

OKLAHOMA ALLIANCE ON AGING
Education Committee, February 2004
RETIRED SENIOR VOLUNTEERS & SENIOR COMPANIONS

BACKGROUND

National Senior Service Corps is a network of federally supported programs that help people aged 55 and older find service opportunities in their local communities.

The Oklahoma National Senior Service Corps brochure contains a Ralph Waldo Emerson quote: *“It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.”*

There are three types of service programs, -- **Retired & Senior Volunteer Programs (RSVP), Senior Companion Programs, and Foster Grandparent Programs.**

In Oklahoma there are sixteen RSVP programs, three Senior Companion Programs, and seven Foster Grandparent programs, located in varied parts of the state.

This meeting focused on the RSVP and Senior Companion Programs in central Oklahoma

The Foster Grandparent Program serves children with special needs, and will be discussed in another meeting.

Each of the programs enables volunteers aged 55 years old and older to provide services to vulnerable people in unique ways.

Executive Directors of National Senior Service Corps programs were at a national meeting at the time of the this Oklahoma Alliance on Aging Education Committee meeting. Key members of their staffs represented the programs in the Oklahoma City metro area.

RETIRED & SENIOR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

.....**Evelyn Harms, Director of Volunteers**

RSVP of Central Oklahoma, a United Way Partner Agency, serves older adults and many younger people, interacts with specialized service agencies, and recognizes individuals and agencies in its monthly newsletter, **The Response.**

Formerly located in Midwest City, the Central Oklahoma RSVP office has moved in 2004 to a location in downtown Oklahoma City in the E. K. Gaylord building.

There are no fees or dues to belong to RSVP, only benefits. Benefits include free accident and liability insurance to ensure that you will never

suffer out of pocket expenses for any injury during the course of your volunteer service

A devoted staff of six people enables over a thousand volunteers 55 and older to serve the community in diverse ways. Executive Director **Beth Patterson** has headed the program for 18 years.

Evelyn Harms discussed the current work of RSVP volunteers. In the last fiscal year, over 1000 RSVP members contributed more than 230,000 hours of volunteer service in Oklahoma County.

They tutored adults and children, prepared and delivered meals to shut-ins, performed clerical or computer tasks, provided transportation to medical appointments, worked with at-risk youth, provided regular telephone contacts to isolated seniors, acted as museum tour guides, helped with crime prevention projects, provided entertainment and much more. A list of organizations receiving RSVP support is available, and you may call any time to discuss opportunities within these organizations.

A free Community Education Program presented by RSVP of Central Oklahoma is *THE BLUES, NOT A NORMAL PART OF AGING*. Many older adults and their caregivers believe depression is normal. *Clinical depression can be treated successfully in more than 80 % of cases*. The Blues program is a free community education service. Presentations are made on a quarterly basis throughout the metro OKC area to groups of 15 or more. Call (405) 605-3110 or E-mail; beth.patterson@rsvpok.org.

RSVP finds opportunities for people confined to their own homes. Telephone Buddies make regularly scheduled telephone calls to isolated persons in the community, providing both wellness checks and a friendly ear to those who are lonely.

There are no fees or dues to be a member of RSVP. Members are asked only to call monthly to tell the staff how much time each spent volunteering. This information enables RSVP to report, on a national level, the impact volunteers have in their communities.

Call **605-3110** for information about RSVP, or to schedule a free presentation to your church or community group,

THE SENIOR COMPANION PROGRAM

.....**John Jacob, Counselor**

In Oklahoma City, the Senior Companion Program is housed in SUNBEAM FAMILY SERVICES, a United Way Partner agency. Senior Companions are low income seniors specially trained by Sunbeam staff and paid a small tax-free stipend. They provide in-home support to

frail elderly individuals, helping them to remain independent and able to live in their own homes. There is no charge for the service, and no restriction on income level of the people served

The program in Oklahoma City was started in 1974, and is one of the earliest Senior Companion Programs in the United States. Judy Hensley is the Director. One volunteer in the program served for 20 years

John .Jacob discussed the work of the program. He serves as a coach and teacher to the companions. Mission is to provide affordable, quality social services which result in improved individual and family function. Both the companions and the people served benefit. First ideal of the program is that every person is unique and valuable and should be treated with dignity. Referrals may come from varied sources, including the Daily Living Center (adult day care), the Third Age Life Center, churches, Salvation Army Senior Centers, etc.

Most of the volunteers are African Americans. Many drive their own cars, and are reimbursed for mileage. Transportation for companions may be arranged through Areawide Aging Agency in cooperation with OKC Public Transit. Companions are with a senior for four hours, two or three days a week. Some serve two clients, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Activities may include preparing a meal, reading, exersize, shopping, brief outings, playing cards, or whatever the client may enjoy. No health care services are provided. If a client must move to a nursing home, the companion may visit for a period of time to help in the transition.

Clients must be 60 years old or older, and living alone.

Every year in Oklahoma County, Senior Companions help 200 to 250 of their elderly neighbors remain independent.