

AmeriCorps Member of the Year

Lyndsey Johnson

College Possible Milwaukee

Governor's
Service Awards



Throughout her three AmeriCorps terms with College Possible Milwaukee, Lyndsey Johnson has positively impacted numerous Milwaukee area students by supporting them on their path towards college graduation.

Lyndsey has served during the last two school years as a college success coach, currently supporting a cohort of 140 college students. Additionally, she served an additional AmeriCorps term as a transition coach last summer, helping more than 200 students navigate tasks before the next school year, including signing up for orientation, securing housing, accepting financial aid, and other enrollment and payment issues.

As a tech connected college coach, Lyndsey is working with Milwaukee area students attending colleges across the country, supporting their academic success and assisting them with financial aid, career planning, scholarships, and locating additional resources. She has additionally expanded upon that role with her students at Mount Mary University, providing them with the option to meet in-person and helping to organize events, including developing a relationship with the university's Promise Program to provide these opportunities for her scholars.



During her first year as a college coach, Lyndsey saw a need from her students for essential items, so she initiated and maintained a donation-based hygiene pantry for scholars to provide them with materials including soap, toiletries, feminine products, and other needed items. She ensures that these essentials are accessible and equitable, and Lyndsey delivers the essentials to scholars if they cannot come to pick them up. Additionally, she is working on a plan that will sustain the pantry for scholars after she concludes her AmeriCorps service with College Possible Milwaukee.

Lyndsey has striven to be not only available to her students, but also to her fellow AmeriCorps members whenever they need help. As a returning college coach this year, she saw a need and stepped up as a leader, always sharing insights and best practices with her fellow team members. She shares and creates resources for her team members to utilize in their work, such as walkthrough videos or flyers, taking it upon herself to create a resource if she ever hears there is a need or an issue.

Additionally, Lyndsey has worked to build culture and relationships for the team, joining their Community Planning Committee. As College Possible Milwaukee left the remote-hybrid model and more individuals were in serving at the program office, she put up decorations and brought in an office pet fish to create a more welcoming, enjoyable, and lively environment for her team members.

In describing the impact that Lyndsey has had for the students she serves, Lauren Robinson with College Possible Milwaukee explained that "out of all of the coaches on our team, Lyndsey has dealt with the most student crises between homelessness, domestic violence, food insecurity, and more. She always meets these students where they are at, and she supports them in any way she can by advocating for her students and reaching out where necessary to get them any resources or help they need."



AmeriCorps Member of the Year

Malysha MacFarland

College Possible Milwaukee

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As a first-generation college student herself, Malysha MacFarland has described that passion for her AmeriCorps service with College Possible Milwaukee comes from wanting to be the person she had needed while she was in school.

Malysha has served as a tech connected college coach the last two years, working with Milwaukee area students attending colleges across the country, supporting their academic success and assisting them with financial aid, career planning, scholarships, and locating additional resources.

As a returning AmeriCorps member, Malysha stepped up to be a leader and provide support to her peers, serving as a mentor to two new college coaches to support them in their work. She has used her experience to see gaps in the resources provided through College Possible Milwaukee and areas in potential need for improvement in sources or support for her fellow AmeriCorps members and the students they serve. She would then take the initiative to address these needs, whether advocating to the leadership team or improving these resources herself without being asked.



The first project Malysha undertook on her own was creating a scholarship bank, creating a repository of scholarships that could be potentially accessed by the high school and college students that College Possible Milwaukee serves. This resource greatly aided her fellow coaches as they assisted their students and proved invaluable to the program coordinator leading tasks surrounding scholarships.

The creation of the scholarship bank served as a jumping off point for creating and revising several other resources that for serving students and supporting her fellow AmeriCorps members. In collaboration with another college coach, Malysha worked to create spaces for students that did not previously exist, such as virtual game nights and in-person study sessions. When College Possible Milwaukee started filming videos for the scholar website featuring coaches speaking about college related topics, she stepped up as one of the two coaches to record the videos. Additionally, she is an active member of their External Relations Committee, not just participating in every project, but also sharing feedback and ideas for how the group and its projects could best function.

In describing the relationships that Malysha has built with the students she serves, Lauren Robinson with College Possible Milwaukee explained that “she has a special commitment to her students, bringing a strong capacity for empathy and understanding, using this to meet her students where they are at effortlessly. She has built strong and genuine connections with her students, many of which she has worked with for two years now. She is very aware of her life experiences and how they may or may not be similar to those of her students and allows this to inform her work. She always hears her students out, uplift their voices, and provides them with the information and resources they need to make an informed decision.”



AmeriCorps VISTA Member of the Year

Allison Hrovat

Wisconsin Association of Free & Charitable Clinics

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Allison Hrovat has truly embodied the spirit of the AmeriCorps VISTA program during her service with the Wisconsin Association of Free & Charitable Clinics at the Vida Medical Clinic in Appleton. Her service has been vital to their efforts to offer support to uninsured and underinsured residents of Wisconsin, especially with care for women who are pregnant or just had a baby.

Having told her supervisors she liked to be busy, they certainly honored that request and Allison has delivered tangible results throughout her service by working on projects that expanded access and programming in the Fox Valley. She has undertaken numerous large projects including updating the clinics quality improvement and risk management policies and procedures to match federal guidelines, developing a data retrieval protocol to gather and analyze clinical statistics as efficiently as possible, and integrating new technologies into clinic workflow to increase efficiency, communication, and patient ease.

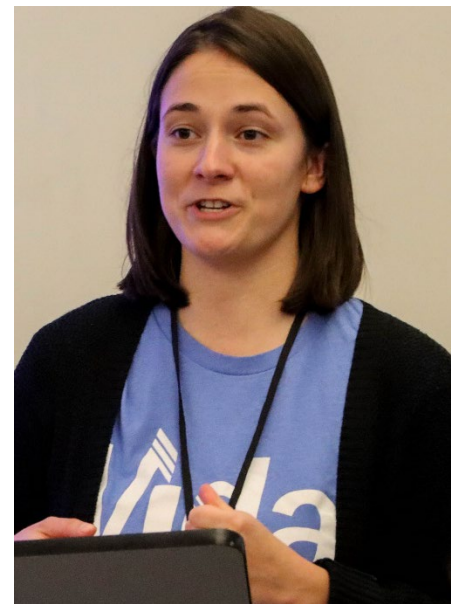


Having a heart for research, Allison was able to utilize this passion and greatly impact her site. In her time serving thus far, Allison has improved clinic efficiency and workflow for over 640 patient visits and 975 services. As part of these efforts, she developed data gathering tools for efficient collection and analysis of medical clinic statistics. Additionally, Allison digitalized the nurses' annual training tracking and found continuing education sources to fill gaps in the clinic's staff training.

Allison also had a significant impact on Vida Medical Clinic partnering with the Wisconsin's Well Woman program, which helps women who have little or no health insurance get screenings for breast and cervical cancers. Thanks to her service, 32 cervical cancer screenings and 27 breast cancer screenings have been performed, 25 outreach events discussing women's health options have been held, and 216 female patients have received 1-on-1 education on STDs, cervical cancer and breast cancer.

In addition to developing data tools to help serve patients and helping to expand screening and health education, Allison had a significant impact on the outreach efforts by the clinic. She implemented an automated online scheduling system for all outreach initiatives, and she developed and created educational resources and outreach plans. During her service, Allison was able to completely restructure the clinic's youth outreach program and has helped them reach 1,800 students. Many of youth and young adults have been coming to the clinic, as they have been able to get information and have access to a nurse to answer many of their questions when they have been in crisis or facing difficult situations

When describing the impact her service, Connor Doppler from the Wisconsin Association of Free & Charitable Clinics explains that "Allison has fully embraced the AmeriCorps VISTA mission of improving lives and strengthening her community through her service, and that thanks to Allison's service, residents of Wisconsin can get affordable healthcare which helps keep people out of poverty."



AmeriCorps Seniors Volunteer of the Year

Linda Longmore

Western Dairyland RSVP

Governor's
Service Awards



Linda Longmore has a passion for volunteerism and for serving others, which she has demonstrated for over a decade as an AmeriCorps Seniors volunteer with the Western Dairyland RSVP program, as well as for many years before she was old enough to formally join the program.

Linda joined the RSVP program in May 2012 and she has undertaken a variety of roles since then to make a difference, recognizing volunteer opportunities everywhere and stepping in to assist when she is able. While many volunteers often focus on one type of service, her service has impacted people in numerous ways, as she has supported efforts to improve student success, address food insecurity, provide medical transportation, conduct free vision screenings for students, keep the community clean, support her local library, and support numerous other events and efforts to bring the community together and assist those in need.

As a former 4K teacher, volunteer work supporting students is near and dear to her heart, having started volunteering in the classroom and on the playground at the school when she retired from teaching. As a result of her service, a significant number of students have been given regular, ongoing, consistent attention and assistance in the classroom over and above that which is available from the teacher. Last fall, when a new 4K teacher started at the school, Linda also spent time volunteering to help orient the teacher to the new position.

Outside of the classroom, Linda has supported several other programs to support children, such as assisting with vision screenings for students, volunteering at the Independence Public Library, and working with the Got Sneakers program, which focuses on providing shoes to children in need. Additionally, she has volunteered with the RSVP Birthday Bag Project since 2012, helping pack bags for approximately 40 children a month and regularly donating items for the bags.

In addition to her volunteer service helping children, Linda has taken on numerous roles supporting the community. She has volunteered to assist those seeking assistance through the local pop-up food pantry and provided medical transportation to help those in need, including taking eyes for transplants from one health care facility to another. She can also be found picking up trash at local parks and around the city welcome sign, as well as participating in the local City Spring Clean-Up event. Wanting to help bring the community together, Linda can even be seen volunteering in costume at their annual Easter and Halloween events, which the local kids have come to expect.

When describing the breadth of the service that Linda does, Tammy Klimek with the Western Dairyland RSVP program explained that "Linda sees volunteer opportunities everywhere and does not limit her service to the activities she engages in through formal groups. She says it is as simple as helping an elderly or disabled person to bag up their groceries, or to assist someone with crossing the street... Because of Linda's volunteer efforts, the community in which she lives is a stronger, more united, and healthier place to live...We are very fortunate to have Linda as an RSVP volunteer and as a member of our community."



AmeriCorps Seniors Volunteer of the Year

Corrine Rolli

Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program – Foster Grandparents Program

Governor's
Service Awards



Corrine Rolli brings kindness, patience, and a dedication to helping students every day to her AmeriCorps Seniors service with Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program. Corrine first started serving with their Foster Grandparents Program in Fall 2013 and has volunteered over 8,000 hours while making a difference for students in two rural school districts listed on the Wisconsin DPI Sparsity List. Her service has been an invaluable resource to these students, providing an additional presence in the classroom and impacting the lives of numerous students.

Corrine began her volunteer service as a foster grandparent at Barneveld School District, whose roughly 450 students across all grades share one building. She volunteered in two third grade classrooms, which were located directly across the hall from each other, becoming adept at moving between the two rooms as needed to assist students. Corrine had a meaningful impact on her classrooms and even strove to increase her connections with the students by playing kickball with them.



After a few years, Corrine then began serving at Iowa-Grant Elementary/Middle School, where she currently volunteers multiple hours each day when school is in session. The students Corrine works directly with all have varying goals in different areas, such as increasing understanding of classroom work, increasing focus, understanding the classroom environment, and other skills they need in school. Not only do the vast majority of her assigned students make progress towards their goals, but all of the students in her classrooms have the benefit of an adult who cares deeply about the students and encourages them to do their best.

When explaining the impact that Corrine has for her students, First Grade Teacher Brenda Wasley describes that “Grandma Rolli is a vital part of our classroom. My students look forward to working with her each and every day. She works tirelessly to see that each student she mentors does their very best work. She pays attention to each detail to help our students fine tune any weaknesses or issues they may be having. She works with them on reading, writing, math, projects ... There is nothing she can't handle. My students are better students because of the time they spend with her. She is a gem, and we are so fortunate to have her as a classroom helper.”

This sentiment is felt across multiple classrooms, with Iowa-Grant special education teacher Sue Anderson detailing that over the several years the Corrine has helped in her classroom that “the kids adore her, and time with Grandma each day is something they look forward to!” In her classroom, the students' favorite day is Thursdays because Corrine has story time and reads stories to each student during their time with her. The students also count on other activities with Grandma Rolli each week, including sight words on Mondays, spelling words on Wednesdays, and playing educational games with them on Fridays.

Looking at the larger impact that Corrine has on students beyond the difference she makes for their educational achievement, Sue Anderson explains that “beyond working with students, Grandma gets to know the students. She talks to them, is interested in them, and invests in their lives. It is a blessing for these students to have another person in their life...cheering them on, spending time with them, encouraging them, and believing in them. My students and I are incredibly fortunate, and grateful to have Grandma with us each day!”



AmeriCorps Seniors Program of the Year

Coulee Region RSVP



Founded in 1973, Coulee Region RSVP has made a lasting impact for people and organizations through the service of their AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers. Over the past 50 years, they have had over 3,000 RSVP volunteers who have provided service at more than 350 locations throughout La Crosse and Monroe counties.

By putting its mission that “through collaboration with community non-profit and public organizations we provide meaningful volunteer experiences for Americans age 55 and better” into action, Coulee Region RSVP makes a difference in the communities it serves in several ways. Their volunteers step up when organizations come to them with a specific need and RSVP volunteers provide numerous services that assist those living in communities in La Crosse and Monroe counties through Coulee Region RSVP programs. In addition to the impacts the program has for others, service through their program keeps its own older volunteers active and engaged, which can help decrease the risk of social isolation, depression, and loneliness by helping to connect them with people in need in their community.

The Coulee Region RSVP Transportation program has made a significant impact in the community by being able to give fifteen or more rides per day to clients to get them to their medical appointments, food sites or grocery store. To better assist those that need rides on a regular basis, the program pairs drivers and clients to help them form a bond, building friendships and helping clients with feelings of loneliness. The relationships they build often lead to recommendations by current clients to others, as Coulee Region RSVP typically has multiple new clients each month that express interest after hearing from others how great the program’s volunteers are when providing rides. As their number of drivers continues to increase after being impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, they currently have around 27 volunteer drivers who volunteer about for 225 hours and drive over 5,000 miles per month.



The Coulee Region RSVP Handyman Program also keeps its volunteers busy, as they typically receive multiple calls each week to assist with various "minor fix it" repairs. The fifteen AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers with the program do more than simply fixing a doorbell or replacing smoke detectors, as they helped nearly 100 clients stay safe and living independently in their homes. Some projects focus on safety and mobility, such as installing grab bars or new railings on stairs, fixing a power lift chair, or securing linoleum in a bathroom to eliminate a fall hazard. Others simply make it possible for clients to maintain their homes, including fixing leaky faucets and garbage disposals, replacing toilets, and repairing lamps and replacing lighting and light bulbs too difficult for clients to safely reach. The RSVP volunteers typically go above and beyond what each client initially requested, often completing a few more items they see that need to be done to help individuals live safely in their homes and staying and talking with those they are helping for a few hours due to the client often having not seen anyone in a couple of days and being lonely.

Volunteers with the Coulee Region RSVP Handcraft volunteers have given out over 5,000 items during the past year to more than 25 local organizations that are in need of wheelchair and walker bags, cancer turbans, hats, mittens, scarfs, quilts, lap blankets, clothing protectors, and other items. These efforts are powered by more than 125 handcraft volunteers who in the last year have put in over 21,000 hours. These projects range from general need items to specifically designed items to help with medical and behavioral needs. Their volunteers have made bonding hearts for families with babies in the NICU that are made out of flannel and designed to transfer scents between parents and their preemies, “comfort cloths” for the behavioral health units at the local medical facilities to help calm patients when they become anxious, and twiddlemuffs designed to provide a sensory experience for those suffering from Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

When describing working with their AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP Volunteers, Coulee Region RSVP program director Ruth Kinstler explains that “I look forward to coming to work each day and being able to interact with RSVP volunteers... Our retired folks have so much to offer the community and it is my pleasure to make sure they are staying busy and not isolated in their homes...The volunteers have such a giving heart, and that is what makes my job so rewarding and fulfilling.”



Volunteer of the Year – East Central Wisconsin

Sally Ann Brickner, O.S.F.

Bellin Health and the American Red Cross of Wisconsin

Governor's
Service Awards



Throughout her life, Sister Sally Ann Brickner has been a dedicated volunteer assisting multiple organizations and causes. In the 1970s and 1980s, she worked for the education of rural teachers in Nicaragua, and over the last few decades has provided invaluable service for organizations here in Wisconsin. Dedicated to peace and justice, Sister Sally Ann directed the Peace and Justice Center at St. Norbert College at 2001-2009 and she coordinated the Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation for the Sisters of St. Agnes in Fond du Lac for four years. She is also passionate about connecting with organizations that help protect the environment and focus on sustainability, as she is an Animator through the Laudato Si Movement and has worked with many organizations, such as the Clean Water Action Council.

In addition to these service activities, Sister Sally Ann has actively supported numerous volunteer efforts with Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Green Bay since 2020. She has been an active part of their Refugee Resettlement program from the very beginning, giving her time to ensure refugee clients are welcomed in their new community and adjust comfortably to life in Green Bay. She has volunteered hundreds of hours with their refugee clients, helping them settle into their homes, clean their vacated apartments, and making sure that they have all that they need. She has also provided them with needed transportation to doctor appointments, grocery shopping, and English classes.

Additionally, she assisted Catholic Charities with data gathering and the organization, transferring, and filing of their immigration and refugee files. This project involved a commitment of ten to twenty hours per week over a period of several months. With her help, the organization is able to free up space for their employees to better meet the needs of their community. Sister Sally Ann is the face of Catholic Charities when their staff is unable to be in two places at one time, helping them expand their ability serve the community, as they credit her with always being there with a smile on her face when they need help.

When discussing Sister Sally Ann's impact through her volunteer service, Renae Vanden Plas from Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Green Bay explained that "Sr. Sally Ann is one of the most inspiring people I know. She selflessly gives of her time to drive our refugee clients to where they need to go, whether it be to appointments, or for recreational activities such as our Afghan Men and Women's groups. The only time she has ever said 'No' to a request is when she was already helping someone else...She has touched the lives of many of our refugee families, our employees, and those in our community. She is a rare catch as a volunteer, and we could not be more grateful for all the good she does not just for our organization, but for the entire Green Bay community."



Volunteer of the Year – East Central Wisconsin

Joe and Audrey Leisgang

Bellin Health and the American Red Cross of Wisconsin

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Joe and Audrey Leisgang have dedicated thousands of hours over multiple decades to promote the health of individuals across the greater Green Bay area. They have served in numerous volunteer roles across multiple organizations, including Bellin Health, the Concerned Heart Club of Northeastern Region of Wisconsin, and the American Red Cross of Wisconsin – Northeast Region, as well as several other local organizations.

Over the past 18 years, Joe and Audrey have volunteered over 12,000 hours combined to provide critical assistance at the Advance Care Desk in the ICU department of Bellin Health. While volunteering at Bellin Audrey and Joe checked in with families in the ICU area, going out of their way to help them in their time of need by providing advice, consolation, or simply offering a cup of fresh coffee. Having had open heart surgery at Bellin Health in the past, Joe could relate to a patient's questions, concerns, and anxieties of rehab and recovery, helping them in their journey and enhancing their patient experience. Wanting to know why it took so long to discharge patients, Joe shadowed the nurses to see the discharge process, which helped him explain the discharge process to patients going through it for the first time. Audrey would typically focus on providing support to the family in the waiting room, trying her best to help calm their worries and anxieties.



In addition to volunteering in the ICU, their service at Bellin Health also extended to critical help during the COVID pandemic. Bellin Health needed door monitors stationed at the entrances to screen individuals entering the hospital at the height of the pandemic, and Audrey and Joe assisted with this task several days a week.

Their support to patients who had invasive heart surgeries and their families also extended to devoting time to volunteering and holding leadership roles with the Concerned Hearts Club Northeastern Region of Wisconsin. Both Joe and Audrey held elected roles in the organization throughout the years. Joe served as treasurer, 2nd vice, vice president, and president, while Audrey served terms as its secretary and financial secretary, with both also serving terms on its board.

Over the years, the Concerned Hearts Club held numerous community educational offerings regarding heart health and supported academic scholarships for nursing students who showed an interest in cardiology. Joe and Audrey helped organize and lead fundraising events to support these efforts, as well as raising funds to allow the organization to purchase over 20 AEDs that were given to organizations and schools in rural communities across Northeast Wisconsin.

Additionally, Joe and Audrey have devoted 25 years to supporting the American Red Cross of Wisconsin – Northeast Region. They were willing to help with anything that was needed to get done, including answering phones, assisting with local events, driving vehicles with equipment, setting up blood drives, and handling registration of blood drive participants. Not only have they helped organize these drives, as participants themselves, they have donated a combined 88 gallons of blood at Red Cross over the years.

Audrey and Joe have dedicated their time to helping others in numerous additional ways as well, including taking on volunteer roles to assist San Louis Manner Nursing Home, the Ashwaubenon Lions and Lioness groups, Brown County Social Services, the Cormier Early Education Center, and Nativity of Our Lord Parish in Ashwaubenon.

Describing the difference Audrey and Joe have made through their decades of volunteer service, Kimberly Summers from Bellin Health Volunteer Services explained that "Joe and Audrey Leisgang are true public servants for our Northeastern Region of Wisconsin, Brown County, and the Village of Ashwaubenon. Their work with The Concerned Hearts Club and the Northeastern Region of the American Red Cross helped the rural communities in our region with much needed AED's, blood drives and cardiac education...We are honored to have had Joe & Audrey's dedication to Bellin Health and The Concerned Hearts Club throughout the years. They are truly a couple that exemplify giving back to their community. Their values and humility are to be looked up to. They have made a HUGE difference in the cardiac health community and have made our community a better place with all their volunteer efforts across Brown County."

Volunteer of the Year – Northeast Wisconsin

Iris Firgens

Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council - Senior Companion Program

Governor's
Service Awards



Striving to remain close to her community and embracing tribal values, Iris Firgens makes it a priority to care for elders in the community who need assistance. Iris serves multiple elders on or near the Menominee reservation by volunteering with the Senior Companion Program through the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council.

Iris gives her time to make a difference for multiple people in the community, providing those she serves with companionship, rides to medical appointments, help in their homes, and provides assistance with whatever else they need. One of her clients is very elderly and can no longer drive. Iris assists this elder with trips to and from her the doctor and with whatever other errands she needs help completing, making it possible for the elder to remain in her home. Beyond just helping with these tasks that help her live independently, Iris also takes this elder on outings to keep her feeling connected to the community and makes sure the client knows she can depend on her for assistance.

Iris does not let obstacles get in the way of helping others, always finding ways to maintain connections with those she serves. When a bridge in the community as closed requiring lengthy detours and significantly more time to reach her clients and to run errands with them, Iris was not deterred. During the COVID-19 pandemic, if Iris could not see her clients in person, she still strove to help reduce the isolation her elders were experiencing, calling them frequently on the phone and dropping groceries and other needed items off at their homes. Even during a period when she was staying hours away with her sister was terminally ill in the hospital, Iris continued to stay in touch with her Senior Companion clients by phone and began seeing them again when she returned home.

The elders that she assists report high levels of satisfaction with the help and companionship that she provides, with one elder stating that "she's awesome. She picks up every time I call." When describing her, they reported that "she's one of those gems that you're lucky to find" and that "the world needs more Iris's" because she is a "selfless, wonderful soul, who would give you the shirt off her back." Beyond just the personal connection they forged, one of the elders stressed the tangible impacts of the assistance that Iris provides in allowing them to continue to live independently, stating that "I'm happy I didn't have to go in the nursing home."

Reflecting on the impact that Iris has made for her clients and with their program, Wendy Rozhon from the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council - Senior Companion Program explains that Iris "is a willing volunteer who goes above and beyond for people. Her upbeat, positive attitude and willingness to get involved make her a great example of what true volunteerism is all about."



Volunteer of the Year – Northwest Wisconsin

Debra Newago Proulx

Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council - Senior Companion Program

Governor's
Service Awards



Deb Newago Proulx is a long-time volunteer with the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council (GLITC) - Senior Companion Program, who is making a difference for others in her Red Cliff community. With a positive attitude and an outgoing, “can-do” personality, Deb provides needed assistance for individuals in need of support and companionship.

Deb has been helping one of the local elders for many years, providing companionship, transportation, general assistance in his home, and addressing other needs as they may arise. Deb “works up a sweat” to clean for the elder each week, making sure everything is in order before she leaves. With this client being an author whose writings include historical accounts on the Red Cliff tribe, she has used reading as an activity to build their connection. Many times when she visits or is providing transportation, she will bring homemade soup or other traditional native dishes to share with him to help maintain their connections to the community. During the times she could not see this elder in person during the COVID-19 pandemic, she actively worked to maintain their connection and provide companionship however she could through frequent phone calls and dropping off deliveries of groceries or handmade soups on their porch.



Of everything Deb does for this elder, his favorite thing is their “coffee time” spent around the kitchen table talking and reminiscing about friends in common, historic community members, and sharing stories of old times. He explains that Deb “keeps me going,” as she is very genuine and a person who always gives. He describes her as “tireless” and “true-blue Red Cliff” for her willingness to help him and other community elders when needed.

Deb also provides assistance and companionship to an elder with dementia, having stepped up in numerous ways to help them as their health situation was changing rapidly. Deb worked to ensure that this client could have medical services put in place and receive needed support. This came through numerous phone calls, providing rides, obtaining groceries, helping them to pay bills, and doing whatever else was needed to help keep this client on track.

Understanding how important it is to maintain connections in the community, Deb will regularly bring this individual to the noon congregate meal in Red Cliff. Due to the nature of dementia, this elder often speaks inappropriately, causing other community members to be concerned or offended, but Deb works to continually promote kindness, speaking with the other meal attendees and reminding them of the effects of dementia. Deb will also use this time to visit with each of the groups sitting across the dining area, and when she sees someone in need of help but reluctant to ask, she encourages them to visit the Red Cliff Tribal Aging Director in their office.

This desire to assist and connect others is clear throughout her service, with Wendy Rozhon from the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council - Senior Companion Program commending her dedication to the program, describing her as “a very willing volunteer with a helpful, “will do” attitude. She speaks highly of the Senior Companion Program, encouraging others to get involved.”



Volunteer of the Year – Southeast Wisconsin

Maddie Frohmeier

United Way of Jefferson and North Walworth Counties

Governor's
Service Awards



As a volunteer driver for Interfaith Caregivers of Ozaukee County for over four years, Maddie Frohmeier transports seniors to their medical appointments and to local grocery stores, helping them to maintain their health and independence. The lack of public transportation infrastructure in Ozaukee County makes service like hers vital for many senior citizens, as without dependable transportation, seniors may see their health decline as a result of missed medical appointments or experience limited access to adequate nutrition caused by lack of transit to local food pantries or grocery stores.

Maddie routinely gets up in the very early hours on Saturday morning to help one of her clients be at their dialysis treatment by 5:30 a.m., providing these pre-sunrise rides to them on 46 Saturdays in 2022! By driving this individual to his weekly dialysis treatments, Maddie ensured that he could access the medical care he needed to maintain his health.

After helping her initial passenger return home following their appointment, Maddie typically continues her day assisting another client that is an elderly Army veteran with her grocery shopping. By assisting this veteran with her grocery shopping 35 times last year, Maddie played a crucial role in helping her access proper nutrition and maintain an independent lifestyle.



While one could easily quantify the contributions Maddie has made through the number of hours she volunteers, rides she has given, or the number of miles she has driven, the impacts of her service go beyond just providing transportation to her clients. Maddie also provides her clients with a sense of companionship and forged connections with them that helped reduce their feelings of isolation. She focuses on building relationships and fostering social connections with her clients, creating a supportive and friendly environment for her riders that addresses the isolation issues that many homebound seniors face.

Her service has tangible impacts on those receiving rides, as the Army veteran getting help with weekly grocery shopping has seen a significant change in her life since Maddie began providing assistance to her. The two of them have bonded over their shared love of books and puzzles, swapping their favorites and discussing their thoughts. This goes beyond conversations while driving in the car, as she also does in-home visits with the veteran, showing how Maddie fosters genuine connections with her clients that go beyond her service role. This connection helped reduce the veteran's feelings of isolation, as it provided her with a sense of companionship that she might not have experienced otherwise.

When describing what made Maddie's service stand out for recognition, Carissa Barnes from the Ozaukee Nonprofit Center explains that "Maddie Frohmeier demonstrates outstanding passion and commitment to making a difference in her role as a volunteer at Interfaith Caregivers of Ozaukee County... By navigating around her full-time job and personal responsibilities, she showcases her dedication to overcoming logistical challenges and delivering consistent service ...Maddie's dedication to meeting both the practical and emotional needs of her clients has made a tangible difference in their lives, and the lives of others in the community, creating lasting change and fostering a more caring and supportive environment for seniors in Ozaukee County."



Volunteer of the Year – Southeast Wisconsin

Jake Martin

United Way of Jefferson and North Walworth Counties

Governor's
Service Awards



When the organizations that previously led holiday toy drives in the Whitewater area notified the United Way of Jefferson and North Walworth Counties that they could no longer continue, Jake Martin was instrumental in saving Christmas for many Whitewater area residents. Not only would the toy drive require reorganization and collaboration with community partners to serve families as had been done previously, but it also would need to address changing needs and new outreach strategies with the addition of over 600 families from Nicaragua to the area over the past year.

Recognizing that many recipients of the toy drive did not speak English as a first language, Jake began learning Spanish in order to not only help register families to participate, but so that he had the ability to converse with many of their families in their primary language and make them feel more welcomed. The results of this effort were tangible, as Jake was able to help register over half of these new families for their Holiday Helpers program. This meant that the program would now be able to provide each child with several gifts, including a game for every family, stocking stuffers, a book for every child, and three toys; one of which being something special they had on their wish list.

Jake collaborated with other organizations to assist in the collection of toys and eventual distribution of gifts to families. He spent hours scouring the internet for items that would fulfill children's wish list items, including some being quite unique and challenging to locate. He also dedicated his time to translate the individual letters to Santa from each family or child, as well as letters they would receive from Santa.

As the event approached, Jake assumed an even larger role when the lead coordinator for Holiday Helpers developed COVID-19 the week of the event. In response, Jake stepped up and worked around the clock, picking up hundreds of toys from community partners, sorting toys by age group, tagging and bagging items from individual wish lists, and setting up thousands of toys for pickup.

Jake's commitment to serving his community continues to expand as he embarks on a new pathway, as he began serving as an AmeriCorps member this January through Marshfield Clinic Health System – Community Corps. His placement at the United Way of Jefferson & North Walworth Counties allows him to further contribute to making a difference in the lives of others.

In describing the impact of his service, Elizabeth Ellis from United Way of Jefferson & North Walworth Counties explained that “without Jake, over 600 children in our area may have gone without on Christmas morning. He is a Santa Superstar!”



Volunteer of the Year – Southwest Wisconsin

Cathy Schmale

United Way of Dane County – 211

Governor's
Service Awards



When the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased the number of people looking for information and assistance, Cathy Schmale stepped up and began volunteering with United Way of Dane County's 211 program.

Prior to the pandemic, their 211 program consistently utilized 8-10 volunteers who assisted others from their office, answering calls every hour of every day and connecting callers with community resources such as food, housing, utilities, healthcare, legal assistance, transportation, and other resources. When their office closed and people would need to answer calls remotely, their volunteers left due to not feeling comfortable continuing from their homes without direct staff support. To make things more difficult, until Cathy started serving, whenever 211 tried to recruit virtual volunteers, those that expressed interest had all decided to look for easier volunteer opportunities after shadowing live calls and realizing the scope of the volunteer project.

Recognizing the need and being willing to help, Cathy quickly underwent training as an Information and Referral Specialist and began answering calls. Her service was critical to answering the increased level of need in the community, as 211 saw particular increases in food and housing needs from those seeking assistance, as well as the impact of the pandemic on the callers' mental health and increased substance use. Throughout the height of the pandemic, Cathy answered over 1,000 calls, frequently serving multiple four-hour shifts per week and committing to a regular four-hour shift on Mondays, which is their busiest day.

Cathy not only answered these calls, but those seeking assistance consistently gave her high rankings for satisfaction with the assistance they received when providing feedback on their after-call survey line. Callers expressed how Cathy was not only "delightful" and "personable" when speaking with them, but that "she kept me calm" and "made me very comfortable." Her ability to demonstrate both a caring and professional approach came through with her assistance being described as "very helpful and understanding" and that Cathy "took the time to look up everything she could think of to help."

Cathy's service continues into the present, as she answered over 800 calls in 2022 alone, which was nearly 5% of the total calls 211 answered last year. Looking at other areas where assistance is needed, she also continued her training to prepare for staffing 211's Addiction Recovery Helpline in 2023.

In addition to this service with United Way of Dane County's 211 program, Cathy also makes a difference for others by delivering lunch for seniors and people with disabilities as a volunteer with Meals on Wheels and by providing mental health services for people affected by disasters as a Red Cross volunteer.

Reflecting on what Cathy's service meant for their program, Agi Redei from United Way of Dane County explained that "not only did Cathy leave an impact on our service, but 211's volunteer program as well. She proved that virtual volunteerism exists and can be very effective. She was the first volunteer fully trained remotely, which meant working in our database with thousands of resources without 211's usual hands-on support. Cathy handled over 1000 calls through a cloud-based phone system from her home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her responses impacted people's financial, physical, and mental well-being. This was done with patience and a personal touch showing that she cared, wanted to listen, and sought to guide and to empower those who needed her help most urgently."



Volunteer of the Year – West Central Wisconsin

Valjean J Adams

African American Mutual Assistance Network (AAMAN), Inc.

Governor's
Service Awards



Over the last two decades, Valjean Adams has dedicated her time and energy to positively shaping the future by providing educational opportunities and support to children, as well as supporting partnerships to address issues of diversity and inclusion.

Twenty years ago, Valjean co-founded the African American Mutual Assistance Network (AAMAN), Inc., an organization dedicated to providing at-risk children from low-income families with the resources needed to equip them for a successful and productive life. Over the years she served in multiple leadership roles with AAMAN, including as its Board President and Secretary/Treasurer. She also participated in the UW-Systems' Diversity Counsel under former UW System President Ray Cross, representing AAMAN.

Wanting to provide educational opportunities for low-income families while inspiring children to learn, Valjean worked through AAMAN to create the Clara Fields Multicultural Literacy Program, which started serving children from La Crosse and Onalaska in 2007. Knowing that children are at risk of educational struggles because of a lack in literacy skills, she strove to create prolific readers of Pre-K children by the time they enter kindergarten and assist K-2nd graders that may have missed a solid reading foundation and needed to bolster their skills.



For over a decade, Valjean undertook numerous roles, including leading the management and implementation of the Pre-K Reading Program, training volunteers and staff, collaborating with volunteers and staff to plan instructional activities and lessons, organizing program graduations, completing grants, and collaborating with local schools and nonprofits.

These efforts had tangible results for the children attending Clara Fields, with one parent explaining that "My son attends this program, and it has done wonders for him! He gets individualized interaction with teachers...(and) a varied multi-sensory approach is used to teach these young children, which is engaging and fun. My son has built so much confidence and will enter Kindergarten this fall reading fluently... and already reads for fun."

Recounting the personal impact Valjean had on their child, another parent explained that "my son was diagnosed with childhood apraxia of speech at 20 months. Research suggested entering an early reading program because it is likely that my child will have more difficulty learning to read. Mrs. Adams said she would take him the minute she heard my story, even before he started speaking sentences. After seven months (age three), my son is beginning to read. But they are not only helping with reading... My son struggles with fine motor, so she focuses on it with him...This program has been vital to the neurological development of my child."

In summarizing the impact and approach Valjean had for students, a parent described that "Mrs. Adams prides herself in teaching each child as an individual" and that she "somehow manages to offer zero tolerance for bad behavior while still getting hugs from her students at the end of the day."



Special Recognition

Margie Zutter

RSVP of Dane County

Governor's
Service Awards



Margie Zutter's unwavering commitment to RSVP of Dane County spans an impressive 46 years. Her journey began as a dedicated college student intern in 1976, and upon graduating, she transitioned into the Community Services Project Director role. In 1979, Margie's exceptional leadership abilities led her to be appointed as Assistant Director. Throughout the years, she steadily progressed within the organization, assuming greater responsibilities. She was named executive director in 2011.

Under Margie's steadfast guidance, RSVP of Dane County has flourished, boasting an astounding achievement of over 8 million hours contributed by AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers. It has grown into one of the nation's most prominent RSVP programs, with a robust roster of 1,200 volunteers serving at more than 80 nonprofits and public agencies. These dedicated individuals selflessly offer their assistance in diverse areas such as driver services, veterans programming, public safety education, intergenerational and school-based initiatives, and volunteer service with numerous organizations that cater to the needs of the people of Dane County.



From her early days as an intern, Margie collaborated with senior volunteers countywide, crafting handmade items for agencies to distribute among individuals of all ages facing hardships. This initiative, which Margie championed, continues to thrive after four decades, with AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers crafting an impressive 16,000 handmade quilts, knit sweaters, and other clothing items in 2022 alone. Since 1976, Margie has worked tirelessly alongside other community agencies to develop programs that harness the skills and experience of senior volunteers, such as Vets Helping Vets and First Book of Dane County.

Margie's exemplary leadership extends beyond the confines of Dane County, as she has actively supported national service and programming for seniors. Her involvement as a board member of the National Senior Corps Association (NSCA) and her past presidency of the Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (WISCA) demonstrates her commitment to advancing these vital causes. Currently, Margie serves on the Board of the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN), further solidifying her dedication to promoting the well-being and rights of aging individuals.

Margie's unwavering belief in the mission of the AmeriCorps Seniors Programs shines through her remarkable 46-year tenure with RSVP. Throughout her career, from student intern to her current role as Executive Director, she has consistently demonstrated a genuine passion for helping older adults foster meaningful connections within their community through volunteer service.

Despite her upcoming retirement this July, Margie's connection with RSVP of Dane County and her commitment to national service will endure, as she plans to continue her involvement as an RSVP volunteer herself.

