



Clark County Commission on Aging
Webex Remote Meeting
Vancouver, Washington

MEETING NOTES

Wednesday, September 21, 2022
4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Members Present: Cass Freedland, (Chair), Franklin Johnson (Vice Chair), Chuck Green, Amy Gross, Mel Sanchez, Larry Smith, and Tanya Stewart

Absent: Sue Cameron, Meghan McCarthy

Note: **highlighted text** indicates ideas to consider for the commission's annual major findings and recommendations.

1. Welcome and call to order

Chair Cass Freedland opened the meeting and completed a roll call of the Commission members.

Approval of agenda

The agenda was unanimously approved.

Approval of August 17, 2022 work session and regular meeting notes

The notes were unanimously approved.

Approval of 2022 Silver Citizen Award recipient

Katlin Smith was unanimously approved to receive the 2022 Silver Citizen Award.

As part of the discussion Chuck Green shared comments in support of the motion related to his familiarity with the recommended recipient's impact with FISH of Vancouver food pantry specifically in relation to the Clark Neighborhood Food Project/Green Bag Project. Larry Smith provided comments that all the nominees are winners and phenomenal individuals. The subcommittee spent time reviewing all the nominations. Nominee ages ranged from 64 to 85 and all of them could have been a recipient of the award.

There was a request for clarification on next steps following the Commission's vote. Staff explained they would follow-up with Katlin's nominator first, and then either the nominator or staff would let Katlin know about the award. Staff will also begin preparations for the award ceremony to take place at the November commission meeting. Staff will also notify all other nominators about the Commission's decision, let them know that the commission felt like all the nominees were phenomenal and would have been happy for them each to receive the award, and will encourage them to submit their nomination again in the future.



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Amy Gross inquired as to whether nominees know that they were nominated or not or were interviewed as part of the process. Cass Freedland clarified that the subcommittee did not interview nominees and just reviewed written submissions.

2. Moderated Discussion “Fireside Chat”: Innovation Through Connection with Volunteer Coordinators

Cass Freedland introduced the discussion and the guests, Jon Seibert of Blanchet House, Ulises Alvarez Olvera, and Cendy Cruz of Meals on Wheels People.

Cass provided introductory remarks about volunteers and volunteer coordinators, including the following:

- Volunteers serve many essential roles as they help service providers reach more deeply into our community, connecting aging adults with essential services.
- Volunteers serve and deliver meals, unpack boxes of supplies for distribution, make connections with aging adults through regular phone calls, and drive their neighbors to appointments.
- Volunteerism is a meaningful way for aging adults to serve their neighbors.
- During the pandemic, organizations needed to pivot to create a safe way for people to volunteer.
- Today’s guests will not only share the challenges that they faced in utilizing volunteers during the pandemic, but also the important lessons they learned that will be carried post pandemic.

Discussion highlights

Please briefly tell us about your organization and the role volunteers play within it.

- Jon Seibert: Blanchet House has existed for 70 years, and volunteers have been the core of what they have done since starting in 1952. Free meals, no questions asked, is what the organization is most known for. Volunteers come to Old Town Portland and serve a lot of individuals with housing insecurity and other different needs. The organization serves coffee every morning and have expanded to providing clothing and hygiene items for our houseless neighbors. The organization strives to provide a place that feels safe and welcome and where people can connect as a community. Volunteers help the organization with their mission. Jon noted that the organization always wants to acknowledge what a gift it is to have a volunteer come and help. After serving the public, there is a meal with Blanchet House residents that volunteers are welcome to join. The organization tries to make volunteers feel welcome by meeting their residents and sitting alongside them.
- Ulises Alvarez Olvera: Meals on Wheels People (MOWP) has existed for more than 50 years. Up to date, they have served 1.2 million meals to people over the age of 60. Currently, this year the organization has 8,734 individuals receiving services. In the beginning, MOWP started delivering meals to those in need, whether it be at a dining center or at their own home. More recently, especially with the pandemic, MOWP expanded their services to include social services where they are trying to minimize the social isolation. MOWP is still serving meals and are also offering virtual volunteer opportunities so that volunteers have additional options besides picking up and delivering meals, such as offering a friendly chat with an elderly person who cannot leave their home.

How do you connect most effectively with your volunteers?

- Jon Seibert: Blanchet House has been around for a long time. For most of that history, it was just word of mouth. In recent years, as needs have changed and the organization has expanded their services, word of mouth is still a big part of that, and they also send out communications to different organizations, schools, etc., trying to connect with families, work groups and church groups. One thing that is important to the organization is that they want volunteering to be accessible to nearly everybody. They have very few barriers to becoming a volunteer. You must be over the age of 14 and need to fill out a brief application. After that, you could be volunteering by the next day. The organization wants to make it easy to volunteer and wants to be a place where community happens not only for the houseless community members they serve but also anyone who wants to be a part of that. One of the reasons the organization could be successful through 2020 was because they were still inviting people in, creating a safe space, and allowing community to be in person and be involved in a meaningful way. Jon noted he thinks that is why people come back too. The organization tries not to limit how long or short a volunteer serves because everyone has their own needs. The organization considers how can we get people here, make them feel welcome, and make them feel connected?
- Cendy Cruz: Largely pre-pandemic, MOWP had a lot of in person interactions with volunteers, with people coming to MOWP centers. Today, they still see a lot of volunteer drivers regularly. MOWP staff also see their volunteers at different events with the organization. They also use email and phone to connect. During COVID, these other options have helped people who maybe can't come into the centers, by providing alternative virtual options.
- Ulises Alvarez Olvera: MOWP tries to do outreach events in person, letting people know about Meals on Wheels in a one-on-one setting and letting folks know the organization needs volunteers. MOWP delivers a lot of meals daily. Out of their central kitchen alone, they deliver 7-10,000 meals every day and use over 2,000 volunteers per day to deliver those meals. Without volunteers, the organization couldn't do what they do, assisting older people maintain their independence at their homes.

How did COVID restrictions change the way in which you worked with volunteers?

- Jon Seibert: Blanchet House realized early on in COVID that their services were needed even more. They shifted quickly to to-go services and followed the news and safety protocols, adding masks, etc. as needed. The organization adjusted their café to keep moving food and to keep individuals who came to serve safe. They were strict with safety guidelines because they also have transitional housing in the same building as their café. Once there had been long term accessibility with vaccines, Blanchet House instituted a mandatory vaccine requirement, with proof of vaccination for anyone entering the building. They wanted to make sure everyone in their residential space was safe and because they work with vulnerable individuals, they wanted to make sure anyone coming in for their services felt safe. The protocols kept volunteers safe as well.
- Jon Seibert explained that communicating clearly, following guidelines, and offering to-go services was not as hospitable of an experience as they like to offer, but it let them keep meeting needs and keep trust in the community that Blanchet House would be open. The organization reopened their café to in person services in May of 2022. It has been very successful. They have made every meal service and the numbers of people coming in has increased as people feel safe. They offer every guest who comes in a mask as well.

- Jon Seibert explained they have tried to follow guidelines, communicate widely, understand there needs to be flexibility with volunteers, and worked with people the best they can.
- One of Blanchet House priorities is making sure they have some consistency in their services, so everyone knows what to expect.
- Cass Freedland noted that she understood Blanchet House had volunteers running to them because people were looking for something to do early in the pandemic. She asked if that was daunting at first.
- Jon Seibert explained that in the early days of the pandemic, there were a lot of high highs and low lows, for example they might have 20 people show up for one meal service and then 5 at the next. The well-kept secret that you could hang out at Blanchet House wasn't a secret for long. In some ways, it was nice to go somewhere and be productive, meet people, connect, and get a meal. That kept Jon going, being able to offer that. He explained that while they were serving the needs of people experiencing houselessness and all sorts of traumatic situations, they were also serving those that came to serve. That is something the organization has tried to keep doing, honoring volunteers who show up and make sure there is a continuity of services no matter what.
- Ulises Alvarez Olvera: COVID changed a lot of the structure with how MOWP does their work and how they interact with volunteers. In the beginning with COVID, working with a population who was at risk, staff had to retrain volunteers and had to do so appropriately. They couldn't offer in-person training and switched to virtual trainings. Zoom calls were very helpful in reaching many people.
- Ulises Alvarez Olvera explained that meal delivery changed from daily meal delivery to 7 meals delivered 1-day per week. The organization started incorporating supplemental calls because they were not there as often checking in on clients.
- MOWP also changed the way they operate in other ways, such as shifting to a 4-day work week to minimize exposure for volunteers and clients. They incorporated temperature checks and started staggering times of when to pick up meals for delivery.
- When centers closed and diners no longer had the same social interactions, MOWP put those folks onto a delivery route and incorporated wellness check and friendly chats to help with the isolation. Those programs have been great because the organization can reach people and check in on them.
- MOWP staff started hosting bingo over the phone and book exchanges. For a while, they offered a peer-to-peer program where people can call a phone number and be connected with other seniors in the area. Ulises Alvarez Olvera explained that MOWP took that opportunity to restructure a lot of the aspects of our programming.
- Cass Freedland asked if MOWP received feedback on their changes? Ulises Alvarez Olvera shared that the feedback received was very positive. Changing from delivery daily to once per week helped our clients a lot. Pre-COVID, the client had to wait 10am-2pm to receive their meals because they cannot leave food without them being present. Now, clients only needed to be around one day per week. This change helped ease the strain of needing volunteers every day for every route.

What lessons did you learn as you move forward connecting and communicating with volunteers?

- Jon Seibert identified two key lessons from working with volunteers as: communicate and trust. He explained that there have been so many changes over the past few years that communicating with folks when they come in was key, such as explaining here's what we have been seeing, here's what you can expect this week, here are some changes, and here are some tools for any challenges that you see today.

- Jon Seibert explained that any time there were possibilities of COVID exposures, they made sure to follow guidelines and be clear and above board and were not just looking at what they had to do but what would help them build the most trust in this community.
- Blanchet House also trusted volunteers to be honest with their health and safety, especially before vaccines were available, i.e., they wanted people to be honest about having the sniffles and their volunteers were good about that.
- Blanchet House trusted their volunteers to manage their own schedules. They have an open calendar system. They do limit the number of people per service but trust them to make their own schedules. Some do short durations of work and other volunteers have been with the organization a long time.
- Jon explained that if they are giving information, that people can show they can work with us, then they build that trust and learn how to work with individuals who are not full-time staff but are a big part of what the organization does.
- Cendy Cruz echoed a lot of what Jon mentioned. She confirmed that communication and trust are a huge thing with volunteers at MOWP.
- Cendy Cruz also noted that MOWP tries to provide opportunities for volunteers to take a lead on different projects or events. There are community connectors, for example, who are volunteers who help the organization with outreach events, i.e., tabling events. It is nice to connect with volunteers on a more personal level and have them be more involved in the organization's mission and vision.
- Cendy Cruz noted that some things they are learning that aren't working out so great are the forms of communication they use. For instance, virtual communication doesn't work for everybody or isn't always a popular option. Many people want face to face interaction or a phone call. MOWP wants to increase more face-to-face interactions again over time, while also keeping everyone safe. Right now, the organization is using a hybrid option that is very heavy with online or virtual communication.

What innovative tools or technologies might be just around the corner to support your work?

- Jon Seibert noted that Blanchet House has been fortunate to meet more needs and grow over the past few years. The recent Blanchet House staff expansions means they have a lot of avenues to explore. They are looking to add different aspects to the organization, which includes the volunteer program. For instance, they have not done much with a lot of virtual opportunities because their services are in person, and they have had to focus on that. They need to think about how that might fit into future expansion.
- Jon Seibert explained that they have offered workshops/trainings to the public on trauma informed care, rest and resilience, and various topics that are relevant to working during a pandemic and with the individuals they serve. These are opportunities for people to learn more about the different issues that may be present in someone who comes to the organization's meal services.
- Jon Seibert explained that Blanchet House has a second location in Yamhill County that they are looking to expand volunteer opportunities at as well. It is a beautiful place with a residential program.
- Blanchet House has recently launched new volunteer management software. They want to be attentive with any change they make on how they interact with volunteers, because they still want to make sure the volunteer experience is central, and they want to make sure their services remain easily accessible. They want to always be a place where anyone can figure out how to come to their services and be a part of the program. While they may add some aspects here and there, they always want easy

access to be a major feature. Blanchet House staff believe that the more people involved in social work environments, that is a big part of reaching towards the solution.

- Ulises Alvarez Olvera explained how MOWP accommodate their volunteers who are of an older age. For instance, they try to keep it simple when it comes to technology. They have an app for volunteers to find client information and the app takes them to the client, and once a delivery is done, it takes them to the next client. It is hard for some older volunteers to use the technology. They prefer route books, while younger volunteers tend to prefer the app. MOWP wants to keep both options open.
- MOWP staff have learned that face to face interaction with volunteers works best. They want to keep that when possible.
- MOWP is also pursuing innovative ideas such as expansion of their Friendly Chats program.
- MOWP also has a few new programs such as the Safe Home for Seniors Program, in which volunteers go to a client's house who has requested yard work and small fixes in the home. Another program MOWP will be piloting soon is a Home Share program, where people with an extra room can offer it to a senior who needs a place to stay. MOWP would help connect those individuals.

Questions/comments from COA members.

- Franklin Johnson thanked the guests for their participation in the session and the vital work that they do. He asked if any COVID adjustments lead to permanent changes or efficiencies and how it affected the way the organization utilized volunteers.
- Ulises Alvarez Olvera explained that as MOWP is exiting out of the pandemic, there are some aspects they want to go back to, for instance, the virtual orientation will stay in place, but they will increase face to face communication between center managers and volunteers. It can be more impactful for staff to ask a volunteer for help with something face to face rather than over email. He also explained that the 4-day work week is going to be permanent for MOWP.
- Franklin Johnson asked about delivery changing to once per week and whether there were drawbacks to that change.
- Ulises Alvarez Olvera explained that he understood that would become a permanent change. It has helped the organization with both staffing and having enough volunteers each day. The Friendly Chat program helps alleviate the longer time between deliveries. For instance, if a client gets a delivery on Monday, they will receive a call from us the Thursday before.
- Franklin Johnson noted that it sounds like MOWP received a lot of positive feedback. He wondered if there has been any negative feedback, and, if the organization feels like they are prepared for another pandemic.
- Ulises Alvarez Olvera noted that MOWP received feedback from some clients who enjoyed seeing their volunteer daily and would prefer that approach.
- Cendy Cruz noted that overall, there was not too much negative feedback from their clients. Most of the changes were experienced by volunteers and staff, and that is where they had some questions and concerns. For the clients and families MOWP serves, the one day a week delivery generally worked well.
- Ulises Alvarez Olvera added that when MOWP centers closed and precautions like masking were taken to keep people safe, there was some negative feedback. Most people understood that we needed to be compassionate with each other.

- Cendy Cruz noted that MOWP tried a lot of different things, which has helped the organization prepare for emergency events, whether it's a fire or heat wave, MOWP staff have come up with new ways to problem solve.
- Franklin Johnson noted it sounded like MOWP is comfortable that if another pandemic hit, they would have a strategy to use. Ulises Alvarez Olvera explained that he thought so and that the organization has great leaders. They started an emergency preparedness committee to help take care of clients when there is a heat wave or a lot of smoke. For instance, they can deliver fans to those who need one. If anything were to happen in the future, they are well prepared to be able to pivot and shift services with open communication to clients and volunteers.
- Mel Sanchez asked how volunteers and clients communicate with each organization, such as address, phone number, text, website, email address, app, or Facebook. He suggested that information be posted and so others can share it.
- Jon Seibert explained that Blanchet House communicates through several mediums. The easiest way to find the organization is at blanchethouse.org which has the organization's contact information and communication methods. Jon also noted that regarding the previous question, reflecting on what the MOWP representatives were saying, the pandemic gave Blanchet House an opportunity to figure out what they do well and what we need to be doing. They knew they wanted to go back to in person services. They knew they had to be consistent. The pandemic also provided an opportunity to try new things, hear from people who were in an extended space of need, and see how the organization could move those things to people.
- Blanchet House expanded programs during the pandemic and will continue doing so because of the feedback from their guests and volunteers. For instance, someone might offer an item they would like to donate, and Blanchet House staff would think about how to make that a part of their services. For instance, sack lunch and care kit programs were added. The organization also hosted events in the parking lot behind their building. These was an opportunity to focus on how to expand in a consistent way.
- Cass Freedland confirmed that Blanchet House information is posted on the commission webpage.
- Larry Smith asked if the organizations have had any challenges reaching out to diverse communities? He noted that Clark County is becoming more diverse, such as with the arrival of new refugees. He wondered if the organizations have had any difficulties or challenges in reaching out and providing assistance?
- Ulises Alvarez Olvera noted MOWP is fortunate to have diverse staff to help with outreach. Their Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee have an agenda item for an equity scan of their clients to see who is being left out. The organization wants to do more outreach to diverse communities and knows there are challenges with that. The organization is trying to hire staff to be reflective of the communities they serve. For instance, they offer added pay for staff who speak multiple languages.
- Mel Sanchez asked for MOWP about their contact information. MOWP can be reached through their website at mowp.org. The webpage includes contact information such as email, phone numbers, Facebook, and Instagram.
- Amy Gross commented that she was stunned by the wonderful efficient way both organizations put humanitarianism into action. The way in which they are respecting and helping, it's beautiful. She noted that Jon Seibert mentioned if someone applies to be a volunteer, they can volunteer the next day. She asked if background checks are conducted and why or why not.
- Jon Seibert commented that Blanchet House does not conduct background checks. They focus their volunteer service where people work in groups and always work with

staff in a public setting. Volunteers are not working alone or with data. Blanchet House works to make their services accessible, knowing specifically that many people attend the organization's meal services because Blanchet House is a low barrier place. There are other free meal services in the area where they might require government or agency-issued IDs. For some people, it can feel like a barrier when you are handing over information, and you do not know who you are handing it over to. Blanchet House wants to have an inclusive volunteer program too. If they don't have volunteers handling sensitive information, they don't have the need to conduct background checks. They want to make people feel welcome by removing barriers, make volunteering easy and accessible.

- Ulises Alvarez Olvera commented that MOWP does require every volunteer to have a background check and to go through an orientation. The background check is because volunteers work with client addresses and phone numbers and are working with older adults who are an at-risk population. The orientation helps staff communicate what MOWP does, how they do it, and best practices.

Public comments

There were no public comments.

Commission Download

Chuck Green noted that the question and discussion on changes precipitated by the pandemic era are interesting responses and could be helpful when putting together the new chapter for the Aging Readiness Plan update. Action Item: Chuck recommended that highlights from the discussion today be shared with the consultant team to help them with that chapter.

3. General Public Comment

There were no public comments.

4. Communications and Announcements

- Chuck Green reminded everyone that tomorrow, Thursday is GiveMore24! and to let people know it is a big day for nonprofits in the community to raise funds for their work.
- The next Commission on Aging meeting will be held on October 19, 2022, with a fireside chat about supportive technology and innovative communication providers.

5. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

The Clark County Commission on Aging provides leadership and creates community engagement in addressing the needs and opportunities of aging.