

## Volunteering: Community Senior Citizen Needs

*Overview: Provide direct, simple, hands-on volunteer services, based upon your own reasonable assessment of what time, energy, and talent that you have to share, through affiliation with the councils-on-aging or seniors services providers in your own communities. In reaching out and sharing your time, talent, and energy, make your community stronger and more caring.*

For nearly 50 years I have pursued a career in what I might call Community Development in a number of Massachusetts municipalities. I have worked as a grants writer, grants manager, and deliverer of direct services to often underserved and lower income segments of the population of a number of municipalities in employment and training, housing rehabilitation and development, economic development, education, and human services. These have been endeavors that have been designed to be, not a handout, but, a hand up to those in need, to use a somewhat hackneyed expression, who are determined to improve the quality of their lives. The objective has been to create and strengthen community in a way that is sustainable.

My latest efforts have involved recruiting all segments of the community to deliver services to those residents over the age of 55, a rapidly growing component of the population.

I would appeal to all classmates to engage themselves in providing hands-on volunteer services, based upon their own reasonable assessment of what time, energy, and talent that they have to share, through affiliation with the councils-on-aging or service providers in their own communities.

There are councils-on-aging formally established in at least 38 states. A listing those organizations, established to render services can be found on a number of website links including: <https://www.ncoa.org/national-institute-of-senior-centers/>. A listing with contact information could be found on the internet for organizations within each state, county, or municipality such as is available in Massachusetts at <https://www.mass.gov/councils-on-aging-senior-centers>.

Most councils-on-aging, through their senior centers, have an on-going mission to provide for the educational, social, recreational, and wellness needs of older adult residents of the area. Senior Centers serve as a gateway to the nation's aging network—connecting older adults to vital community services that can help them stay healthy and independent. More than 60% of senior centers are designated focal points for delivery of services —allowing older adults to access multiple services in one place.

Individuals can assist seniors in the community in the following ways with a small amount of training and supervision from senior center and council-on-aging staff:

- Food Shopping Assistance – Shop for grocery and other household items
- Friendly Visiting – Visit seniors periodically providing friendly contact
- Medical Appointment Escort Transport – Drive seniors to appointments
- Seasonal assistance with yard clean-ups for seniors (Spring and Fall)
- Telephone Reassurance – Briefly call seniors periodically to inquire of well being

Individuals can donate their time and their skills creatively in a number of areas:

Handy Person – Minor Home Repair. Be a volunteer handy person, perform tasks that isolated older residents cannot manage comfortably and safely – replace light bulbs, minor lamp repair, replacing smoke detector or clock batteries, fixing leaking faucets or toilets, plugged drains, repairing door hinges and locks, putting up or taking down screens/storm windows, hanging curtains/blind/shades, turning over a mattress, installing window fans or air conditioners, tacking down carpets, setting up new answering machines, television accessories.

Tutoring on handheld electronic devices – Give simple, practical instruction on use of cell phones, tablets, and e-readers. How to make and receive calls, add to contact lists, work the camera function, texting, downloading, attaching, transmitting pictures and how to change settings. These devices can help isolated clients greatly. Attaining a little

mastery of these devices can be very empowering. It can literally help seniors maintain better contact with family, friends, and the community. Help seniors use the technology within their reach with a sequence of a few basic lessons.

In this era of Covid driven distancing and separation, it is particularly important that older adults learn how to log-in to their devices and search the internet for critical websites and links to locate vital public health information, engage needed services, and locate available food, personal protective equipment, sanitation materials, and toiletry items. Older adults need to receive simple, practical instruction on how to open and use Zoom or other conferencing platforms accessing them through smart phones, tablets, laptops, desktops, or even landlines for audio only connection if necessary. This will allow individuals to safely and remotely participate in virtual programming.

Offerings by many Councils-on-Aging and Senior Centers, across the country, could range from health and wellness activity to lifelong learning opportunities artistic performances and cultural exhibitions. Maintaining connection helps mitigate the horribly crippling effects of social isolation.

Medical equipment to borrow free of charge. – Help a Center set up and sustain a program to collect and distribute, canes, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs, bathing chairs, and other durable medical equipment.

Many senior centers offer an array of programs in which volunteers with some training and supervision could play a role:

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) tax preparation (February to April), with some AARP volunteer training provided

Serving the Health Information Needs of Everyone on Medicare (SHINE), available in Massachusetts and in many states, with volunteer training provided, designed to help older residents identify and be able to analytically choose the best, most comprehensive, and cost-effective coverage plans offered by insurers to augment Medicare and meet an individual's prescription medication and health services needs.

For an overview of an array of services provided by a typical senior center see the attached link describing the activities and services provided by the Callahan Center, Framingham, MA. Monthly newsletter found on the City of Framingham website under Council-on Aging. Ctrl and click the following link, disregard the reference to what might seem an older month and year. You will see the latest

newsletter. <https://www.framinghamma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/32006/February-2020-Callahan-Courier?bidId=> Look beyond the slick services and residential placement ads (they help carry the freight) to the inner content of on-going community activity.

In sum, I would ask you to make contact with your local Senior Centers and Councils-on Aging, and give what time you can to tasks that need be undertaken. These organizations will offer what small amount of training and supervision is required. The Centers and Councils will gladly accept what time you can offer on the basis of your own schedules. In reaching out and sharing your time, talent, and energy you will make your communities stronger and more caring.

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