

Michigan Senior Volunteer Programs
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE TESTIMONY

April 10, 2019

Senior Volunteers Save Lives

Representative Whiteford, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

I'd like to begin by sharing a recent story from a client, Sue, of a Senior Companion, Pat, titled "I Owe my Life to Pat!". Sue has been battling lung cancer and has had Pat by her side the whole time. Pat has taken Sue to all chemo treatments and doctor visits. At one point, Sue was ready to give up. Pat looked at Sue and said, "Sue, we are in this together and we are going to get through this if I have to drag you there by your hair". This was humorous to Sue because she had lost her hair due to chemo. Pat's inspiration and support pulled Sue through her darkest hours. Sue was declared "cancer free" on October second. She is sure she wouldn't have made it without everything Pat has helped her with. She absolutely loves Pat.

We are speaking on behalf of the Senior Volunteer Programs of Michigan, which includes the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), Senior Companion Program (SCP) and the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). Funded by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Aging and Adult Services Agency (AASA), Michigan's Senior Volunteer programs provide meaningful opportunities for older adults, age 55 and better, to engage in service in their local communities. Michigan is home to 19 Foster Grandparent Programs, 14 Senior Companion Programs and 20 Retired & Senior Volunteer Programs. Together, we serve 73 of Michigan's 83 counties.

Senior Companions and Foster Grandparents are low-income older adults who commit an average 20 hours per week and receive a small, non-taxable stipend of \$2.65 for their service.

Senior Companions play an important role in supporting frail seniors and adults with disabilities in their quest to live independently for as long as possible. Senior Companion volunteers add richness to the lives of their clients, while providing access to their community, including grocery shopping, transportation to medical appointments, and opportunities for socialization. In 2018, 487 Senior Companions supported in-home and long-term care services for 2,497 Michigan citizens at risk of institutionalization. Senior Companions help seniors live independently in the communities where they choose to reside.

Foster Grandparents provide sustained one-to-one attention and assistance to vulnerable children, with the purpose of improving self-esteem and supporting the child's ability to learn and succeed in school and life. Foster Grandparents provide a stable, caring relationship for children who often come from chaotic and unpredictable environments. In 2018, 1,198 Foster Grandparents provided service in

1,414 educational settings and supported over 5,436 children who are academically delayed, lacking self-esteem or motivation, experiencing behavior or social problems and are at risk of dropping out of school, all of which can cause additional economic stress on our communities.

The Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), one of the nation's largest volunteer efforts, invites older adults to utilize their skills, talents, and life experience to make a difference in their community, through direct service and collaboration with established non-profits, schools, government, and public organizations. RSVP Volunteers serve their communities by providing companionship, delivering meals weekly to isolated seniors, tutoring and mentoring children, and providing medical transportation for older adults, addressing the opioid epidemic and protecting the safety of their peers through partnerships with law enforcement, and supporting the health of our state's lands and waters. Each year nearly 7,000 RSVP Volunteers contribute in excess of 600,000 hours of service to nearly 1,200 organizations, projects and communities across Michigan. RSVP volunteers do not receive a stipend and do not have an hourly requirement for their service.

For more than 40 years, the Michigan Legislature has recognized the value and importance of one of our state's strongest resources, our senior volunteers and we thank you for the \$300,000 increase last year. The 2018, \$4.7 million in state funding administered by AASA, coupled with local and federal funding, allowed the Senior Volunteer Programs to provide high quality, life enhancing volunteer opportunities for older adults, while assisting nonprofit, health care, and government organizations in achieving their missions and expanding services. Last year's increase enabled projects to increase the number of volunteers, provide mileage reimbursement to volunteers supporting their service, increase volunteer training, and added to the overall sustainability of projects.

An increase of \$1,000,000 for expansion of the three Senior Volunteer Programs would provide for approximately 161,744 additional volunteer hours and increase the program's capacity to better serve the growing population of older adults. Approximately 66,000 of those hours would come from FGP, 47,000 from RSVP and 48,000 from SCP. This would provide an estimated value to Michigan communities of nearly 3.9 million dollars*; almost 4 times the cost of the proposals.

In closing, we would like to share a few results from the independent study sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Senior Corps volunteers reported significantly higher self-rated health scores, compared to older adults in similar circumstances who do not volunteer. They reported their service provided opportunities for personal growth and a sense of accomplishment. After serving approximately two years in the program, 84 percent of Senior Corps volunteers reported improved or stable health, and 88 percent who first reported a lack of companionship reported a decrease in feelings of isolation. Senior Volunteers Save Lives, sometimes their own without knowing it!

Thank you for your support over the years, and we look forward to your continued support in the future.

***Based on the independent sector estimated rate for 2018.**

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Together, Senior Corps Volunteers Save Lives!

Stories worth Sharing



“I owe my life to Pat!” Sue has been battling lung cancer and has had Pat by her side the whole time. Pat has taken Sue to all chemo treatments and doctor visits. At one point, Sue was ready to give up. Pat looked at Sue and said, “Sue, we are in this together and we are going to get through this if I have to drag you there by your hair”. This was humorous to Sue because she had lost her hair due to chemo. Pat’s inspiration and support pulled Sue through her darkest hours. Sue was declared “cancer free” on October second. She is sure she wouldn’t have made it without everything Pat has helped her with. She absolutely loves Pat. –Client Sue of Senior Companion Pat.



There was a young girl in 2nd grade who transferred to Michigamme Elementary mid-year from another school within Port Huron Area school district. This little girl was diagnosed as a “select mute”, a child who can speak but doesn’t either due to an extreme fear around others or a trauma that has occurred in their life. At both the previous school and at Michigamme the teacher, a social worker, a speech therapist and even the principal had worked with her but been unsuccessful in getting her to utter a word. A few weeks after she came to Michigamme, we placed a new Foster Grandma at the school, in the classroom where “Katie” (not real name) was a student. Grandma Margaret was like a grandmother out of a picture book...white curly hair, blue twinkling eyes, warm smile and soft spoken. So the very first day, the teacher said that while they got to know each other and figure out who Grandma would be assigned to work with, how about if she sat with Katie who had only been there a short while and she could maybe help her feel more at ease. Grandma Margaret quickly became a safe presence Katie felt comfortable with, and continued to gain her trust. Katie now had an older caring friend who was special to her and helped her to feel less afraid. Grandma encouraged her self-confidence and involvement with the classroom. Within *less than two weeks* Katie began whispering in Grandma’s ear. Shortly thereafter she was speaking out loud in the classroom to others! The principal at the time was so amazed at what happened that he wrote us about it. He was a witness to the fact that what the “professional” staff hadn’t accomplished all school year, the foster grandmother accomplished in a couple weeks through the unconditional love, time, and attention she was able to give this little girl.



“Senior Services and RSVP of Van Buren County provide many opportunities for seniors and I have the chance to help out with one of the food assistance programs. Every month I volunteer to help run the commodities distribution program which provides local seniors who qualify with a selection of non-perishable food items. I enjoy being able to volunteer for this program because I know I am helping to increase food security for many of our friends and neighbors.”
– George Hooper, RSVP Volunteer, South Haven



“Ever since my mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, she has been blessed with help from many people outside of our family, including volunteers! That’s why I joined RVSP hoping to reciprocate the help and blessings my mom and my family have received. Because of my mom, when I first started volunteering, I knew I would like to help seniors with dementia. But what I didn’t know then was that in giving I actually received and was strengthened! Visiting my client in the respite program and helping seniors at an adult day care center has connected me with my mom who lives far away in a special way. At first I thought those seniors I helped were weak, but actually I have drawn strength from them. I thought they were voiceless, but certainly they have voices that deserve to be heard. Their words are valuable and whether they are verbalized or not, need to be heard. When RSVP Washtenaw first asked me to join the Advisory Council, I declined it thinking I’d rather spend my time with the seniors than in meetings. But on second thought, I thought of the delightful experiences of helping the Alzheimer’s Association table and the RVSP table. I enjoyed introducing and telling people about the organizations! I believe that we are not meant to journey alone. I’d like to encourage people to be companions on the journey. So I’ve decided to try something new — from just participating in the RSVP to promoting it. – Kwan-ling Cheung, RSVP Volunteer, Ypsilanti



HEALTH BENEFITS OF SENIOR CORPS



SENIOR CORPS: IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL GENERATIONS.

Research shows that volunteering is good for the health and well-being of volunteers. But for older Americans with low-incomes and lower levels of education, a group vulnerable to poor health outcomes, many obstacles can make it difficult to volunteer. As a result, these individuals may miss out on the health and well-being benefits of volunteering, and communities may miss out on the volunteer service these individuals provide.

A new independent report sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service offers some good news: Senior Corps provides the access, structure, and financial support for low-income, at-risk Americans 55 and older to live **happier, healthier lives while making a difference in their communities.**



New findings show after two-years of service, first-time Senior Corps volunteers in the Foster Grandparent Program and Senior Companion Program reported **improvements in health, decreased depression and less social isolation.**

SENIOR CORPS: MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

While the current study focuses on the health benefits to Senior Corps volunteers, Senior Corps volunteers also make a difference in their communities. For decades, volunteers age 55+ have been serving their communities through Senior Corps programs, led by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency for service, volunteering, and civic engagement. Each year, Senior Corps engages approximately 220,000 older adults in volunteer service through its Foster Grandparent, Senior Companion, and RSVP programs, enriching the lives of the volunteers and benefiting their communities.



FOSTER GRANDPARENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Senior Corps volunteers who serve as Foster Grandparents become one-on-one tutors, mentors, and friends to young people with exceptional needs, where they act as role models to reinforce important life values. In 2017, around 22,000 Foster Grandparent volunteers helped approximately 150,000 children through a nationwide network of organizations.

SENIOR COMPANIONS PROVIDE COMPANIONSHIP AND SUPPORT TO THE ELDERLY

Senior Corps volunteers who serve as Senior Companions help elderly, homebound seniors, and other adults maintain independence and remain in their own homes, often avoiding costly institutional care. Senior Companions help clients with daily living tasks such as grocery shopping, transportation to medical appointments, and notification to doctors or loved ones of potential problems. At the same time, they provide caregivers and family members much-needed respite.

SENIOR CORPS BY THE NUMBERS

220,000+
volunteers each year

54 million
hours served each year

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency that engages millions of Americans in service through its AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs and leads the nation's volunteering and service efforts.