

Volunteers are the key to success for Meals on Wheels

There are few jobs that provide the community impact and peace of mind knowing the work supports a mission of feeding those in need.

With training, volunteers at Meals on Wheels of the Monterey Peninsula (MOWMP) do everything from preparing and delivering meals, to events and fundraising, to administrative assistance. The most common volunteer role is delivering meals and friendly greetings to homebound seniors, disabled adults, veterans, and other underserved populations on the Monterey Peninsula. Most typically, this involves picking up meals at the Meals on Wheels Community Center in Pacific Grove and delivering them along a pre-determined route directly to the homes of local clients. MOWMP can set up a volunteer schedule that's flexible, and whether that be once

a week, once a month or as needed, any and all support is vital in driving the organization's mission forward.

MOWMP has spent the last half-century providing nutritious meals, socialization, and other critical programs serving the local community. The organization has an acute understanding of the peace of mind that comes with knowing freshly prepared meals, delivered by caring volunteers, serve as a lifeline to the homebound. The organization is uniquely positioned to reach vulnerable individuals and has developed creative solutions to ramp up food production and delivery in the wake of huge increases in demand. Through the addition of on-site storage, a large-capacity tilt skillet and walk-in freezer, more staff to prepare meals, and strong community partnerships, MOWMP is

now producing more than 20,000 meals per month, a near doubling in total demand compared to just a few years ago.

This ramp-up is coming just in time, as seniors represent the fastest-growing segment of the American population, and the number of seniors as a whole is projected to double over the next three to four decades. Data for Monterey County suggests the same will take place locally. While MOWMP's current corps of 500 volunteers are struggling to keep pace with this rapid growth, it will take huge increases in volunteerism in general, and resources, to begin to meet the need going forward.

Earlier this year, MOWMP was recognized as Nonprofit of the Year by the Pacific Grove Chamber of Commerce, and its volunteers reached one million collective hours of service over the past 50 years. One million total hours is equivalent to 114 years of nonstop volunteering – 365 days a year, 24/7. Of the milestone, MOWMP's Executive Director, Christine Winge, comments, "Volunteering has been a part of our DNA from day one, and over the decades, we have pioneered new and innovative ways to engage a local community who is hungry to give back." She continues, "Providing hundreds of thousands of meals per year across our county requires tremendous volunteer support, whether it's preparing meals, driving delivery routes, disaster



Volunteer Sally, Volunteer Hellena, Sous Chef Chase, Executive Chef Isaiah, Kitchen Supervisor Sylvie, and Volunteer Kaitlin prepared over 450 sandwiches for Home Delivered Meals clients.-Provided photo

relief, and education, organizing events; you name it – and they've certainly stepped up to meet the challenge."

Promoting healthy eating has a secondary effect on a client's overall health: it helps them maintain their independence. Since many of the homebound cannot adequately shop or cook for themselves or their spouses, entering a nursing home is a very real potential next step. This is why meal delivery is so important. If the homebound can get adequate nutrition, they can live more healthfully, and in their own homes longer.

At MOWMP, volunteer drivers not only deliver freshly prepared meals but also perform wellness checks. This helps clients have a second or third pair of eyes to monitor their health and situation at home. Typically, recurring volunteers can sign up for a set schedule and delivery route, therefore allowing them to visit the same seniors on a regular basis. However, there is often a need to fill in open volun-

teer slots or to volunteer on different schedules, which could result in serving different clients on different days.

Volunteers are also essential to Meals on Wheels and the Meals on Wheels Community Center. Throughout the day, volunteers make sandwiches, answer calls, conduct classes and activities, decorate for holidays and parties, host the daily luncheon and so much more.

The MOWMP board, its staff, and volunteers are excited to promote and celebrate 50 years of

success on the Monterey Peninsula and garner the support needed to ensure our programs will continue to address food insecurity, enabling independence, and improved health for years to come. Please consider becoming a volunteer in one of a variety of our fulfilling and flexible positions today. Visit the MOWMP website or contact Volunteer & Outreach Manager, Susan Elwood, for individual, group, and corporate volunteer inquiries at selwood@mowmp.org or by calling 831-375-4454.



Volunteer Mike delivers a freshly prepared meal to a local homebound client.-Provided photo



Volunteer Jandi and Volunteer Ismael package hot meals for volunteer drivers to deliver to MOWMP clients on the Monterey Peninsula.-Provided photo

MEALS ON WHEELS OF THE MONTEREY PENINSULA

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831.375.4454

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