

Meals on Wheel Partnership *a Lifeline During Hard Times*



We've all found different ways to accomplish our goals during the past two years. For The Senior Source's Senior Companion Program (SCP) staff, the vital work of keeping volunteers active and engaged has been a top concern. But the SCP staff also knows that the older adults they serve count on the extra income they bring home from this AmeriCorps-supported program's stipend.

In October 2021, Melissa Gomez, the SCP's Assistant Director, was concerned that the federal program might end their emergency pay and temporary allowance on which they had been running for several months.

With these concerns in mind, Gomez went to her Saturday personal volunteer service with the Visiting Nurse Association's Meals on Wheels (MOW). She knew that the home meal-delivery service was

ramping up, restarting routes to pre-COVID levels, and were in desperate need of volunteers. She realized that those delivery hours could qualify for direct service hours with AmeriCorps. It was a perfect match for the SCP volunteers.

A Volunteer Force is Ready

Before the pandemic, the SCP volunteers were busy. They served mostly in private homes and community senior centers. The mutually beneficial program helped both the volunteers and the clients by keeping them civically engaged and socially connected.

"Most of the Senior Centers are still closed, Gomez said. "In-home care is difficult because people are afraid to spread disease. We have found many alternative opportunities, but they are not as consistent and not evenly dispersed around the city. Some of our volunteers still had a lot of time on their hands."

The Meals on Wheels Connection

Meanwhile, Meals on Wheels was also in survival mode. Because their recipients must be over age 60 or disabled and homebound, they were especially vulnerable to the virus. They made the shift to virtual visits with their 4,600 Dallas-area clients. "Their volunteers were using these online chats to check in with those in need." Gomez explained.

Then, in the Fall of 2021, MOW was ready to hit the streets once again and deliver healthy meals. However, some former volunteers could not commit to the restart, leaving them with unfilled routes.

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A Partnership Established

Being involved with both organizations, Gomez saw the opportunity to establish a relationship that would be advantageous for everyone. She worked with The Senior Source leadership and her Meals on Wheels volunteer managers to create the partnership.

“We presented the opportunity to our SCP volunteers during a monthly in-service meeting,” Gomez remembered. “Ten of them stepped up right away.”

The Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) then came to The Senior Source office to train the volunteers. They completed an additional background check, and VNA gave them a car identification magnet and a delivery bag.

“Some of those SCP volunteers now deliver meals daily, and others go out a few times per week,” she said. “We have more who are interested in joining in the spring when the weather is better, and they don’t have to worry about driving on potentially slippery roads.”

Success Brings More Ideas

The success of the Meals on Wheels partnership has Gomez thinking about other ways to leverage alliances with other organizations.

Thinking outside the box is a pandemic skill we all have learned over the past two years. The Senior Source has hundreds of older adults relying on us for support, and we will continue to look for new and unique ways to serve them.

More Information

If you would like more information about The Senior Source’s Senior Companion Program, please visit the [website](#), email Melissa Gomez at MGomez@TheSeniorSource.org, or call us at (214) 525-6167.