

Experience *in Action!*

King County RSVP's news for people 55 & older

Volume 40 | Issue 2 | Fall 2025



AmeriCorps
Seniors



RSVP volunteers cook up healthy communities

by Ann Pelayre

Dedicated RSVP Volunteers Denise Kitchel and Kim Wagoner help build health for themselves and our community. As Solid Ground Community Food Education (CFE) Class Assistants, they support 3- to 6-week cooking and nutrition classes that teach healthy cooking skills, nutrition education, and food budgeting for adults and families living on low incomes.

Each class is led by a staff coordinator and assisted by trained volunteers to create fun, lively, interactive, and informative classes that center participants' needs and interests – and participants build community by engaging in

educational activities and preparing a shared meal.

CFE programs equip people with knowledge, confidence, resources, and skills to cook healthy meals on a budget. Let's get to know Denise and Kim better – and read two of their favorite fall recipes!

Denise Kitchel

Q: What inspired you to start volunteering?

It started about 15 years ago. I took cooking lessons in my late 20s and early 30s, which led to being an assistant and teaching in those classes. In my 40s, I went to pastry



Community Food Education staff and volunteers show off crocheted fruits and veggies.
FRONT ROW, left-right: Julie Wagoner, Laura Emmerson, and Tasha Feilke
BACK ROW: Denise Kitchel, Kim Wagoner, Heather Crandall, and Arlene Hing-Loh

school, which furthered my whole interest in cooking. While working downtown, I stumbled across the [Solid Ground] program formerly known as 'Cooking Matters,' where I volunteered for a couple of years. It was a 6-week session that was held at various locations like the YWCA, a women's/family shelter, and low-income housing facilities.

Q: How did you choose your current volunteer role?

My love for cooking and wanting to help wherever I can. I've been able to participate as the demonstrator, class assistant, and even taught nutrition lessons here and there when the program needed extra support. I really appreciate that this program helps serve communities that need our help. The more we can teach clients about nutrition, and how to break the cycle of living on top ramen, this is a benefit that pays back 10-fold.

Q: What are some ways volunteering has impacted your life (from a health perspective)?

It's challenging transitioning to retirement, and there are usually two drivers: You are either running away from or towards something. When you retire, strings that tie you to connection, belonging, and being a part of something bigger can be cut.

Volunteering helps you find that motivation to get up every day, find excitement and joy, and be a part of something to feel connected again. I appreciate that the classes are also active, from carrying in groceries or even just doing the dishes. It's also

fun watching the lightbulb go off from a client, especially when they learn something new. I've had the pleasure of teaching women in their 60s and 70s how to chop onions, and it's exciting and rewarding to watch them learn new skills.

Kim Wagoner

Q: What inspired you to start volunteering?

I've been volunteering for about 10 years and used to volunteer years ago with my dad for Sunday night dinners at a church by helping in the kitchen. I also volunteer at the Ballard Food Bank and enjoy being able to do different things or find other ways I can help. On the very first day I volunteered with Solid Ground, my father passed away. In honor of him, I went to Marra Farm to help, and it was a great feeling knowing I was doing something special for him in a way that he would have loved and appreciated.

Q: How did you choose your current volunteer role?

Being a class assistant sounded interesting even though I'm not an expert on food, but it gives me the chance to help the nutritionist, greet families, or just wash dishes. It was not only a new way for me to volunteer, but it also worked out great with my work schedule and the ability to help at the Roosevelt and Wallingford locations. My daughter Julie, who is the CFE Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, also gave me additional ideas on ways I could volunteer.

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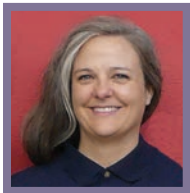
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E*iA* Inside This Issue...

Volunteer for your health!

► Welcome to our new Volunteer Services staff.....	p. 2
► Volunteering for your health.....	p. 3
► Health and wealth.....	p. 4
► Healthy fall recipes.....	p. 5
► Site Partner Spotlight: Greenwood Senior Center.....	p. 6
► Medicare Open Enrollment 2025.....	p. 7

Continued on page 5



Speaking Directly
by Jen Gahagan, RSVP Director

Welcome to our new Volunteer Services staff

Three new volunteer enthusiasts have joined our small but mighty team! I’m excited to introduce Ann Pelayre, Retired and Senior Volunteer (RSVP) Program Coordinator, Alex Olsen, Data and Communications Assistant, and Amy Davis, Solid Ground’s Volunteer Coordinator.

Ann Pelayre, RSVP Coordinator, radiates warmth and kindness. She’s excited to answer your questions about RSVP, get to know you, and connect you to interesting volunteer opportunities across King County. Prior to Solid Ground, Ann worked in the corporate environment for almost 35 years, honing her people and management skills. After leaving that world, she took a long sabbatical to figure out what she wanted to do next, and in 2023, she started volunteering with our team.

Volunteering was important to Ann, because it provided a sense of purpose and belonging that she didn’t realize was missing during her sabbatical. It offered connections and fulfillment that helped improve her well-being – both mentally and physically – while exploring interests and learning new skills. Most importantly, it offered her a chance to meet, foster, and build relationships with the Solid Ground community.

Ann shares, “I never realized how much I had in common with other volunteers, and being able to swap stories is an incredible feeling and opportunity.” When a position became available, the stars aligned, and Ann applied to work with us! She says, “One of the reasons it was so easy for me to decide is because at the core of it all, our values are aligned.”

Fast forward to now, working with RSVP members and our site partners, Ann gets the chance to connect with volunteers and hear what they’re passionate about and why they want to volunteer their time, talents, and skills to those who need help. Ann says, “It’s a great feeling when a match happens between a volunteer and an opportunity with one of our site partner organizations.”

What Ann loves most about working with RSVP volunteers is she gets to connect directly with the volunteers. She’s always enjoyed building relationships and new learning opportunities. Recently, she attended a resource fair with one of our ambassador volunteers, Marty.

“Not only was it a great learning opportunity to see one of our ambassadors in action, but I got a chance to get to know and learn more about him too,” Ann says. “I feel fortunate that I get to work with our incredible volunteers and see how they help our community.”

At the start of 2025, Ann made a promise to herself to be open to new opportunities: “With that mindset, I was able to take a chance on a new role, enjoy a new fun way (water aerobics) to stay physically fit, and love going on adventures with my family. I started the year with this quote: ‘Wherever life plants me, I bloom with grace.’”

Alex Olsen, Data and Communications Assistant, brings positive energy to the team. Combining her love of data and working with volunteers, she keeps track of volunteer hours and helps us spread the word about volunteer opportunities. Alex graduated from the University of Washington a few years ago with her degree in International Studies with a focus on Human Rights.

She started working with volunteers in 2024 as an AmeriCorps VISTA at Literacy Source. There she led projects, organized volunteer teams, collected data, and made systems improvements such as revitalizing the library and coordinating English conversation classes.

Volunteering is important to Alex, not just for the programs and agencies it benefits, but also for the volunteers themselves. When volunteering, Alex



The Volunteer Services team, left-right: Jen Gahagan, Alex Olsen, Amy Davis, Ann Pelayre, and Carol-Ann Smith (photo by RJ Dumo)

enjoys the chance to connect with people who she may not otherwise meet. She loves working with volunteers, because they’re just as excited about caring for their community as she is.

To stay healthy, Alex enjoys walking her dog and trying new recipes, and she’s a huge fan of journaling. She keeps a big notebook dedicated to her thoughts, venting, and (occasionally) stickers. She also enjoys reading. Her three favorite books so far this year are *Chain Gang All-Stars* by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, *Honor* by Thrity Umrigar, and *The Haunting of Alejandra* by V. Castro.



The three “As” of Volunteer Services, left-right: Alex, Amy, and Ann (photo by Carol-Ann Smith)

Amy Davis, Volunteer Coordinator (the newest team member), is calm and caring. She provides support to programs and all Solid Ground volunteers, including RSVP volunteers. With a background in HR and social work, Amy brings a wealth of experience to the team and our community.

She’s been volunteering since the 9th grade and says, “It’s a great way to give back to your community, to learn new skills, to get connected and build community – all while having fun.”

Amy says she gets to keep great company when working with

volunteers, because they’re “the kind of people who are generous enough to volunteer their valuable time and care about their community.”

Some of the many places Amy has volunteered include Seattle Art Museum, Habitat for Humanity, Kids Can Do (a mentorship program), Tabitha (a women’s overflow shelter), AmeriCorps, and most recently on the Board of her church.

In addition to being an active volunteer, Amy stays healthy by walking regularly, focusing on her creative writing, and prioritizing quality time with her husband (and best friend). She’s also making an effort to drink less coffee and eat more vegetables!

Welcome Ann, Alex, and Amy! Thank you for bringing your talents and passion to our RSVP community.

As they’ve each shared above, there are many benefits to volunteering, from creating stronger, more resilient communities, to supporting the people and causes you care about. But did you also know that the act of volunteering can improve your health?

Please enjoy this issue of the *Experience in Action* (EIA) newsletter in which our authors explore the health benefits of volunteering. ●

What health benefits have YOU experienced from volunteering? We’d love to hear from you. Email us at rsvp@solid-ground.



It Seems to Me...
by Peter Langmaid

To your health

My primary volunteering experience is my weekly visit to a local food bank. In addition, I write this column for the *Experience in Action (EIA)* newsletter. I value both activities and their impact on my overall health and well-being.

My wife travels frequently, and when she’s gone, I tend to become a hermit. Research is clear that hibernating alone is detrimental to our health. We are social beings and need the stimulation of interacting with other people. Watching TV doesn’t qualify as interaction!

The food bank gets me out of my easy chair and into the flow of life. I enjoy interacting with both my fellow volunteers and our food bank customers. We have fun.

A self-centered and selfish life is a lonely life. The emotional and health benefits of my time at the food bank are surprisingly powerful. Though tired after my shift, my self-esteem skyrockets to a weekly high. I feel like my existence is worthy, and that’s a great feeling. Want to feel good about yourself? Volunteer!

Helping others is incredibly uplifting. My food bank experience also reminds me of how lucky I am. A few years ago, I suffered a stroke. As a result, reading is difficult for me, and my keyboarding skills are marginal. Writing for this newsletter exercises my mind in a healthy way by forcing my brain to organize my thoughts in a coherent manner. An active brain is a healthy brain and a hedge against cognitive decline.

Though time consuming, I continue to hunt and peck my way through my contribution to each EIA issue with the hope I have something interesting to contribute. (As a side note, I also challenge my brain by doing Wordle every morning with a 99% success rate.)

Though not strenuous, my food bank activities are far from sedentary. My usual job is handing out protein. It requires constant stocking, restocking, and remembering the assortment – which varies week to week – to help guide customers to find their

preferred choice. I know I’ve had a workout when I get home and want a snack followed by a nap!

Since my stroke, there are a few favorite activities I’m no longer able to do or do well. On my bad days I feel sorry for myself and lament the losses. This is not healthy, especially because there’s nothing I can do about it. However, volunteering is something I can do, and it changes my focus from negative to positive, which is emotionally healthier.

Finally, on a larger scale, volunteering is a measure of the health of a community. It’s easy to drive by the line of people waiting at the door of the food bank and to assume that hunger is someone else’s problem – but a healthy community member would do a U-turn and ask how they can help, realizing that hunger is everyone’s problem. ●

Peter Langmaid is a semi-retired businessman, RSVP Ambassador, and longtime EIA contributor.



How volunteering benefits me by Paul Jeganathan

I had just retired and had plenty of free time. It was a bright sunny day, and I stopped at IHOP for brunch. While I was waiting for my meal, an elderly gentleman approached and asked if he could join me. He introduced himself as an RSVP Ambassador and taught me about the good work of Solid Ground and RSVP. As a result of our conversation and because volunteering was topmost on my list of retirement activities, I decided to become an RSVP Ambassador.

Volunteering with RSVP has been a wonderful experience. Research shows there are many benefits to volunteering. Here are just a few ways in which volunteering with RSVP and other organizations has benefited my life.

Make a difference: Through RSVP, I volunteered at Cancer Lifeline’s call center, which required a deeper time commitment, discipline, sensitivity, and confidentiality. It gave me the opportunity to express my empathy in support of many cancer survivors and their families who need listening ears.

Sense of fulfillment: Prior to joining RSVP, I volunteered with Seattle Children’s Hospital in their Child Life Department. I encountered not only the patients but their families as well. Many parents simply wanted to talk and were looking for support. Just being there for patients and their parents was what was expected. All I needed to have was a willingness to hear their stories and show my support by sitting with them



Paul Jeganathan

and arranging to provide the small supplies they needed. I got great satisfaction seeing them relax and express relief at even the smallest gesture of concern and comfort.

Continue to learn: Another opportunity came when I was invited to serve on the Board of the Service League at UW Medical Center. Working on the hospital board gave me the chance to meet both clinical and

non-clinical staff and gain insight into the workings of the various departments. I also learned more about the wide range of needs – physical, emotional, spiritual – of patients, caregivers, and families the hospital serves.

Social connection: As a preteen who wasn’t able to attend school, it was inevitable that I felt extremely lonely and experienced isolation. I had too much time on my hands with too little to do. The only outlet was to visit an elderly gentleman across the street. He was a medical doctor who had become blind. I read him newspaper stories, books, and magazine articles.

I developed the skill of reading aloud in a clear voice with proper diction and correct pronunciation. We also spent time talking. At the end of the day, I was happy not being alone and idle, and I felt appreciated. Yes, this is true of volunteering – you are not alone nor idle, and you are appreciated.

I feel compelled to volunteer. I’m restless to serve. I encourage anyone who has the time and heart to seek out opportunities to better someone’s life and your own! ●

RSVP



AmeriCorps Seniors

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is a nonprofit AmeriCorps Seniors program sponsored locally by Solid Ground. RSVP meets critical community needs by encouraging and supporting volunteerism in King County for people 55 and older.



At Solid Ground, we believe poverty is solvable. Our approach combines direct services with community-based advocacy. We support individuals while working to undo racism and other oppressions that create barriers – so everyone can achieve their full potential.

EIA

Experience in Action! (EIA) is published by King County RSVP and distributed to 3,500 RSVP members, senior volunteers, and friends. The **EIA** is dedicated to providing news, information and opportunities about senior volunteerism. Articles express writers’ opinions, which aren’t necessarily the views of RSVP, Solid Ground, or **EIA**. We reserve the right to refuse any material deemed unsuitable. Articles may be edited to meet technical and editorial policy guidelines.

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Financial Planning

by Bill Pharr

Health and wealth

In *The Five Types of Wealth* by Sahil Bloom, the author posits that there are multiple kinds of wealth: 1) Time Wealth, 2) Social Wealth, 3) Mental Wealth, 4) Physical Wealth, and 5) Financial Wealth. His main thesis is that building a life around these five types of wealth creates true fulfillment. The goal is to make a positive impact on one’s daily life.

My primary takeaway from the book is the goal of creating balance between the five types of wealth. If any one “type” becomes dominant or too weak in one’s life, you lose the sought-after life’s balance. This philosophy directly ties in to this newsletter’s theme: health and wellness in general, and the health benefits of volunteering specifically. Volunteering is intertwined with four of the five types of wealth: time, social, mental, and physical.

As I review my volunteer activities, I take the time to look at the results of my efforts for the community. When a family approaches me and my co-volunteers and says thank you for the clothes they received for their children – or a person thanks me for spending time reviewing their finances with them – it makes me feel good that I was able to make the world a better place in a small way. When people volunteer in a variety of areas of need, big accomplishments can happen in all communities.

The flip side of the positive impacts of community volunteering are the personal benefits volunteers receive, which tie into the four types of wealth listed above. Time, and

especially how one spends their time in retirement, is important. As an RSVP Ambassador, I regularly talk with newly retired people who sometimes struggle with how to spend their time every day. Personally, I have a goal to volunteer someplace every week. Volunteering is a wonderful way to fill one’s week doing important things while participating in fun activities. A quote from Sahil Bloom’s book is: “If people observed my actions for a week, what would they say my priorities are?”

In an informal survey of volunteers I know, their biggest source of satisfaction is the social aspect of volunteering. When you volunteer, it helps to get you out of bed in the morning with a purpose in mind. When you arrive at the volunteer location or click into a Zoom meeting, you can collaborate with people you like with similar values. You can meet people from various aspects of life, learn about them, and hear their stories. For example, at a recent volunteer activity, my wife learned a great deal about mandatory high school busing in Seattle in the 1970s.

Sometimes you get to know people well; you hit it off and develop social activities away from volunteering. It’s fun to be part of a group effort to achieve goals.



Most articles I read about mental health recommend trying to engage your brain as much as possible by doing different activities. I do financial reviews and educational classes. The people I work with always ask me great questions, which force me to find creative ways to explain the answers. I’ve also put together playground equipment for a nonprofit, and just the process of figuring out the directions was good for my brain!

Displaying food at the food banks, organizing people’s shopping bags when they overfill, and doing tax returns for people are other basic examples of using our brains when volunteering.

Finally, volunteering can help us exercise. Gardening at Solid Ground’s Giving Garden at Marra Farm, lifting bags of carrots at Magnuson Park Community Food Pantry, and taking a walk with a senior citizen who you just took to a doctor’s appointment are just a few examples of getting that heart beating a little faster. Getting

exercise doesn’t always involve going to a gym. Walking up and down stairs, walking from one room to another, and lifting and carrying a box are great ways to get moving!

There you go. Volunteering improves our community, and we get all the personal benefits of helping. As we talk about volunteering here at Solid Ground, it’s about giving one’s time to assist, making our community better, and helping the organizations and nonprofits in our community be better able to get the job done. For example, if all the nonprofits had to pay people to work at food banks or mentor students, it just would not work. That side of volunteering, making people’s lives easier and better, is critical.

The other side of volunteering to give back to your community is what you get out of it. A purpose for the day, and life. Camaraderie. Sense of self-worth. Fun. Learn new skills. Meet new people. In this day and age, volunteering gives one a sense of doing something meaningful and positive. ●

Bill Pharr is a retired business owner and financial advisor, RSVP Ambassador, and regular EIA contributor.

Gearing up for the winter cold

Solid Ground’s Knit-It-Alls volunteers have been at work all year knitting, crocheting, and sewing warm clothing and blankets for people who need them during the cold winter months.

Knit-It-Alls volunteers...

- ▶ Create a range of cozy hats, scarves, and mittens, including baby and children’s clothing.
- ▶ Count, tag, and sort donations.

This winter, we’ll distribute thousands of items to people we serve and other nonprofits to pass out to their participants. It’s not too late to contribute new, cozy, handmade items. **For more info, contact us at 206.694.6825 or volunteers@solid-ground.org.**

Attention Current RSVP Volunteers!

If you haven’t received your AmeriCorps Seniors long-sleeved T-shirt, please contact us at 206.694.6786 or rsvp@solid-ground.org with your requested shirt size and the address where we should send it.

Not yet an RSVP volunteer? Sign up today at solid-ground.org/rsvp-registration-form!



Cooking for health continued from page 1

Q: How did you choose your current volunteer role?

Volunteering gives you a sense of empathy and understanding, and whenever I come out of a cooking class, I’m enthusiastic and always feel better. Even after a long day at work, volunteering in the cooking class gives me energy – positive energy. It’s always an enjoyable and uplifting experience. You’re not only learning great things about food, but you end up feeling good both mentally and physically – because you’re active the whole time – and you meet families with their young children. It’s fun watching them learn and work together.

I personally take a lot away from the class itself, too. It’s like I’m taking the cooking class. It’s given me the opportunity to learn how

to make cheese quesadillas with ingredients that include carrots and zucchini. I’ve made a melon salad with tajine, and I now love eating melons this way. I learn nutritional pieces from the class, and it offers healthy choices that volunteers can also appreciate.

What I especially like is it gives me a talking point. I’m always sharing what Solid Ground is about and the great resources that are available. It’s also heartwarming when I hear that people already know about Solid Ground too. Recently, a 5th grade elementary teacher shared with me that he took his class to Marra Farm.

We’re grateful for the time, energy, and expertise Denise and Kim share through volunteering with Solid Ground and CFE! ●

Denise’s fall recipe pick:

Chicken Soup – Immunity Soup

Recipe by Ann Taylor Pittman & Emily Lachtrupp, M.S., RD, eatingwell.com

Prep Time: 30 minutes
Cook Time: 1 hour | Servings: 8

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1½ cups chopped onion
- 3 celery stalks, thinly sliced
- 2 large carrots, thinly sliced
- 1 pound pre-sliced mushrooms
- 10 medium garlic cloves, minced
- 8 cups unsalted chicken stock
- 4 thyme sprigs
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 (15-ounce) can unsalted chickpeas, drained
- 2 pounds skinless, bone-in chicken breasts
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 12 ounces curly kale, stems removed, leaves torn

Directions

- Heat oil in a large Dutch oven over medium heat.
- Add onion, celery, and carrots. Cook, stirring occasionally, 5 minutes.
- Add mushrooms and garlic. Cook, stirring often, 3 minutes.
- Stir in stock, thyme, bay leaves, and chickpeas, and bring to a simmer.
- Add chicken, salt, and red pepper. Cover and simmer until chicken is done, about 25 minutes.
- Remove chicken from Dutch oven and cool slightly, then shred meat with 2 forks and discard bones.
- Stir chicken and kale into soup. Cover and simmer until kale is just tender, about 5 minutes.
- Discard thyme sprigs and bay leaves before serving.



Denise Kitchel at home

Nutrition Facts

Calories per serving – 253
Protein – 28g
Saturated fat – 1g
Cholesterol – 54mg
Sodium – 581mg
Calcium – 116mg
Iron – 2mg

Kim’s fall recipe pick:

Three-Bean Vegetarian Chili

Recipe by Julianna Grimes, Anissa Helou & James Peterson

Servings: 6 (~1½ cups each)

Ingredients

- 2 red bell peppers
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 cups organic vegetable broth
- 1½ cups peeled & cubed (½-inch pieces) butternut squash
- 1 28-ounce can no-salt-added chopped tomatoes with its liquid
- 1 15-ounce can pinto beans, rinsed & drained
- 1 15-ounce can cannellini beans, rinsed & drained
- 1 15-ounce can red kidney beans, rinsed & drained
- ½ cup thinly sliced green onions

Directions

- Preheat broiler.
- Cut bell peppers in half lengthwise, then remove and discard seeds and membranes. Place pepper halves, skin sides up, on a foil-lined baking sheet. Broil 15 minutes or until blackened.
- Place blackened pepper halves in a zip-top plastic bag and seal. Let stand 15 minutes, then peel and chop peppers.
- Heat a Dutch oven over medium-low heat. Add oil to pan and swirl to coat.
- Add onions. Cook 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- Stir in the spices and garlic. Cook 2 minutes, stirring frequently.
- Add bell peppers, broth, squash, and tomatoes. Bring to a simmer and cook 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- Add beans and simmer for 25 minutes or until slightly thick, stirring occasionally. Sprinkle with green onions.
- Optional protein boost: Sprinkle the top of each serving with 1 tablespoon toasted pumpkin seeds.



Kim Wagoner in the Giving Garden

Nutrition Facts

Calories per serving – 264
Fat – 7.7g
-Saturated: 1.2g
-Monounsaturated: 5.2g
-Polyunsaturated: 1.3g
Protein – 9.5g
Carbs – 40.9g
Fiber 10.7g
Cholesterol – 0mg
Iron – 4.4mg
Sodium – 787 mg
Calcium – 145mg

A message from Community Food Education (CFE) staff
We couldn’t run our CFE cooking classes without our wonderful volunteers.

Kim and Denise have both gone above and beyond to ensure our classes run smoothly and that all participants have a good time. In addition to assisting with class set-up and clean-up, washing produce, and helping distribute nutrition handouts, they’ve both added their own personal touches. Denise once brought her knife sharpener and sharpened all of the class knives. She also led a class on using a sourdough starter. Kim brought small vases with flower cuttings from her yard to add color to the tables and gave them as gifts for everyone to take home. Huge thank yous to both for helping our program be such a success!

SITE PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Greenwood Senior Center volunteers build a healthy community

by *Becky Rosenberg*

On a recent Friday morning, the parking lot was full at the Greenwood Senior Center (GSC), so I found parking around the corner. When I entered the Center, I was welcomed by two volunteers at the reception desk. The lobby was filled with tables and chairs, reading materials, games, and a bulletin board posted with the activities both in the community and at the Center, including information about their parent organization, Phinney Neighborhood Association (PNA).

An exercise class was in session and lunch preparation was underway. The class and the meal are offered at \$5 each and are routinely well attended. The weekday lunch menus offer healthy and varied options, using seasonal produce available through GSC’s partnership with local farms. October features options like stuffed peppers, tofu larb, cassoulet – not your standard institutional fare.

GSC was founded in its current North 85th Street location in 1977 and became part of PNA in 2006. I was there to meet with LeAnne Chow, who’s been GSC’s Volunteer Program Manager for 14½ years. She holds the position at both organizations, with two days per week spent at GSC. Linda, the volunteer who greeted me at the front desk, describes herself as LeAnne’s “first hire” 14 years ago.

The array of activities is vast, with classes and clubs in crafts, arts, languages, and film, and exercise classes including Pilates, line dancing, Zumba, and yoga. Professional services include foot care and acupuncture at discounted rates, complimentary financial consultations, and Solid Ground’s own SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors) volunteers available by appointment twice a month to assist with any Medicare issues.

Discussion groups are provided for individuals experiencing memory loss and for their caregivers. The PNA Village, Memory Loss Support, and Social Connection programs are supported by a social worker, a half dozen staff, and hundreds of volunteers. They help provide extensive services to NW seniors designed to keep them in their homes by tending to their regular household needs (yard care, cleaning, dog walking, and taking garbage to the curb) as well as offering daily programs, with weekly outings to the zoo, music, movement, art activities, and counseling that benefits those with memory loss and their caregivers.

All of these programs are designed to support GSC’s efforts to be “an inclusive community that provides social, physical, and educational activities focused on the needs of older adults. We work to fight isolation, build camaraderie, and enrich each other’s lives.”

Beyond the regular volunteers, GSC and PNA engage larger groups for annual day of service events. As many as 100 Windermere Real Estate employees join the staff and volunteers to provide maintenance on the buildings, scrub the kitchen, and perform other services. LeAnne was struck by the genuine joy they express by being able to contribute.

These enriching programs are only possible because of the dedication



Photo thanks to Phinney Neighborhood Association

and generosity of hundreds of volunteers. But what do the activities provide to volunteers? Recent research confirms that the answer is quite a lot. The benefits of volunteering extend not only to those who receive services but also to those who provide them.

Of course there’s the sense of satisfaction and purpose that comes with supporting other human beings. But there are also benefits like counteracting the isolation that often accompanies retirement and aging, when it can be harder to find community. Then there’s the physical activity of showing up, and stress reduction from sharing with others and being distracted from your worries.

But more than that, research conducted at Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health links volunteering “to healthier cognition in later life, and also with slowing or reversing declines in brain volume of areas implicated in dementia pathology.” Additional research at Chapman University concluded that volunteering “can boost our own happiness and psychological well-being ... [and] our physical health.” That is, mental health gains are credited with physical well-being and reduced mortality!

As this work emerges, it’s clear that organizations staffed by volunteers can enhance these benefits by creating more opportunities for interaction among volunteers and expressions of gratitude for their contributions.

LeAnne is aware of this and has taken steps to enrich the volunteer experience with more intentional opportunities to bring volunteers together for celebration and appreciation events like coffee hours, happy hours at a brewery, and quarterly meetings. She’s observed that volunteers often arrive early to catch up and socialize and develop relationships outside of GSC, and she’s seen incremental changes in their interactions with each other and with participants and their openness to new opportunities.

There’s much to be gained by coming together in service to the community. This service can lead to better mental and physical health, and a longer, more satisfying life. Pat Bonner, a longtime RSVP volunteer at GSC, testifies: “I thoroughly enjoy my volunteer experiences at GSC. The opportunities are plentiful!”

If you’re looking for a meaningful way to volunteer while building community, consider joining Pat and LeAnne at Greenwood Senior Center. ●



WHAT ARE RSVP AMBASSADORS?

They’re RSVP volunteers willing to help us spread the word about the benefits of volunteering!

Because of our small staff, we have a wonderful group of volunteers who help us share RSVP’s mission with other seniors. If you’re willing to represent RSVP at events around King County, we’d like to talk to you. You’ll share your experiences and enthusiasm for volunteering, and encourage others to join RSVP. We provide a fun, interactive training!

To sign up, send hours, or ask more questions, please contact: Ann Pelayre, 206.694.6786 | annp@solid-ground.org

SEND US YOUR HOURS!

Your RSVP volunteer hours are important!

Hours are tied to federal funding with benefits provided to you, and they help our volunteer sites and RSVP reach volunteer hour goals. And importantly, they help us recognize you for your service and the contributions you make to meet community needs when you volunteer.



Medicare Open Enrollment 2025: Wednesday, 10/15 – Sunday, 12/7

Medicare Open Enrollment is here!

This is the one time of the year when those already enrolled in Medicare can make changes to their health and drug plans for the next year. Changes made during this period take effect **January 1, 2026**. If you haven't already reviewed and updated your plan, don't delay!

Five steps for Medicare Open Enrollment:

- 1) **Review your Annual Notice of Change letter.** By September 30, you should have received a mailed notice from your current plan provider with any changes for 2026, including formulary and/or premium changes. Review the changes to see if the plan will continue to meet your needs.
- 2) **Compare plans.** Even if you're happy with your current coverage, it's important to check for any changes next year and compare it with other available options. You may save money, find better coverage, or both!
- 3) **Review your 'Medicare & You 2026' handbook.** In late September, all Medicare households received the updated handbook in the mail. Look over this handbook to see new listings of plans in your area and answers to frequently asked questions about Medicare. You can also download a copy online at [medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov).
- 4) **Pick up a copy of the Medicare Open Enrollment Jumpstart Toolkit** at your local library or senior center to help guide you through changing Medicare plans, or visit insurance.wa.gov/MedicareOEP to order a copy or access online resources.
- 5) **Get trusted advice from a SHIBA volunteer.** We offer free, unbiased education on your Medicare options and can help you compare plans for Open Enrollment.

Call or email to get personalized Medicare health insurance counseling at 206.753.4806 or shiba@solid-ground.org. ●



Medicare Open Enrollment Presentations & Webinars

Join us for a free, unbiased presentation on Medicare Open Enrollment and learn about...

- ▶ What you can do during Medicare Open Enrollment.
- ▶ Choosing and changing plans.
- ▶ What Medigap plans are available.
- ▶ How to get help paying for Medicare.

View our calendar of in-person and online presentations!

To see all upcoming events, check out our website at solid-ground.org/workshops/#medicare.

QUESTIONS? Email shiba@solid-ground.org.

SENIOR ON THE STREET – RSVP AMBASSADORS

“What’s your favorite way of staying healthy?” *by Ann Pelayre*



Gwen Campbell
“Walking in a peaceful place.”



Ryan Chamberlin
“Power walking four times a week and fresh air walks daily.”



Bill Pharr
“When I can, I walk or bike instead of driving. I swim or work out at the gym and garden, and volunteering is a part of my weekly schedule.”



Becky Rosenberg
“Working in my yard gardening, growing flowers and raising vegetables to enhance my diet. I love to sit on my deck appreciating all of this, with a good book.”



Charla Sullivan
“I try to get in over 10,000 steps three times a week, and with my weekly volunteer gig I get in 6-8,000 steps. I also cook and try to prepare meals from scratch, using fresh vegetables, no salt, and lots of herbs.”



Marty Thompson
“Love to walk and try to get in six miles daily.”

VOLUNTEER & COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH RSVP

The following are just a few of the opportunities RSVP has to offer. To talk to a real person about volunteer roles that are just right for you, call Ann Pelayre at 206.694.6786 – or visit our website at solid-ground.org/RSVP for volunteer opportunity listings organized by region.

Auburn Community Food Bank: Lend a hand and help others access food. The Auburn Food Bank is a volunteer-directed organization that provides food, referrals, and emergency assistance to those in need. Volunteer opportunities include: Counter person, door person, bagger, vegetable/bread attendant, van helper (loading/unloading food donations), and administrative assistant/bookkeeper. ~South King County

Catholic Community Services (CCS) welcomes volunteers to enable elders living on low incomes and adults with disabilities to remain independent in their own homes. You may help the same person each time or be listed as “on call” depending on your schedule and interests. You’ll receive training, mileage reimbursement, and insurance. Volunteer opportunities include giving rides to medical appointments, doing yardwork, and being a phone buddy, as well as delivering groceries, medications, and/or meals. ~Countywide & via phone

Family Law CASA provides free child advocacy services to shed light on intricate family dynamics in high-conflict custody cases. Advocates gather information and make recommendations to the court about what’s in a child’s best interests. Each advocate is assigned a staff supervisor who guides and supports them. No specific experience is required. ~Countywide

Franciscan Hospice & Palliative Care (FHPC): Affirming every life, FHPC invites you to be part of a team of professionals and volunteers who provide compassionate care to meet the unique needs of hospice patients and their families. Volunteers provide both practical companionship and emotional support by making friendly phone calls to patients. ~Seattle & via phone

Full Life Care invites volunteers to support seniors, caregivers, and adults with disabilities in one-on-one or group settings at self-scheduled, flexible times. Join our ElderFriends or Care Teams programs to provide customized social, emotional, and practical support to an isolated senior or unpaid caregiver through friendly in-home visits, hobby sharing, community outing companions, walking buddies, and phone buddies. ~South Seattle

Greenwood Senior Center is an inclusive community that provides social, physical, and educational activities focused on the needs of older adults. We work to fight isolation, build camaraderie, and enrich each other’s lives. Volunteer opportunities include assisting with hot meals, special events, and classes. We welcome all abilities and interests! ~North Seattle

Jewish Family Service Seattle supports the needs of Jewish individuals and families, refugees and immigrants, and our broader community to achieve well-being, health, and stability. We offer a variety of social service programs across the Puget Sound region. Our volunteer opportunities support food access, older adults, refugees and immigrants, and more. We happily welcome individuals, families, and groups of all ages and sizes to volunteer! ~Central Seattle, North & East King County

Kokoro Kai Adult Day Center provides health and related services in a traditional atmosphere to primarily Japanese American families in the Pacific Northwest. Like to talk? Play games? Seniors would appreciate your warmth and company. If you speak any Asian languages, it’s a plus but not a requirement. Join us to assist with companionship and activities. ~International District, Seattle

Lifelong: Our volunteers – the heart and soul of the organization – have played a vital role helping provide quality care and services to people for more than 30 years. Lifelong’s food program, Chicken Soup Brigade, eases the lives of people living with or at risk of serious illnesses. Volunteer opportunities include repacking food donations, prepping food, packaging meals, delivering nutritious food, and assembling health care kits. ~Central & South Seattle

Mount Si Senior Center: Over 1,200 seniors a year rely on Mt. Si Senior Center for fitness classes, social programs, arts and educational workshops, recreational activities, and lunches. Volunteers help ensure seniors can safely age in place. We seek lunch program help, afternoon front desk support, and workshop leaders. ~East King County

North Helpline Emergency Services & Food Bank keeps food on the table and a roof overhead for our neighbors, helping meet basic needs to affirm human dignity. We’re seeking fitness class instructors as well as nutrition volunteers for our Community Dining program and Health and Wellness Center. Training and certification provided. ~North Seattle

Port of Seattle SEA Volunteers: If you love being a part of the airport environment, join our volunteer team to help make every passenger’s journey a pleasant one. SEA Volunteers provide vital support at the airport, assisting passengers with navigation and ensuring a seamless travel experience. By guiding them through the terminals and offering knowledgeable assistance, you’ll enhance the efficiency and friendliness of the airport environment. ~South King County

Power of One Volunteer Program works to match volunteers with opportunities in the Shoreline Public Schools PreK-12. Volunteers commit to one hour per week on a regular basis throughout the school year. Under a teacher’s direction, volunteers work with students to support academic success and/or social skills. Join Power of One and witness the difference you can make in a student’s life! ~North Seattle, North & East King County

NEW! Providence ElderPlace, a health insurance and care provider, is a Program of All-Inclusive Care of the Elderly (PACE). We provide seamless total care for vulnerable elders with compassion and dignity. Volunteers support staff as we assist elders, offer social enrichment activities, provide companionship and a chance for those we serve to socialize in a group or one-on-one setting, and foster a sense of belonging and care to help make their lives easier. Medical screening is necessary, and training is provided. Spanish-speaking skills are a plus! ~Countywide

United Way of King County (UWKC) Tax Prep: Tax season can be stressful, especially for folks who are new to the US tax code or just entering the workforce, and those with financial or technological barriers to filing. UWKC seeks volunteers to prepare taxes (we train you!) for the next January to April tax season, and greeters to welcome folks to tax sites. Training is offered in December and January. ~Countywide & online

Valley Medical Center volunteers are the heart of our community, bringing care, compassion, and support to patients, families, and staff. From welcoming visitors at information desks and providing shuttle rides to assisting in our new Cancer Center, their dedication touches countless lives. Be part of our team and share your heart! ~South King County

Washington DECA serves 13,000 high school students to prepare them to become innovative leaders and entrepreneurs who make a positive social and global impact. We’re currently looking for volunteer judges to evaluate both written and oral business competitions. Students value your feedback as they prepare for the International DECA competition. ~Eastside & online

Youth Tutoring Program (YTP) volunteer tutors guide and inspire 6- to 18-year-old youth scholars who live in low-income and public housing. We seek afterschool tutors interested in helping guide youth on their educational journeys. We ask a minimum of one hour/week of in-person tutoring at one of our five centers. ~North & South Seattle

☐ Please call to help me find a volunteer opportunity suited just for me.

☐ Please send information about RSVP.

☐ Please note my new address.

Name:_____

Phone:_____ **Email:**_____

Address:_____

Please mail this form to: RSVP, 1501 North 45th Street, Seattle, WA 98103