

55 Forward

Senior Services
OF WICHITA

Fall 2020

SENIOR SERVICES RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A message from Laurel Alkire, Executive Director

On Friday, March 13, 2020 Senior Services came to the realization that a virus was about to wreak havoc on our lives. The beloved St. Patrick's Day Parade was cancelled by city officials, an event we look forward to each year. That next week all 4 Senior Centers and the Senior Employment Program closed to the public.

Our Special Events Committee postponed the first ever Picklepalooza, a week-long fundraising festival celebrating the great sport of pickleball. Originally slated for April 18 - 25, Picklepalooza is now rescheduled for April 2021. Our other special event fundraiser "The Heartland Games" cancelled the track competitions and the 5K race is now virtual. The September Competitive Pickleball Tournament will likely be postponed until next year.



Laurel Alkire
Executive Director

Knowing that nutrition programs were considered essential services to home bound seniors, staff went about designing ways to modify program deliveries. The challenge was met with anxiety. How do we deliver 850 Meals on Wheels each week day maintaining social distance? How do we keep 70 volunteers from congregating in a cramped space? What will our Roving Pantry Program face? How can we do all of this safely?

All those questions will be answered in this edition of 55 Forward. Staff members and volunteers rose to the occasion, working countless hours to perfect a system that allowed us to continue both Meals on Wheels and Roving Pantry deliveries.

As Executive Director I am humbled by the hard work and commitment from all our valued staff members. I'm also grateful to our supporters for continued financial support especially after lost revenue from special events fundraising. And last, but not least, a **very heartfelt thank you to our volunteers. You are the lifeblood of Senior Services.**

Please enjoy this edition of 55 Forward. I hope you are enjoying these last few weeks of summer and look forward to fall. Please stay safe and healthy!

Sincerely,

MEALS ON WHEELS CONTINUES DAILY DELIVERY AMIST GROWING PANDEMIC

A “typical” day in Meals on Wheels begins around 10:00 am when volunteers arrive to pick up routes. They enter the south door, form a line to pick up heavy bags of 10 - 20 meals, then exit the north door to take off on their deliveries. At any given time 30 or more people congregate in the volunteer area. The process, while often chaotic, works efficiently and is just another “typical” day for Meals on Wheels.

Then, after March 16th, nothing was “typical” about Meals on Wheels deliveries. Many questions were raised on safety and precautions. How do we continue delivering meals for 800 - 900 vulnerable seniors? How do we manage over 70 volunteers each day, in a tight space, without the ability to social distance? How do we make adequate client safety checks without making physical contact? The team immediately went to work on modifications.



A volunteer group from St. George Church prepares to deliver routes in 2018. Since Covid, larger groups are no longer entering the building for pick up.

“Trying to communicate procedure changes was a challenge, especially at first” said Karen Dao, Director of Programs “we stepped up our communications through email, phone calls and in person training.” Those procedure changes included pulling more staff members to assist with sanitizing delivery bags as well as handing out sanitizers, masks and wipes

for all volunteers. “Runners” brought the meals and routes outside to volunteers that stayed in their cars curbside.



A “runner” carrying heavy bags to volunteers’ cars

Tiffany Oltjenbruns, Volunteer Coordinator, discusses the challenges of the new system “The work was physically taxing. We were carrying out heavy bags of food that weighed 30 pounds or more in all kinds of weather - bitter cold, rain and heat.”

Karen agrees, “We needed a lot more manpower. Before Covid, three Volunteer Aides could manage things easily. In the midst of the pandemic, we needed at least 12 staff members each day.”

Volunteer shortages were also a major concern. “My biggest fear was trying to keep the volunteers safe,” says Tiffany. Karen agrees, adding “I was worried they wouldn’t show up at all.” Numbers did decline early on so the program reduced delivery from 5 days to 3 in April. Shelf stable meals were packaged and bagged by staff members for the 2 days without deliveries. **“In 4 months’ time staff**



Shelf stable meal

packed nearly 19,000 meals. We worked hard, coming in early and staying late.” says Karen, “teamwork was AMAZING. Staff members from every department stepped up to help.”



One day of shelf stable meals packaged by staff members

Volunteer numbers eventually began to increase and the program returned to 5 day deliveries in June. Today the program is slowly integrating a small number of volunteers back inside to pick up routes. “The outpouring of community support was overwhelming. Once we were able to adequately process new volunteer applications and call all new prospects, things began to fall into place” says Tiffany, who knows that the work she does is important “seeing the genuine appreciation and the smiles on our clients faces helped me get through bad days.”

That sentiment is echoed by Program Director, Sherri Flippo “even through fear, health and personal concerns we showed up every day for our clients. And we still are!”

“Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart”

– Elizabeth Andrew



Volunteers Are The Lifeblood Of Senior Services

While Senior Services maintains a large volunteer pool we are never in a position to say our programs have too many. With Covid numbers on the rise, volunteer numbers drop each week. If you or a loved one have the time to deliver Meals on Wheels, or assist Roving Pantry with grocery shopping, please contact the following.

MEALS ON WHEELS

- Volunteers needed to deliver between 10:00am – 1:00pm, Monday – Friday.
- Many open routes available Wednesday – Friday.
- Delivery routes take approximately 1.5 hours start to finish.
- Volunteers can deliver daily, weekly or on occasion.
- Contact: Tiffany Oltjenbruns at **316-267-0122** x: 211 or email tiffanyo@seniorservicesofwichita.org or visit website for details www.seniorservicesofwichita.org/meals-on-wheels/

ROVING PANTRY

- Volunteers needed to help shop for groceries between 5:00am – 7:00am, Monday – Thursday
- Volunteers meet the program at Dillons on Hillside & Douglas.
- Thursday is the busiest day for Roving Pantry services.
- Contact: Opal Smith at **316-267-4378** or email opals@seniorservicesofwichita.org or visit website for details www.seniorservicesofwichita.org/roving-pantry/



John Brewer and granddaughter Clara make volunteering a family affair.

DELIVERING GROCERIES THROUGH THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

“My oxygen tank only lasts 30-45 minutes”.

Anthony Reed knows he faces some challenges that differ from the normal grocery shopper. Homebound for the past six years, Senior Services of Wichita has provided programs that allow him to maintain his independence at home.



Anthony Reed (right) receiving his groceries from Rick with Roving Pantry

A retired photographer for the Wichita Eagle, Anthony wishes he could participate in some programs Senior Services offers, but suffers from Macular Degeneration and can no longer drive.

“Reading a recipe is pretty stressful with my sight”

Anthony now has five home cooked meals delivered weekdays by a Meals on Wheels volunteer. And once a week, the Roving Pantry delivers groceries to help meet his nutritional needs. A food fanatic with the self-anointed “best Pico de Gallo” in Wichita, Anthony Reed still has a love for cooking. He just needs a little help getting his ingredients. That’s where Opal Smith comes in. She is the Roving Pantry Coordinator, and has led the program for the past 40 years.

Senior Services Roving Pantry travels from east to west Wichita, Monday – Thursday delivering groceries upon request. This program is a lifeline for seniors in the middle of the pandemic, never missing a day of delivery. Poor nutrition is the number one

reason seniors must leave their homes for a nursing home placement.

Covid-19 has presented new obstacles to make sure essential programs like the Pantry continue in a safe and healthy way. Staff members are taking all necessary precautions “As much as possible, we don’t go into the home, and just set the groceries down right inside the door. When needed, we can help them unpack and put them away.” Masks, hand sanitizers and wipes are utilized by both the Roving Pantry staff members and Meals on Wheels volunteers. Their daily visits also provide an important mental and physical wellness check on the resident. “If they didn’t have us, it’d be stressful, not knowing who to call. They depend on us. They know that we are **going to be there every week, every day.**”

Truthfully, Anthony is grateful for more than just receiving his groceries, “I haven’t seen any of my friends for about six months. I’m missing a lot of personal contact I had before the pandemic so I always look forward to seeing the volunteers and Rick from Roving Pantry.”

Senior Services of Wichita has served the community since 1968 and will remain an essential service. If you or someone you know could use the Roving Pantry service, please call **267-4378**. The program is always taking new clients.

Anthony’s ICT Pico

- 5 or 6 Roma Tomatoes
- Dip in boiling water, shed skin
- Dice tomatoes coarse
- Dice and add ½ very large onion
- Add jalapenos – 4 or 5 depending on size and heat intensity
- Add tablespoon of dried cilantro and Parsley
- Add juice of 2 peeled limes
- Spice with crushed red pepper, salt and black pepper

A WHOLE LOT MORE THAN COFFEE & DONUTS

"In Wichita, the discrimination starts at about age 40". Cherie Wenderott-Shields, Senior Employment Director, has encountered this time and again in her 21 years overseeing the program.

Katherine Talley, a client of the Senior Employment Program, agrees. "Oh my gosh, yes. I had been out of the workforce for several years, and it was really hard to get back. I had a fall, and took several years off. I broke my leg in two places on my icy driveway. I had lost my job."

After being out of work for a few years, Katherine struggled to get back to achieving her personal goals. She decided to reach out to the Senior Employment Program for advice and support.

"I hadn't really gotten very far in interviews. I was kind of depressed"

Kelli Nuss, SEP Outreach Coordinator, stepped in to help. "Kathy was so frustrated at getting the run around just to get a copy of her educational records. So I said, 'I'm going to make this happen.'" A couple phone calls later, and Kathy had a picture of her GED. Katherine believes the senior population should be cherished and supported. "Kelli really does advocate for us. Seniors have a lot to offer, and are so special. We have a very good work ethic."

Kelli and the rest of the Senior Employment team are tasked with constantly advocating for their clients in the job market by attending job fairs, emailing HR managers, and attending networking events.

Director Cherie Wenderott-Shields' focus for the program is that "good service travels". And she has transformed this job placement program into a support system. Cherie hosts The Job Club, a meeting every Tuesday at 9AM at the Downtown Senior Center. This senior club offers donuts and the latest information about job postings. It also doubles as a social event. "People need that connection, I think socialization is the key. A lot of our clients are single, and Job Club is something they look forward to. We have seniors that come in for a donut and take one

home for lunch in case they don't have anything else."

Cherie says that while Covid-19 has changed the program and the amount of snacks it offers, it hasn't stopped its mission. "One positive from the pandemic is that we've had time to individually call clients and say 'how are you doing'. I've called and placed 42 seniors in jobs for the upcoming election!"



Hila Boyer handing out the latest Job List to James Carter at the Downtown Senior Center

"July was a good month, and I'm hoping a lot of these temp jobs turn into fulltime." Cherie, Kelli, and the Senior Employment team are always working to place their clients. While the long johns and old fashioned donuts have been furloughed, the staff is still there to help. "I'm always available by phone or email!" Kelli said. If you or someone you know is seeking employment as a senior, please call **(316)-267-1771** for more information about the program.



August 2020 - Senior Employment Program team from left to right: Hila Boyer, Kelli Nuss, Cherie Wendorott-Shields, Chester Green

ISOLATION CONCERNS INCREASE AS SENIOR CENTERS PAUSE REOPENINGS

“The key to successful aging is to keep moving, learning and connecting.”

This is a motto that Laurel Alkire, Senior Services Executive Director, firmly believes in. “That is why senior centers are such a vital part of our community. More than a place to simply hang out, our centers keep seniors connected to each other. When a person retires, isolation can take hold. If they join a senior center we are able to keep them out of nursing homes and off programs like Meals on Wheels for a much longer time. They may never need to use those services at all.”



Research shows the physical and mental effects of isolation are the equivalent of smoking 16 cigarettes a day. Over 3,000 senior citizens use a service provided by the 4 centers each year. Since Covid hit in mid-March the centers were forced to close their doors. A plan to slowly reopen each site on July 13th was recently halted due to the rising number of cases. On the advice of Sedgwick County Area Agency on Aging, Senior Centers will not reopen until there is at least a 2 week decline in the number of reported cases.

Center Directors Diane Nutt (Orchard Park) and Carnesha Tucker (Northeast) are doing all they can to keep their members engaged and encouraged. “My members call me all the time asking when we will reopen” says Diane, “they need to get back to their friends and community.”

Carnesha agrees, “I have a gentleman who

gets restless staying at home. He gets in his car and drives around the neighborhood then parks in our center’s lot, comes to my office window, and talks to me on his cell phone. He is longing for some face to face interactions.”

Each site is doing all they can to stay in touch with their members. “We are looking at new ways to connect that will include online and social media interaction,” says Laurel. Center Directors Jennifer Fox (Downtown) and Cherise Langenberg (Linwood Park) have filmed Facebook videos of educational events, even comical discussions or jokes, anything to keep their members’ minds engaged.

When the centers do reopen things will look different. Masks or facial shields will be required at all sites. Gathering limits will be enforced to maintain the 6 foot social distance. Libraries will be closed and food and drink will not be served. Recreation like pickleball and billiards may not return right away.

Laurel knows this will be a challenge. “It will be an adjustment for all of us but we are committed to keeping our seniors safe.”

For more information on social isolation and how you can help a senior loved one check out the website: **End Social Isolation**
<https://www.endsocialisolation.org/covid19>



Large gatherings like this one held at Downtown Senior Center will not be a part of the “new normal” when the centers reopen.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



VICTORIA RUFFIN

volunteered in Meals on Wheels - almost every day



Victoria packing delivery routes

I was watching the news, and it was just like this pull to help.

I'm healthy, and not in the risk category. I have to do something.

I thought just make this happen, so I walked into the Meals on Wheels building and asked for Tiffany. She is awesome and always so calm!

It was an awakening and eye opening experience, to see the conditions people are living in, and how important this service is.

That's when I feel comfortable, taking care of someone else.

On my breaks from teaching school, I'll still volunteer.

I don't feel like a hero, there's so many people that help out daily, many are seniors themselves. They are my heroes!

JIM UNRUH

volunteered at 5AM to help shop and deliver groceries for Roving Pantry



Jim (right) leaving for grocery delivery

I was never nervous or scared (of the pandemic).

I figured I'm in good health, I thought this would be a good opportunity to fill in. I really did enjoy it.

I was glad to see the people. I saw a number of those people twice a week, and it was obvious that I was the only person that they saw.

They continually told me how much they appreciated the service.

I certainly would utilize this service if I was homebound. I think it is great. You just make a phone call and get your groceries delivered to your door.

I'm just glad I was in a position to help make their life a little easier. No hero status here.

LANGENBERG KIDS

highlighted on Fox Kansas segment Pay It Forward, and awarded \$500 from Devaughn James for all they did with Meals on Wheels during the pandemic



From left to right: Seth (18), Atiera (15), mom Cherise & Asa (21)

Seniors are honestly some of the best people to hang out with. They have so much wisdom.

It's important that these seniors get their meals and nutritional needs met.

We also make sure they are safe!

I never had second thoughts. We were taking a lot of precautions, and would sanitize all the bags.

One lady on my delivery route will ask to boogie with you. She is fun to take a meal to!

I feel like an ordinary person, it's great to make someone else happy.

- as quoted by Seth Langenberg

While Others Stayed Home These HEROS Went Out To Support Their Community





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2ND ANNUAL HEARTLAND GAMES 5K

SEPTEMBER 13TH

Virtual 5K - \$20

Virtual 1 Mile Walk/Run - \$20



Join us for our 2nd Annual Heartland Games 5K race! This event benefits all the programs offered by Senior Services Inc., of Wichita. Complete your 5K run/walk any time between **August 1st - September 13th** and post your photos on our Heartland 5K Facebook page!

Use the hashtags **#Heartland5KVirtual** and/or **#SeniorServices** for a chance to win prizes!

Senior Services, Inc. of Wichita is dedicated to offering programs that allow older adults the opportunity to lead quality lives while continuing to make positive contributions to the community.

Don't want to run or walk, but want to support the cause? Consider making a donation to Senior Services Inc., of Wichita. Let us know if you are making a donation in Memory or Honor of a Senior in your life. We will send an acknowledgement of your donation.

To Register Visit: <https://runsignup.com/Race/KS/Wichita/Heartland5K>

