

The Connection

Emergency Services

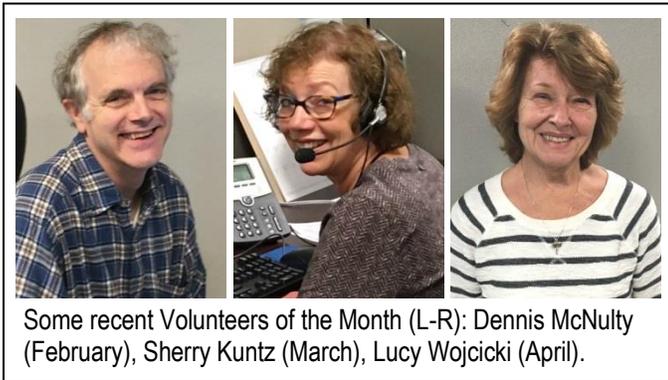


Volunteerism and going beyond the nine-month mark

Watching community-focused volunteers in different groups across rural Oregon, you see the same issues as in volunteer groups most other places: New volunteers are eager to learn and contribute, but about six to 12 months later, some begin to drift away. Pulled in a myriad of directions by family, health, financial, or other concerns, they turn their attention to aspects in life that become more critical or fulfilling.

I have now surpassed a different milestone of similar length. I began my role as Emergency Services Manager just over nine months ago in 2017. As I think back on the time that has passed, it amazes me how dedicated are our volunteers in the Portland Council office. Some not only serve here, but in their local parishes as well. More than half have served more than three years.

All of the things that our Emergency Services team has accomplished during my first nine months could not have occurred without the selfless sacrifice of these volunteers. As our program has expanded services, a number of these volunteers have even stepped up to do more.



Some recent Volunteers of the Month (L-R): Dennis McNulty (February), Sherry Kuntz (March), Lucy Wojcicki (April).

I arrived last October to find extremely long wait times for clients coming for help. Thanks to our staff and volunteers, we reduced wait times while increasing the number of clients seen. We improved statistical tracking of food distributed directly from our in-house pantry. We also began putting systems in place to better track rent and utility requests in the future.

The volunteers who stepped up to do more were key

in making this happen. Some turned out more frequently. Some took on extra tasks. Others tried new tasks that expanded the flexibility of our staff to meet hard-to-predict challenges, such as unusually high client turnout or the illness of another staff member.

And through it all, these volunteers displayed a uniquely positive attitude. I am always amazed at what cheery and giving people they are in spite of the difficult situations they encounter.

As in my beginning months here, our team gave hope and alleviated suffering for people who were wondering mournfully where the next part of life's journey might pull them.

Here's a breakdown of the more common requests that our staff and volunteers handled from January through June in 2018:

| Type | Number | People Served |
|-----------|--------|---------------|
| Food | 6,254 | 19,566 |
| Utilities | 787 | 2,060 |
| Rent | 566 | 1,364 |
| Local Bus | 447 | 616 |

But as some stepped up, others stepped away. Some because of illness. Some because of family concerns. Others for a variety of reasons. While this is regrettable, it is also natural. Whether after nine months or after nine years, life events eventually make it harder for us all to serve. But as individuals drop away, our team must move forward in adapting to change and in persevering to make a difference in people's lives.

We must continue to recruit new people, and to look for efficiencies in delivering services. To maximize the mission we perform, we must be careful stewards of resources, and must provide a service that clients find valuable relative to services provided by other charities.

In closing, thanks to all who help this great organization. If I haven't met you yet, I hope I will soon. I look forward to doing more great things together.

—Craig Loughridge, Emergency Services Manager