



NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2023

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

The winter months can be hard for anyone, but they can be especially difficult for older adults. While I was making Friendly Chats calls one day this past winter, I spoke with one of our homebound participants, a man in his 80s, who lived alone. I will call him Malcolm.

Malcolm answered the phone and we began chatting, first just about the weather, which was in the low 30s at the time, then about how he was doing. He told me that he was sitting in his bedroom huddled in front of a small space heater so that he wouldn't freeze. I proceeded to ask him a lot of questions: Did he not have another heat source in the home? Had he tried to get weatherization services or energy assistance?

He let me know that he had tried to get help, but after many calls and telling his story over and over without any action, he finally gave up. He was frustrated, depressed, and oh-so-cold! As soon as I got off the phone, I called our Client Service Coordinator, told her about Malcolm's situation, and asked her to follow up and see what she could do to help. She was able to get Malcolm signed up for free weatherization services,

an appointment for energy assistance to get his heat back on, and she enrolled him in our Safe Homes for Seniors program so that we could provide any routine maintenance needed to create a better, safer environment for Malcolm as he aged in place.

As trusted providers, we are privileged to hear our participants' stories, most often their struggles and concerns, thus opening the door for our staff and volunteers to provide support beyond the meal and services that help older people not only age in place but also thrive in that space. These wraparound services — services that encircle the participant while ensuring they have good, healthy food first and foremost — are essential for seniors to live healthy and well. Our meal is the entrée into their lives from which we can provide greater support, such as maintaining homes to prevent falls and unsafe conditions, connecting the homebound to other people to prevent depression and physical decline, creating

shared housing to provide companionship and reduced expenses, setting up veterinary care for pets, and solving problems without having to refer the participant to others where they have to tell their story over and over, as demonstrated by the story above.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Suzanne Washington".

Suzanne Washington
CEO, *Meals on Wheels People*



Chef Challenge Recap: Focus on Food Insecurity

Before the pandemic, an estimated 5.3 million older Americans were food insecure and more than 9 million lived in isolation. As our nation's senior population continues to grow exponentially, even more older adults will struggle to access nourishing food, jeopardizing their health and diminishing their quality of life. In an effort to raise awareness for older adults experiencing food insecurity, Meals On Wheels People hosted its fourth annual Chef Challenge competition, featuring two local chefs competing to create a fall-themed dish that meets MOWP's dietary and budgetary requirements.

This year's competitors, Erica Montgomery of Erica's Soul Food and Selena Taylor of Selena's Custom Kitchen, gave one another a run for their money. Erica, who won the challenge last year, whipped up a special

turkey-and-dumplings recipe. The foundation of Erica's dish was the Three Sisters (corn, delicata squash, and pinto beans), followed by turkey, fresh herbs, and buttermilk dumplings. Her turkey dumplings dish paid homage to her grandmother's chicken and dumplings as well as her family's roots in Vans Valley, a Cherokee area in Rome, Georgia.

Selena delivered a flavorful crawfish etouffee dish, featuring a vegetable roux and crawfish meat served over warm rice. She paired the main dish with a side of smoked turkey greens and cornbread. Selena was born and raised in Portland; however, this traditional Southern dish was a staple in her family and is a fan-favorite at Selena's food cart.

Erica and Selena made determining a winner incredibly difficult for the judges, but

each of them was up to the challenge of testing out these delicious meals. This year's judges were Ricardo Gonzalez, the chef and kitchen manager at The Diner Vancouver; Michele Venlee, a local food blogger; and Matt Gage, a dedicated MOWP volunteer. Ricardo, Michele, and Matt judged each dish based on presentation, creativity, and healthiness and, after painstaking deliberation, determined that Erica of Erica's Soul Food would maintain her title as the Chef Challenge winner for the second year in a row!

We want to offer a big round of applause to both Erica and Selena, this year's judges, and, of course, our amazing host, Joe Vithayathil of KPTV's On the Go with Joe, for their participation and support this year!





Designed for Safety and Delivered with Comfort

When we consider our homes, our first thoughts typically aren't about the foundation under our feet or the shingles over our heads but rather the people and memories that breathe life into the bones of the structure. A home offers a powerful sense of comfort and safety — a feeling that many older adults attest to growing as time marches on.

Aging at home not only provides older adults comfort and security, but it also allows them to maintain a sense of independence and control over their lives. Plus, it can be more cost-effective and convenient than moving into a nursing home or assisted living community. However, it's crucial for older adults to have access to the resources and support necessary to continue living safely and comfortably at home.

When it comes to home safety,

seniors face a number of unique challenges due to their shifting needs. Safety precautions, such as locking doors and windows, extend into a number of other areas of older adults' lives. Home safety for older adults requires additional care and attention to detail, such as taping rugs to the floor to prevent falls and installing grab bars and rubber mats in the bathroom to prevent slips.

Assistance from the Safe Homes for Seniors program provides home repairs, yard maintenance, and safety improvements that help older adults to continue aging in place, and we count on the support and generosity of handy volunteers to provide seniors in our community with the fulfilling option of living independently.

"It's easy for young, able-bodied folks to take their health for

granted because we don't know any other way of life," said Pat, a recent Safe Homes for Seniors volunteer. "But we all know that if we're lucky enough to reach old age, we'll likely face blurry vision, difficulty hearing, and trouble getting around. It's important to acknowledge this reality and assist while we can in hopes that younger generations lend us a hand in the future."

If you're a handy person or know someone who enjoys yard work or making home improvements, consider registering as a Safe Homes for Seniors volunteer or passing on the opportunity to join the program. Together we can make a difference in the lives of older adults and people with disabilities who need a little extra help to live safely in the comfort of their homes. Learn more at mowp.org.



Cold Weather Preparation

From cozy nights spent by the warmth of the fireplace to building snowmen with loved ones, the winter months are filled with joy for many but not all of us. For older adults, the colder months bring greater health risks: The risk of slipping and falling increase due to wet and icy conditions as does the risk of cold-related illnesses, such as hypothermia.

Hypothermia poses a major risk to older adults. In fact, approximately half of all Americans who pass away due to hypothermia each year are over the age of 65. Due to reduced metabolism and circulation, older adults retain body heat less efficiently than in decades past, which makes them more susceptible to hypothermia.

Fortunately, there are safety measures older adults and their loved ones can take to protect seniors this winter. We encourage you to check in on your older neighbors this winter — especially on extra cold nights — to pass along these tips to

ensure they stay safe and warm.

Mind the Thermostat:

Thermostats should never be set under 65 degrees for adults over the age of 75. If central heating is unreliable, place space heaters in frequented areas. Be sure to unplug space heaters when they're not in use, and tuck away cords to avoid preventable falls.

Pay Attention to Hydration and Meals: Focusing on hydration during the winter may feel counterintuitive, but dry air temperatures inside and outside can cause dehydration. When older adults are appropriately hydrated, they experience fewer falls, reduced risk of bladder cancer, and less constipation. Additionally, ensuring seniors eat regularly will help stimulate their body's internal thermostat.

Layer Up: Even while indoors, older adults should wear multiple layers that are easy to remove should they get too warm. This can look like throwing a blanket over their legs while sitting in place or

wearing socks, slippers, long underwear, and a hat.

Know the Warning Signs:

Older adults may not always be aware of their decreased body temperature or know when to reach out for help. Check in on your older neighbors and loved ones, and check specifically for symptoms of hypothermia, including shivering, slurred speech, shallow breathing, and a weakened pulse.

Our team works diligently to ensure our clients have access to critical resources in the event of an emergency. We depend greatly on the support of our volunteer community to help support outreach efforts to ensure each senior has access to a support system, and the need surges when the temperatures dip. You can make a difference in the lives of older adults by volunteering to make Wellness Checks and Friendly Chats calls that provide a check-in point for older adults or make Safe Homes for Seniors visits to make sure sidewalks are shoveled and homes are warm.



We Need You!

You can give back and change the life of an older adult in your community. We need volunteers to provide critical support to the homebound older adults we serve. As one client shared: “Every once in a while, we get special treats — little individual cakes, sometimes See’s Candies, which is extra special. During the holidays, volunteers take time to make unique cards and colorful placemats for us. As a former teacher, a mom, and a grandma, acts of kindness like that mean a lot to me.”

Become a part of our volunteer family and help change a life, one meal and friendly connection at a time. Get involved by visiting mowp.org/volunteer, or reach our volunteer coordinator at volunteer.coordinator@mowp.org.



Follow us to stay up to date with events, volunteer opportunities, and more.

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