

Volunteers are a Gift to Our Community

National Volunteer Week is April 18-24 this year. And we want to thank all the individuals who give their time, talent, and resources to make an amazing difference to our Elder Network community. The Points of Light web site provides many interesting statistics on the value of volunteers, one statistic that stands out is **\$482 million dollars** identified as the annual dollar value of volunteer hours. How inspiring is that?

Our Elder Network volunteers help us and our elders in various ways. Let's start with a special thanks to the volunteers who provide direct support and services to our elders. These volunteers provide vital services including:

- Driving elders to medical appointments and other essential locations
- Providing social interaction through our Friendly Visiting Program
- Giving respite support to caregivers

Another critical group of individuals is the Elder Network's board members! They guide us and keep our organization vibrant and forward-thinking. The individuals that help with fundraising and work to grow awareness of our services are crucial to our organization. Our volunteer office staff performs all the essential tasks that help us stay organized and on top of things, they also provide positive and helpful experiences to our callers and visitors.

Whatever volunteer role you play at Elder Network you are invaluable to us!

Charlotte Rupprecht deserves special recognition

Charlotte (who recently retired from volunteering) has been a Friendly Visitor volunteer for 25 years at Elder Network in the Winona area. She originally volunteered with Family Service of Winona, working in the Older Adult Supportive Services (OASS) program and doing social visits to clients. Charlotte's parents were aging, causing her to think the OASS program would help her better understand the challenges her parents might face. Over the years, OASS joined forces with Elder Network in Rochester. Charlotte remembers taking 12 required classes through Elder Network's Peer Support volunteer training program before she could see her first client on January 5, 1995.

Over the course of 25 years, she provided Peer Support and Friendly Visitor services to many clients. Charlotte shared that *one of her clients told her that, "She was the only person that had ever given her a hug"*. Through the years, she took additional training in order to provide volunteer respite for caregivers. Charlotte is glad that she was able to visit with clients before Covid-19. She, with her big heart, wants everyone to know many other volunteers served through the Friendly Visitor, Peer Support, and Caregiver Respite programs for many, many years too.

Creating a chain of volunteerism

In a recent discussion with Tom, an Elder Network volunteer driver, we discovered he became a volunteer driver partly because his dad was a volunteer driver in Olmsted County. Passing down this volunteerism and a community service mentality is such a gift to Elder Network and the community at large. Kathy Scheid stated, *"As the new Executive Director to Elder Network, I was thrilled to hear this story because Tom's dad had driven for a program I worked with in*

another job. I knew his dad quite well. Now, I was meeting his son and discovering this beautiful legacy of volunteering.”

Sometimes bringing joy and displaying caring is done in the simplest of ways. One of our Friendly Visitor volunteers, Jerry Davidson, was no longer able to do in- person visits with his elder due to COVID-19. Jerry decided to continue to be of service by filling the elder’s bird feeder on a regular basis and having a brief window visit. Pretty soon he was improving the feeder, adding a suet feeder, and bringing corn cobs for the squirrels. Jerry said, *“I love to feed the birds and squirrels at home. It’s a natural thing for me. It gives her another thing to look at and enjoy.”*

Giving our youth a mindset of volunteerism is so important for the future of our community and the self-worth of our youth. Actually, volunteering gives as much to the volunteer as they give to their clients.

Meredith Predum at 24 years old is a new volunteer driver for Elder Network. She shared, “Being a volunteer driver with Elder Network has shown me how imperative transportation is to [a person’s] general health and quality of life. This program has given me a glimpse at how many elders have truly lost much of their independence by losing the ability to drive. I have been blown away at the gratitude I have been shown from each person I’ve driven. I can see the personal impact firsthand that Elder Network is making in the lives of people. This is such a practical way of helping the aging population in our community and I am happy to be part of this important organization.”

How you help

Generally people think of volunteering as helping others, but studies show that volunteering has a positive impact on the volunteer. *Not only do they experience a greater sense of well-being and value to their community, volunteering is good for their own health. One report goes as far as stating that volunteers have greater longevity, higher functional ability, lower rates of depression, and less incidence of heart disease.*

Elder Network would love to welcome anyone at any age to share their time and talents with us and the elder’s we serve. Please, consider joining us. Our current needs include:

- Driving elders to medical appointments and other locations
- Teaching people how to use an iPad for telehealth, online grocery shopping, and social connection with friends and family
- Helping with fundraising events, sponsorship asks, and donations of goods and services

To contact us, please e-mail: info@elder-network.org or call: 507-285-5272