my friend up when I call. I am grateful for this program and hope it will be available once I'm ready for my (companionship) call.

— Volunteer

”

Caring Calls and Response Team Programs

DOROT, Inc.

New York, New York

Research shows that remaining socially engaged improves the quality of life for older adults and is associated with better physical and mental health outcomes, including longer survival and decreased risk of disability and depression, among other benefits. Recognizing these benefits, DOROT, Inc. developed multifaceted volunteer support programs to alleviate social isolation among older adults by providing them with connection, services and supports that enable them to live well independently. DOROT's Response Team is comprised of volunteers who engage older adults through one-on-one connections and participate in specific activities, projects, or hobbies requested by clients, such as practicing foreign languages, discussing current events and playing chess or other board games. These activities used to happen in person but now occur over the phone or on Zoom, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. DOROT also responded to the pandemic by creating a Caring Calls program where volunteers and older adults are matched for weekly phone conversations.

During the pandemic, Response Team and Caring Call volunteers have offered vital connections for older adults to help them get through a trying time. Through weekly phone calls, Caring Call volunteers and older adults share conversation and mutual support, which also might be valuable for volunteers who are on their own. Through the Response Team, DOROT has been able to enrich and brighten the lives of older adults who have been lonely during this time with birthday calls and deliveries of cards and cupcakes, and other opportunities to participate in activities that they might be missing out on, such as playing games and conversing in their first language. Through these programs, Caring Calls and Response Team volunteers have helped DOROT staff identify older adults who are struggling with food insecurity and other needs, so that DOROT can provide referrals and case assistance.

DOROT recruits volunteers through a variety of sources such as local community groups, social media and postings on volunteer websites. DOROT has successfully developed a new system to train and screen volunteers remotely, including a new Zoom orientation offered twice per month and step-by-step guides for volunteer activities.

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Older adults and volunteers have shared that connecting with new people through DOROT programs have helped them stay positive during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some have even said that this has improved their physical health.

—Program Leader

”



Caring Check-Ins

ElderSource

Jacksonville, Florida

Companionship is an effective strategy to help build meaningful relationships and combat social isolation. For homebound older adults who wish to maintain their independence and age in place, being socially engaged is an important component of their wellness plan. ElderSource has launched Caring Connections, a telephone reassurance program, to enhance the well-being of older adults through social engagement. Caring Connections pairs older adults with trained volunteers who check-in weekly providing older adults with an opportunity to socialize and talk about shared interests over the phone. While volunteers do not provide direct care services for older adults, they report any additional needs to the Volunteer Coordinator who serves as a direct connection to additional supports. This low-cost setup for consistent engagement helps bridge the service gap for older adults.



To adapt to the circumstances posed by COVID-19, ElderSource has transitioned all trainings and orientations to virtual platforms. The organization offers two volunteer orientations and two telephone reassurance trainings per month, and they are actively recruiting more volunteers to continue to meet growing community needs. ElderSource also successfully organized a Shop and Drop event where individuals donated household items that were then distributed to all of the Caring Connections participants.

Looking ahead, Caring Connections is working on a collaboration with another ElderSource program called U.connected, which utilizes a universal platform to facilitate engagement through the television. Caring Connections participants will soon be able to put a face to the name when communicating with volunteers through their televisions. ElderSource is also developing a Caring Connections database for volunteers and participants to streamline its program activities.

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Our participants say having someone to talk to during the pandemic has helped them emotionally, mentally and physically. One volunteer encouraged her participant to get out of the house, go for walks and get some fresh air. Our volunteers and participants have expressed great joy from their weekly telephone phone talks and have formed friendships they treasure. One participant said that getting a weekly phone call puts a happiness in her humdrum day.

—Program Leader

”

Intergenerational Service Connections for Community-Dwelling Adults

Good Shepherd Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers

Shepherdstown, West Virginia

Many older adults experience a combination of chronic conditions, disability or mobility issues, which can lead to unmet needs and social isolation. To combat these challenges to health and well-being and to support independent living, Good Shepherd Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers (GSIVC) has been connecting older adults and individuals with disabilities with essential services provided through its volunteer program. GSIVC offers a variety of services, including transportation, critical home repairs, friendly phone calls and medical equipment lending. Connecting community dwelling older adults with these services not only benefits their physical health but fosters social interactions that provide participants with meaningful connection. This cost-effective model connects participants with much-needed services, provides volunteers with a sense of purpose and allows the community to reap the benefits of intergenerational programming.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged traditional service delivery, GSIVC has upheld its vision to serve those in need. The organization is still fulfilling requests for transportation, errands, wellness calls, medical equipment, home repairs and in-home assistance. In light of the pandemic, GSIVC has taken precautions to reduce in-person contact to maintain the health and safety of both volunteers and participants. The organization has also shifted its recruiting model to virtual platforms, and the program has seen an increase in no-contact services like friendly calls, porch drop-off and pickup and shop and drop services.

GSIVC has increased its online visibility by sharing information through its recently updated website to support this transition to virtual and no-contact service delivery. Moving forward, the organization is onboarding new volunteers with particular emphasis on no-contact service delivery, and it plans to offer additional online trainings to facilitate these efforts.

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“

Thank you for the calls, thoughtful gifts and notes that remind me that someone is thinking of me and cares. Many times, yours is the only voice I hear from.

—Client

”



Tech-Forward Volunteer Program

Jewish Family Services of Washtenaw County, Inc.

Ann Arbor, Michigan

Often a first step toward innovation can be identifying a problem. Even before COVID-19 hit, Jewish Family Services (JFS) of Washtenaw County, Inc., was becoming acutely aware that some constituents—from older adults and their caregivers to volunteers—were facing barriers to in-person engagement. Mobility, geography, population density and demographics are examples of such obstacles. To expand opportunities for engagement beyond the paradigm of in-person interactions, JFS has been working to shape an eVolunteering platform with partner agencies—including the Otsego County Commission on Aging (OCCOA), which is situated in a far less densely populated county, near the northernmost reach of Michigan—and a forward-thinking team of online innovators at a software development company. The resulting product is a mobile app where volunteers and care recipients can communicate and “meet,” whether in a shared video call, through the online messaging portal or by phone. The platform serves as a landing site for those seeking services, as well as for the volunteers who are eager to provide them. The platform is expected to increase volunteer opportunities for people who might otherwise be unable to participate. Friendly eVisits between volunteers and older adult care recipients naturally provide much-needed respite for caregivers, letting them focus on other tasks or self-care. The virtual nature of the medium makes it possible to connect care recipients with volunteers who would otherwise be too far away. This expands the pool of available volunteers, who are recruited from the community and trained using videos, video-based platforms, and digitally based user guides.

COVID-19 has not impeded the agency’s work with its partners to develop the contactless eVolunteering platform. If anything, COVID-19 has underscored and amplified the need for eVolunteering. JFS has been working with project partners to develop training videos to help volunteers and clients become familiar with the platform. Together, these partners have also been testing the eVolunteering platform internally and are working to create a replicable system that other communities may easily adopt.

In the interim, JFS has vastly expanded its volunteer corps in response to the pandemic, ensuring all older adults in the agency’s care receive regular reassurance calls to check on their well-being. After getting to know their care recipients by phone in recent months, a service-oriented group of dedicated individuals is poised to become the first wave of eVolunteers to test the platform.

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“

Volunteering for this program satisfies almost a spiritual need in me to volunteer and to be a member of the community who serves. Also, I’ve gained a friend! I get to have a conversation—or multiple conversations—per week with people who may not be connected with as many people as they should be and may not have that outlet of communication.

—Volunteer

”

“Leaving a Legacy”

Lifespan of Greater Rochester, Inc.

Rochester, New York

Informed by research showing that caregiver respite can combat isolation, reduce stress and depression and prevent burnout, as well as studies that show that life review and reminiscence therapy improve psychological well-being and life, Lifespan of Greater Rochester enhanced its respite program to blend these benefits.⁶ Lifespan developed a multi-level training that offers several options for volunteers to incorporate reminiscence and life review activities into their one-on-one volunteer visits with care recipients. The program model also provides wellness programming to drop-in respite sites. The agency has also implemented a Texting Buddy Program for caregivers that matches past caregivers with individuals who do not have any caregiver experience. Trained Texting Buddies check in with their caregiver match at least once a week to provide support, encouragement and resources when necessary. In several instances, the Texting Buddy relationship has evolved to include phone calls, virtual support, and even discussion about meeting in-person when safe.

While volunteer recruitment was slower than anticipated at the height of COVID-19, caregiver interest has remained high. Staff have utilized online platforms to recruit volunteers, including Volunteer Match, Facebook, and AARP’s Create the Good, as well as radio and print ads. The program has also instituted a “train now, volunteer later” concept—inviting potential volunteers to connect with the program, train and volunteer when they feel comfortable. The Texting Buddy Program has been a great option for caregivers to connect virtually since it required no COVID-19 adaptations. Even when drop-in sites were not in-person, staff were able to provide wellness sessions via Zoom.

Staff adapted elements of the “Leaving a Legacy” program to develop its own life review/reminiscence module that is used to train volunteers to engage care recipients one-on-one. The newly developed module trains volunteers in life review interviewing options and therapeutic reminiscence strategies. Additionally, Lifespan piloted an in-depth Partners in Caring: Life Review Project in which trained volunteers engaged their match in eight weeks of themed life review questions to create a tangible memory book for the family.

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“

My Texting Buddy seems to know just when to reach out to me...She'll text me at just the right time and I'll text her back a paragraph to vent. I don't know if it's a cosmic connection, or what...

—Caregiver

”



A Helping Hand: Engaging Students in Service-Learning

Lori's Hands, Inc.

Newark, Delaware and Baltimore, Maryland

Although most older adults wish to age in place, their ability to do so may be challenged by chronic illness. Lori's Hands, Inc. trains and equips college students preparing for careers in healthcare to make weekly volunteer visits to assist community members living with chronic illnesses. Lori's Hands volunteers provide dependable, weekly companionship and direct support with activities such as housekeeping, meal preparation, laundry, grocery shopping and yard work. The program is designed to give students an opportunity to engage in long-term, community-based experiences that demonstrate the reality of living with chronic illness while providing free assistance to community members who otherwise may not have access to support services. The program fosters an intergenerational, mutually beneficial support system as clients contribute to student education by sharing their experiences living with chronic illness, navigating the health system and aging in place.

Lori's Hands made several adjustments to adapt to the circumstances posed by COVID-19. The program maintained continuity of support by providing contactless visits and virtual services. While in-home visits were halted, student volunteers continued to run errands and perform other activities that could be done safely while maintaining physical distancing guidelines. Virtual services consist of social support and resource navigation facilitated through phone and video calls, text messages and email. The program also launched a virtual event series to allow clients and students to connect in a group setting for entertainment and socialization. In addition, Lori's Hands staff developed supplemental virtual trainings for students focused on loneliness and isolation, community resource navigation and health fairness.

Volunteer recruitment, enrollment and training were already largely being conducted virtually, so these methods have remained consistent. Client enrollment is now being completed over the phone with a brief in-person home visit, and information is disseminated via video meetings, phone calls, emails and hard copy letters. The organization receives referrals from hospital systems, dialysis clinics, social workers, Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) programs, senior housing facilities, and home-based health care providers, and they are continuing to expand their client base. Lori's Hands has expanded its services in Newark, DE, and launched its second chapter in Baltimore, MD. The team has developed policies and procedures, including a chapter handbook, which they will use as they continue expanding. The organization aims to become a chapter-based, nationwide service-learning model.

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“

Carly and Valerie's genuine friendship and commitment to helping one another are at the core of Lori's Hands' mission. While Carly helps with household tasks like vacuuming, dusting, or gardening, Valerie is sharing her life experiences and wisdom with Carly, education she'll carry on into her career as a physician's assistant. And, beyond these more tangible benefits, Carly and Valerie have formed an unbreakable bond. In Carly's words, "Valerie has taught me that family doesn't have to be defined by the people who are biologically related to you, but rather the ones you love and cherish the most. I am proud to say I am family to Valerie and she is family to me. I wouldn't trade this for the world." (names used with permission)

—Program Leader

”

REST for Caregivers

Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota

St. Paul, Minnesota

Non-medical support and technology can connect older adults and individuals with disabilities with essential services crucial to living independently. Caregivers and those who live alone may not know where to find support, which can result in care recipients moving into institutional settings when there may be supportive community options which would enable them to remain safely supported at home. To expand the community system of support, Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSSMN) has developed a plan to educate, train and empower volunteers and caregivers from within congregations to address the needs of older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers. LSSMN's model pairs its expertise in volunteer services and caregiver support with the community expertise and connections of local congregations. The four-part volunteer model includes congregation education, Respite Education and Support Tools (REST) education for caregivers and volunteers, iPad distribution and technology training and volunteer service provision. The evidence-based REST program, which trains participants to provide respite in both formal and informal settings, has resulted in substantial increases in respite knowledge and confidence. Technology training and iPad use are intended to combat isolation and connect older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers with social support and services.

While COVID-19 has impacted day-to-day operations for LSSMN, many aspects of their service model include technology and service delivery that can occur remotely. The organization has been meeting with congregation leadership, training volunteers and providing caregiver education sessions via video calls. Rather than hosting separate, in-person caregiver education sessions, LSSMN has been able to bundle some of these sessions allowing congregations to attend the same sessions remotely. Additionally, the organization has successfully transitioned the REST training curriculum to a virtual training model.

Meeting remotely has allowed LSSMN to foster more collaborative meetings between metropolitan and rural churches that may not have been possible otherwise. Congregations are implementing the grant work at their own pace, and LSSMN has continued to schedule training courses and recruit new volunteers.

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“

Our services are different but are still as valuable! Our support group has been fantastic! I have gotten to meet people from around the state and we have become so close. After it is safe to be in person again, we all plan to meet up for lunch.

—Caregiver

”

Tech Options for Reaching Rural Adults

Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

Fargo, North Dakota

Isolation can be a challenge for people living in rural areas. Rural communities are often faced with smaller and scattered populations, limited transportation and fewer resources reaching their community. Regular social engagement is critical to maintaining health and independence, and companionship services can help bridge this gap for older adults. To respond, the North Dakota Senior Companion Program (ND SCP) has designed a Rural Companion Program to foster friendship and quality interactions between volunteers and isolated seniors who lack social connectivity. Research shows that older adults tend to value technology but lack confidence when using it, so ND SCP developed an innovative approach that provides older adults with user-friendly tablets and paid internet access, as well as one-on-one device training and tech support. Clients can connect with volunteer companions via Google Duo, Zoom or other video calling methods. They can also use the tablets for other health and wellness activities such as telehealth appointments, ordering supplies and connecting with friends and family. The positive impact of regular social engagement offered through the Rural Companion Program will help older adults remain independent in their community and prevent or delay moving to higher levels of care.

While COVID-19 has posed some challenges, ND SCP has been able to bring the Rural Companionship Program to its existing clients and volunteers. The organization developed training materials for volunteers and clients participating in virtual visits, including a tablet guidebook, “how-to” documents, tech support videos and translated language documents to increase older adults’ confidence in using wireless technology. ND SCP also established a mobile device management system to help maintain tablet devices provided to clients.

ND SCP staff conduct bi-monthly calls in place of their regular check-ins to support their volunteers, and they have developed an outreach database and materials for a coordinated recruitment strategy for new clients and volunteers.

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“

My mother, Caroline, has had her tablet for the past several months. She visits with her companion, Sharon, almost weekly. “Oh, there you are!” says mom when she actually sees Sharon’s face. It is a whole different dynamic than speaking over the phone. Caroline “Zoomed” with her brother and sister-in-law last week. It was the first time she had seen his face in six and a half years. She was awestruck and I am tearing up just thinking about it. He is a beloved brother and uncle, and we finally got to see him. It was an epic moment to us, but especially to my mom. I would say she was giddy. My 86-year-old mother was giddy. This program is worth every penny. Thank you!” (names used with permission)

—Caregiver

”

Virtually Supporting Caregivers and Their Loved Ones

New Mexico Caregivers Coalition

Bernalillo, New Mexico

Addressing the needs of various populations through culturally competent services and supports is critically important for caregivers. The New Mexico Caregivers Coalition (NMCC) develops and delivers culturally relevant services to advocate for a well-trained frontline health care workforce and to promote the voice of family and professional caregivers. NMCC offers training, activities and events designed to engage caregivers and ensure their needs and interests are addressed. Through this project NMCC has provided locally tailored trainings and interventions on a variety of topics aimed at family caregivers and their care recipients, including infection prevention, safe transfer and mobility, opioid overdose and reversal, online safety, financial safety and protecting your online identity.

COVID-19 has necessitated a shift to online and remote interventions, which has posed challenges for family caregivers with limited experience with computers or Zoom, or who have limited or no internet access. NMCC offers opportunities to attend trainings over the phone for individuals who do not have internet access.

Throughout the pandemic and in alignment with its core mission, NMCC has continued to serve a wide range of populations and has reached various geographic areas across the state. The coalition has contracted with two highly trusted health navigators based in New Mexico who provide limited in-person and one-on-one phone interventions to ensure caregiver health needs are addressed.

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“

Many family caregivers have expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to attend online trainings through our organization. While the Zoom format has been an adjustment for folks, they are still appreciative that training has been available to them.

—Program Leader

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Food as Medicine

North Coast Opportunities, Inc.

Ukiah, California

Social contact and assistance with activities of daily living go a long way in supporting individuals aging at home in their communities. North Coast Opportunities, Inc. (NCO) provides companionship and in-home support to decrease social isolation, improve health and nutrition and increase safety and well-being among older adults and individuals with disabilities so they can maintain their independence and remain safely in their homes. To accomplish this, NCO's volunteer model brings together four of its programs: the Redwood Caregiver Resource Center (RCRC), Caring Kitchen (CK), Emergency Preparedness in Communities (EPIC) and the Volunteer Network. Through each of the programs, volunteers are trained and equipped to provide caregivers with assistance and respite, prepare healthy, nutrient-dense meals for clients and caregivers and assess client homes for disaster readiness and preparedness. The Volunteer Network recruits and coordinates volunteers to furnish these services and conducts community outreach and promotion to reach clients in need.



Although some challenges have stemmed from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Caring Kitchen volunteer model has continued preparing meals and volunteers are delivering these meals while following safety and sanitation protocols. Volunteers have sustained regular check-ins with clients via phone calls, Zoom and Skype. NCO has also conducted multiple volunteer trainings for services that will be available once public health guidance allows.

NCO has identified the next steps for volunteer recruitment and client referral after vaccination. The Redwood Caregiver Resource Center and a local apartment community are ready to refer clients and residents for services when it is safe to do so.

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“

My reason for accepting this volunteer assignment was to help brighten an older adult's life. I made a call today to my older adult and had a wonderful conversation with her. What a vibrant lady! She said how lonely she is, and how nice to hear that someone cares, which is heartwarming.

— Volunteer

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Connect Through Transportation and Technology

Retired & Senior Volunteer Program of Rock County

Beloit, Wisconsin

Older adults and people with disabilities often experience transportation challenges, such as lack of access to public or private transportation options, that contribute to social isolation and affects their ability to have their daily needs met. Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Rock County seeks to combat transportation barriers through two programs working in tandem: a volunteer transportation service and smart display device installation. Volunteers provide transportation services to individuals who are no longer able to drive. Clients are picked up from their homes and driven to their medical appointments, grocery store, pharmacy, bank or to attend to any other essential need; volunteers remain with the client for the entire duration of their trip. RSVP Rock has also introduced a new program that provides an internet connection and Facebook Portals to foster virtual connection for individuals who cannot participate in social activities outside of their home. Facebook Portals are voice-activated devices that participants can use to video call friends and family.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, requests for transportation from older adults has remained high, and RSVP Rock has continued to fill requests while implementing comprehensive safety procedures. The virtual display program is now underway, and RSVP Rock has begun to distribute and install the devices. Devices are set up in the program office, and installation procedures have been designed to minimize the time spent in client homes for installation. The devices are intended to facilitate virtual social gatherings coordinated by the program and general client use.

The measures that RSVP Rock has adapted to transition its programming have proven effective, and the organization has continued to experience pre-COVID-19 levels of demand. Clients report they can easily use their devices to connect with family and friends, and the program is working to continue its rollout.

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“

RSVP provides not only a ride but in most cases a friend to help lessen social isolation. Our drivers have been known to go into an appointment with the clients when they are facing bad news. This helps alleviate fear and anxiety. Our portal program helps one recipient who is legally blind have contact with his portal pal daily. His son also purchased a portal and they now have daily face to face contact.

—Program Leader

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Stay at Home: Aging in Place

ShareCare of Leelanau, Inc.

Lake Leelanau, Michigan

In rural communities, many older adults do not live with family nearby, which can present a challenge to their ability to access health care and social services. ShareCare of Leelanau, Inc. located in rural MI recognizes the need to be proactive in identifying vulnerable, at-risk older adults and to help them remain in their homes for as long as possible in a safe and healthy environment. To achieve this goal, ShareCare's established volunteer services include friendly visits, respite, running errands, transportation and handyman services along with a telephone reassurance program. The agency has also assembled an Aging Well in Leelanau committee comprised of six area health providers to enhance broad community collaboration.



Due to COVID-19, ShareCare of Leelanau placed a hold on home visits and respite, but they have successfully recruited volunteers to offer phone reassurance service and provide regular check-ins as needed. The program has received a steady volume of calls, and staff have developed training materials for outreach. ShareCare has also assisted the health department with outreach to seniors on how to get vaccinated.

The Aging Well in Leelanau committee has convened virtually to examine gaps in service and develop approaches to working together more effectively. ShareCare has conducted technology training for clients to support virtual service delivery.

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“

I drive people to medical appointments and take side trips to do errands. I've met some interesting people and had marvelous conversations.

— Volunteer

”

More than a Ride: Driving Innovation to Enhance Volunteer Transportation Services

Shepherd's Centers of America

Kansas City, Missouri

Transportation is an essential service for helping older adults access health care, purchase goods and services, and remain socially engaged and connected with their communities. However, public and private transportation options present barriers, including high cost, eligibility for subsidized programs, fixed schedules and lack of personalized assistance. Volunteer transportation programs offer an important option to help address many of these barriers. Shepherd's Centers of America (SCA) is utilizing three different strategies to best help programs enhance and expand current services based on community needs. First, an innovative volunteer transportation model integrates companion assistants who not only drive to health care and other professional appointments, but also attend appointments to take notes to help eliminate questions and confusion when so much information is communicated at once. Second, SCA is promoting intergenerational connections by engaging university student volunteers through service-learning and developing a how-to guide for collaborating with university partners and training students. The program is focusing on volunteer engagement and forming robust relationships with higher education institutions to establish an ongoing volunteer stream. Finally, a comprehensive Volunteer Driver TurnKey Kit presents promising tools and practices to ensure operational effectiveness, sustainability and accessibility to further advance volunteer transportation. This initiative is a collaboration of experts and community-based affiliates to encourage sound but creative options to strengthen services.

Although door-through-door transportation support was not possible due to COVID-19, SCA utilizes volunteers in resourceful ways to promote participant safety. Instead of driving older adults for errands, volunteers perform these activities and leave food and supplies on their doorsteps. It is anticipated that some of these essential errands will continue for homebound older adults after the pandemic with the likely addition of social visits.

This Driving Innovation initiative focuses on meeting the growing needs of older adults living in their own homes and communities. Utilizing a well-rounded educational approach, the goal is to inspire innovation and volunteer engagement for years to come, thus helping a greater number of older adults continue aging in place safely and independently.

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Our older adult participants share with us all the time that when they can't drive, they feel isolated and alone. Having safe, reliable transportation is a necessity to living independently in the community. A participant in Fairfax, VA, says it well: "When I lost my driver's license, I lost my independence. I knew being without transportation was going to be a huge adjustment. Then the pandemic started. I was very worried about using public transportation and felt so trapped. When I was connected with the Shepherd's Center, it was a godsend. Their volunteer drivers and staff treat me like family."

—Program Leader

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Trusted Ride Certified

St. Agnes Hospital Foundation, Inc.

Baltimore, Maryland

Transportation barriers are a daily reality for many older adults that must be addressed—inadequate and inaccessible transportation support services are a severe impediment to improving health outcomes. St. Agnes Hospital Foundation, Inc. has developed the St. Agnes Trusted Ride program that incorporates volunteer chaperones into their non-emergency medical transportation service. This layered approach seeks to improve transportation availability and increase access to preventive health care and chronic disease management. St. Agnes Trusted Ride volunteer chaperones accompany older adults and adults with disabilities to and from non-emergency medical appointments. Transportation support is available via multiple options, including Lyft rideshare and individual rides. Volunteer chaperones undergo an extensive screening, onboarding and orientation process, and they receive additional training and certification from Trusted Ride Certified, LLC.

As a result of COVID-19, there has been a reduction in scheduled appointments on the St. Agnes Hospital Campus and a general discomfort among individuals to be involved in in-person activities. To continue to support its community, the program has been offering virtual chaperoning, which includes wellness check-ins, case management linkage, and COVID-19 vaccine registration support. Project staff conduct ongoing feedback and training sessions to allow for learning, sharing experiences and highlighting challenges and best practices. Newly onboarded volunteers can start virtually to gain their footing with the program before undertaking in-person chaperoning. Shadowing opportunities are also available for new chaperones to learn from project staff and more experienced volunteers.

St. Agnes continues its public education and outreach to identify potential consumers who could benefit from their services and would like to include a Chaperone Shuttle in future plans. St. Agnes seeks to establish both inpatient and outpatient hospital chaperone teams to support the continuum of care for those who need extra support but may not be qualified for ambulance or other local transportation services. The program is hoping to connect with other local organizations to enhance resource-sharing and recruitment.

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“

Our Ascension Saint Agnes patients and caregivers enjoy and value the chaperone program. Patients benefit from volunteers that listen and offer in-person encouragement and motivation to achieve greater success in their health and wellness.

—Program Leader

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Village Model for Community Support

Villages of the Berkshires, Inc.

Lenox, Massachusetts

Barriers such as lack of social and cultural engagement, limited opportunities for civic engagement, and minimal public transportation options can impede aging in place. The Villages of the Berkshires, Inc. (VoB) has launched its first Village to address some of these challenges locally and support older adults to age in place. The Village model is designed to empower older adults to live successfully and comfortably at home by offering volunteer services to members. To best offer these services and capitalize on the surrounding community's volunteer potential, VoB has partnered with Berkshire Community College (BCC) and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). Berkshire Community College has developed and finalized a service-learning program. BCC students training in areas such as life review, fall prevention and other issues provide instruction for VoB members to learn about topics relevant to supporting older adults in their community. VoB has also established a relationship with the Volunteer Coordinator at OLLI to identify members who wish to volunteer and offer courses, workshops and special interest groups to the community.

VoB have adapted and moved forward despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. VoB successfully identified a core group of volunteers in its service areas and trained them via Zoom. Volunteers meet regularly with their Volunteer Coordinator to discuss what needs to be accomplished, with an emphasis on online services to members as well as regular telephone contact. Google Groups have also been established for volunteers providing services in the same areas to create cohesion amongst the volunteer community and foster idea exchange.

VoB began full operation during the height of the pandemic and has identified areas of future work. They anticipate that partnership with BCC will flourish once pandemic limitations loosen and that activity with OLLI members will gain momentum in the near future.

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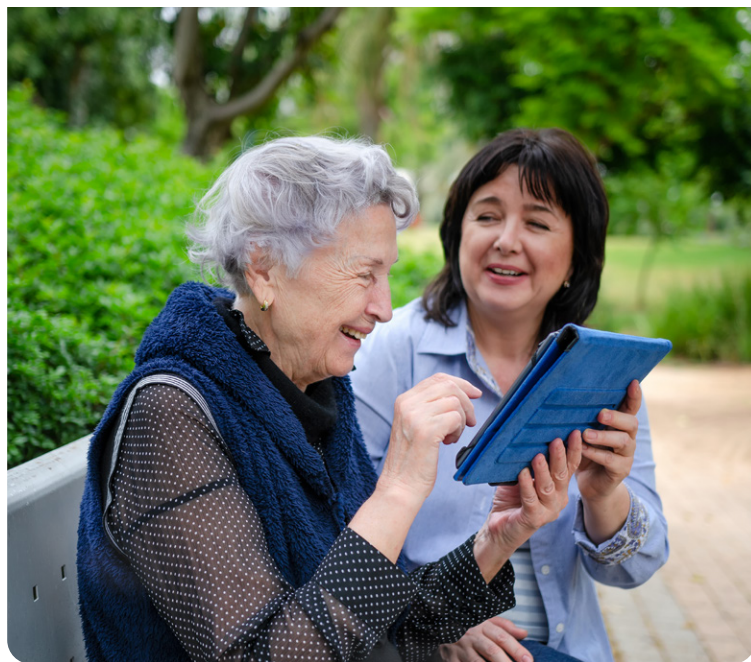
info@villagesoftheberkshires.org

“

Members feel supported living at home with this valuable assistance at hand and often speak of the emotional benefit of just knowing we are here for them, even if they do not have a specific request at the moment.

—Program Leader

”



Caring Companions for Caregiver Support

Volunteers of America, Northern Colorado Services

Fort Collins, Colorado

As the number of unpaid family caregivers is rising, Volunteers of America Northern Colorado Services has expanded and enhanced their Caregiver Support Program to increase caregiver resiliency, improve social connectedness of care recipients and ensure a meaningful volunteer experience. The program matches families caring for an older loved one at home with Caring Companion volunteers. Caring Companions are thoroughly screened and undergo training, which includes orientation, workshops and coaching conversations. The Caring Companions visit virtually, or in-person post-COVID-19, at the homes of care recipients each week to provide caregiver respite and offer friendship, support, and socialization.

While the COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to the original plans for the Caring Companion model, the program goals remained the same. The program transitioned to virtual formats, conducting client intake and volunteer orientation over Zoom. Since in-person meetings have been curtailed, volunteers stay connected with care recipients and caregivers using video chatting programs, phone calls, emails, text messages, letters, holiday cards and emergency food box drop-off. Through collaboration with the music department at Colorado State University, volunteers have also been trained to provide music engagement over Zoom. For clients who cannot or do not opt for technology-based engagement, volunteers deliver activity boxes directly to their homes that contain puzzles, brainteasers and craft projects.

Throughout the pandemic, staff have met with clients and volunteers to gather suggestions on how to best support them. Several volunteers have contributed creative ideas and learned new technology such as how to provide music through a Zoom connection and using Facebook Live and Skype to connect with participants. Looking ahead, the program intends to integrate remote means of social connection even beyond the pandemic, for those participants who enjoy it, while remaining focused on providing in-person caregiver respite whenever possible.

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“

The two of them get along so well. I hear them laughing, often peals of laughter, as they share comments on reading material. My spouse is quite isolated due to his lack of vision and can become gloomy and depressed. The laughter is wonderful!

—Caregiver

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Conclusion

The 2020-2021 Community Care Corps grantees were confronted by a unique set of challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with determination and flexibility, they were able to develop and enhance programming to meet the needs of older adults, people with disabilities and family caregivers in their communities. These snapshots are based on their activities during the first six months of their projects during which time many of the grantees had to transition their programs completely virtually, while others initiated a hybrid of virtual and in-person supports. As these efforts go forward, it is clear that grantees will continue to evolve their service delivery to respond to the needs of older adults, adults with disabilities and family caregivers during and after the pandemic.

Despite the challenges that COVID-19 presented, all grantees remained committed to best serving older adults, people with disabilities and family caregivers to maintain their independence, health and well-being. This publication provides a brief snapshot into the extensive work of each of these grantees, and we encourage you to learn more about their work and to explore how other organizations can implement their own innovative models in pursuit of this mission. To learn more about the work of Community Care Corps and access resources for prospective applicants, visit www.communitycarecorps.org.

Funder Acknowledgement

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¹ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade.2010.html>

² <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2020/05/full-report-caregiving-in-the-united-states.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00103.001.pdf>

³ https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/liv-com/2018/home-community-preferences-survey.doi.10.26419-2Fres.00231.001.pdf

⁴ https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK396394/#sec_000116

⁵ <http://www.ijssh.org/vol7/802-SC0015.pdf>

⁶ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17558580>

