

Paint a Picture of Independence by Volunteering

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Many adults are more active and healthy than ever before, but not everyone is so fortunate. We all know someone... a parent, a grandparent, a neighbor, who is facing new challenges as they age. People who have spent a lifetime to become self-sufficient are facing their hardest struggle yet, aging. By the end of this article, you will have the knowledge and tools to support seniors who want to remain in their homes.

Let me paint a picture. Imagine that a couple years ago, you lost the love of your life and it turned your world upside down. Your companion was the social one, the housekeeper, the cook. You're on your own, and with the recent loss of your driver's license, you feel trapped. You find it difficult to complete everyday tasks and what's worse, there is nothing to look forward to anymore. Maybe your family visits when they can, but they live out of town. You, like many in our community, live on a limited budget. In fact, according to the 2009-2011 LIFE Report, 67.7% of Marathon County residents aged 65 and over live with household incomes of less than \$35,000. You may not be able to afford a home health aide or semi-private nursing home care.

Stories like these are becoming altogether too common, but you can help. Volunteer your time. It doesn't take a huge commitment to make a world of difference in someone's life. Deliver meals to elderly residents who would not get adequate nutrition on their own. Help cook or serve meals at senior dining sites. Drive neighbors to medical appointments and shopping trips. Help with tasks of daily living like cooking meals, light housekeeping or yard work. And don't forget that while you do, you are offering much more than transportation or a lending hand. You are offering a friendly ear to those who need it. Whether you go on outings, sit and visit or enjoy hobbies together, the residents you visit will be glad you did. Just "do what friends do for friends" and you may find you make one along the way.

Remember the picture we painted earlier? It looked pretty grim. What if we finished it with a volunteer knocking on the door? Suddenly, our picture comes alive with brilliant colors and it appears more hopeful. United Way Volunteer Connection and RSVP can help you bring color, light and increased independence into the life of a senior. Volunteer Connection offers a searchable database of volunteer opportunities in Marathon County at www.unitedwaymc.org. You can search by interest, the population you want to serve or by the days of the week and times of the day that you're available. For volunteers 55 and over, RSVP can offer even more benefits to support your volunteering including personalized placement, optional mileage reimbursement and insurance while volunteering. Call United Way today at 715-848-2927 or email us at volunteerconnection@unitedwaymc.org.