

# Experience *in Action!*

King County RSVP's news for people 55 & older

Volume 39 | Issue 1 | Spring 2024



**AmeriCorps  
Seniors**



## SITE PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: Rebuilding Together Seattle

by David Thornbrugh

If you're a homeowner, you know that keeping up your "castle" can, at times, seem to cost a king's ransom. That's especially true if you're a homeowner who has to struggle just to make the house payments, let alone repair that leaky roof, dripping water faucet, or cracked windowpane.

Beyond the expense involved, there's the question of skills. Not every homeowner is able to "do it yourself." And what homeowner hasn't heard tales, or experienced their own examples, of the difficulties of hiring a contractor?

However since 1973, the

501(c)(3) nonprofit organization Rebuilding Together has helped homeowners across the country who are living on low incomes – including elderly, disabled, and veterans – make essential repairs to their homes without charges for labor or materials.

Since 1989, its local affiliate, **Rebuilding Together Seattle** (RTS), has been dedicated to keeping homeowners in need of help stay safely in their homes while aging in place.

As with so many other community service organizations, RTS exists only because of one precious commodity: the



Volunteers pose with a happy customer (photos in this story from the RTS website).

**Solid Ground's King County RSVP  
(Retired and Senior Volunteer Program)**  
1501 North 45th Street  
Seattle, WA 98103-6708

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goodwill of other people. As RTS Program Manager Sam Wyllie-Cain explains, "We are a completely volunteer-led organization, which means that all of the repair projects get completed by volunteers."

For qualified homeowners, including apartment and condo owners, the organization offers three programs: Spring Rebuilding Day, Team Build, and Safe at Home. The first of these, also known as National Rebuilding Day, is a yearly one-day event that takes place among the organization's over 150 affiliates.

Team Builds, however, occur throughout the year. These are projects in which a company gets together a group of volunteers from their organization to participate. "We take what a group is capable of and what is needed at a person's home," says Sam, "and we do a matching of the homeowner and the group."

Such projects may require project management, "so that's another opportunity for volunteers as well."

And as RTS Program Manager, Sam finds himself running a lot of the communication between participants. "Understanding what is needed in the individual's

home, relaying it to the project manager, and then they come up with [a plan to obtain the needed tools and materials to complete the projects]."

Most individual homeowners who apply to RTS, however, will be connected to an individual volunteer through the Safe at Home program, which is largely focused on helping homeowners "age in place."

As Sam explains, this involves visiting an applicant's house and checking its condition against a 25-item Safe and Healthy Priorities list.

"Does it have a fire extinguisher, or carbon monoxide or smoke detectors? Can you get in and out of your house safely? Do you have handrails that are attached? Do you have grab bars in your bathroom?"

After interested homeowners qualify for the nonprofit's services, Sam and one of RTS's AmeriCorps volunteers make a site preview of the home. "If some or any of the repairs are within our capacity, then we put them on our wait list for matching them either with an individual volunteer or a group." A homeowner's time on the waiting list depends on the extent of the

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## Speaking Directly

by Jen Gahagan, RSVP Director

### 50 Years of Volunteers ...

### Thank you for being part of our changemaking legacy!

April is a special month in a significant year for Solid Ground. Not only are we honoring **Volunteer Appreciation Month**, we're also celebrating **Solid Ground's 50th Anniversary**. Volunteers have been part of our community since our inception, and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is a big part of that legacy.

Since becoming a program of Solid Ground in 1994, more than **6,425 RSVP volunteers** have contributed more than **4.6 million hours** to meet community needs at over **150 partner organizations** countywide. And last year alone, **293 RSVP volunteers** supported **19 King County nonprofits** and provided **28,045 hours of service** valued at over a **million dollars**.

Solid Ground is grateful for RSVP volunteers and our 35 site partners for your collaboration and investment of time, talents, and passion to meet basic needs, nurture success, and spread change.

At Solid Ground, we understand that it takes a community to solve poverty, so we're dedicating this issue of *Experience in Action* to building community.

Our writers explore the importance and complexity of building community, working toward common goals, overcoming challenges, and stepping out of our comfort zones to be a part of something larger than ourselves. Thank you for being a part of our community! ●

**Learn more about community needs and current volunteer opportunities. Join us for an upcoming Solid Ground orientation or RSVP info session!**

#### Upcoming Volunteer Orientations

For any and all potential volunteers. Join us to learn about all of Solid Ground's current volunteer needs!

- ▶ **Tuesday, April 9 | 1-3pm | IN PERSON**  
1501 N 45th St, Seattle, WA 98103, 1st Floor
- ▶ **Tuesday, June 25 | 5-7pm | VIRTUAL**
- ▶ **Tuesday, Sept 10 | 5-7pm | VIRTUAL**

To view all orientations & register, visit:

[solid-ground.org/volunteer/#orientations](https://solid-ground.org/volunteer/#orientations)

#### Upcoming RSVP Info Sessions

For volunteers 55 & older. Join a virtual session via Zoom to learn about critical needs in King County!

- ▶ **Wednesday, May 29 | 1:15 - 2:30pm**
- ▶ **Tuesday, October 15 | 1:15 - 2:30pm**

To view all info sessions & register, visit:

[solid-ground.org/rsvp/#events](https://solid-ground.org/rsvp/#events)

**Save the date!**

**Friday, August 23, 2024**

**Solid Ground's Day of Service**

*to celebrate 50 years of changing lives*

*... and please join us for Solid Ground's*

# 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala

**Wednesday, May 8, 2024 | 5:30pm**

**@ SUMMIT | 900 Pine St, Seattle, WA 98101**

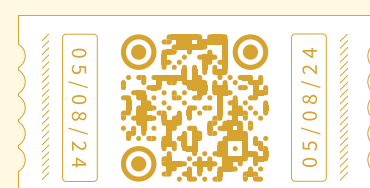
Join Solid Ground at our 50th Anniversary Gala to celebrate a half century of progress toward solving poverty. Hear from participants, partners, leaders, and changemakers who have helped improve the lives of thousands of our neighbors. We'll also share our transformative vision for the future! Solid Ground CEO Shalimar Gonzales will cohost the event with Sasha Summer Cousineau, Fundraising Auctioneer extraordinaire. You'll enjoy...

- ▶ Reception with jazz greats Bruce Phares and Tim Lerch
- ▶ Dinner, an inspiring program, and a call for support
- ▶ Keynote address by Converge Media's Omari Salisbury
- ▶ End-of-evening music by the award-winning Garfield Jazz Band

**QUESTIONS? CONTACT:** [events@solid-ground.org](mailto:events@solid-ground.org)



#### GET TICKETS & INFO:



[solid-ground.org/50gala](https://solid-ground.org/50gala)



RTS volunteers connect with a delighted homeowner during a Spring Rebuilding Day event.

## Rebuilding Together Seattle *continued from page 1*

needed repairs and the availability of volunteers.

Just as with the other programs, Sam assesses what's needed at a person's home and then matches them with a volunteer. "I have an understanding of our volunteers' skill sets. If at this home, there's only four or five things that need to get done, then I match a volunteer with the right skill set with the homeowner."

According to Sam, the organization can call upon "a pretty dedicated group of volunteers who say, 'Hey, I'm available in January. Do you have anything for me?' Sometimes we use volunteers to wrap up bigger projects." Occasionally, a few unfinished items remain on a large project, and he'll call up an individual volunteer to come in and wrap up those tasks.

And he explains, "What's great about volunteering with us is, it's very much on your terms. For example, if you're an individual, I facilitate all the communication between you and the homeowner. You're really just there to get the project done, use your hands, work in someone's home and serve someone in your community. It's really on your timeline. It's really up to you how you approach things.

"We have a volunteer who only does stuff on Sundays, because he still works 50 hours a week. He'll only spend two or three hours, but he'll spend every Sunday there until he gets the work done. I do all communication with the homeowner ahead of time. I create what we call a 'work scope agreement,' so that the homeowner understands what we plan to get accomplished.

"I think that's one of the big benefits of Rebuilding Together – it's really on the volunteer's schedule. If you have

this skill set, we're happy to send you out there to work on the project. And you do what you're comfortable with, too.

"I think that's the other big point: We're not going to have you go out there and do anything you can't do. You get to determine that." For volunteers, some basic carpentry skills, or the do-it-yourself work that most homeowners pick up over time, will suffice.

"A lot of the smaller stuff that I send volunteers to do is securing handrails. Fixing windows that aren't working. Doors that aren't properly sealed, adding weather stripping to things. Fixing toilets and faucets. Making sure that people can clean their dishes and get in and out of the bathroom.

"Somebody who's handy. A DIYer. Someone who, if they have their own home, they're going to go in and figure out how to fix things. They're not going to hire somebody to come in and do it."

For the homeowner, "Everything is free. The homeowner never pays for anything." Sam tries "to make it as easy for volunteers as possible." Having worked as a middle school teacher in Massachusetts, and as a construction worker since moving to the Northwest, the congenial program manager decided that he "wanted to serve a

population that was more in need."

At Rebuilding Together Seattle, Sam seems to have found his niche. "There's a really cool opportunity here to volunteer in a way that works for you, but it's also very impactful to your community. It's such an important thing. And the health outcomes from providing handrails saves a ton of health care dollars in the long run for individuals." ●



RTS volunteers collaborate to fix a handrail.

# RSVP



## AmeriCorps Seniors

**The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)** is a nonprofit AmeriCorps Seniors program sponsored locally by Solid Ground. RSVP meets critical community needs by encouraging and supporting volunteerism in King County for people 55 and older.



**At Solid Ground, we believe poverty is solvable.** Our approach combines direct services with community-based advocacy. We support individuals while working to undo racism and other oppressions that create barriers – so everyone can achieve their full potential.

# EIA

**Experience in Action! (EIA)** is published by King County RSVP and distributed to 3,500 RSVP members, senior volunteers, and friends. The **EIA** is dedicated to providing news, information and opportunities about senior volunteerism. Articles express writers' opinions, which aren't necessarily the views of RSVP, Solid Ground, or **EIA**. We reserve the right to refuse any material deemed unsuitable. Articles may be edited to meet technical and editorial policy guidelines.

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## It Seems to Me...

by Peter Langmaid

# Thoughts on community

At a macro level, community in all its many forms is a fundamental American value that holds us all together. Whether you're a Democrat or a Republican, wealthy or poor, a person of color or white, deep down we all agree that we're Americans, an identity that encompasses us all.

At a micro level, community can replace isolation with fulfillment and friendship, help solve problems larger than ourselves, and expand our understanding of each other.

A successful community has two basic attributes: inclusion and respect. A group that doesn't value inclusion is a club, not a community. A group that doesn't tolerate diverse opinions is a cult.

We are all members of many different communities, large and small. Following are a few thoughts and observations from my experience with community.

Dogs are a community seeker's best friend. Many years ago, we moved to a neighborhood near a popular park where we walked our dog twice a day. So did many

other dog lovers. Over time, led by our dogs and their playmates, we developed a community of dog owners that has evolved into lasting friendships.

Hitting a high note, I played clarinet in a community band for decades. Membership was open to all (i.e., no auditions). The only requirements were the ability to read music, owning a music stand, and being available on Thursday nights for rehearsals. I met many wonderful people over the years. It was a true community band for people who just loved playing music with other people.

I played squash (not the vegetable), a sport similar to racquetball, almost every day for over 30 years. I loved the intensity of the game, the competition, and the fact that it kept me slim and fit. I had dozens of playing partners over the years, most of whom I never saw in long pants. But we were a devoted community built on a common interest.

I currently volunteer at my local food bank. I love the



mission, the clients, the staff, my fellow volunteers, and the fact that we all feel the need to give back to the community. At the end of my shift, I'm tired, but it's a good tired, because I've spent my energy helping others.

In any healthy community, there will always be differences of opinion between members. Allowing those differences to fester and grow into resentments can undermine and destroy the success of the mission. Don't let differences distract you. Instead, embrace diversity and listen closely to other opinions and viewpoints. Who knows – you might learn something!

Community can be a hedge against isolation. With the power of cellphones and computer apps such as Zoom, communication and community can be only a few clicks away. My wife, for example, is a member of a community of bridge players who meet

through Zoom. However, I would caution against living entirely through your devices, because when the call or session ends and the screen goes blank, feelings of loneliness and isolation can be accentuated, not diminished.

And finally, know your neighbors. Where you live is your most immediate community. In years gone by, houses were designed with front porches where residents could sit outside and chat with neighbors and passersby. Today, homes are designed with a backyard focus that tends to isolate neighbors from each other. In our neighborhood, everyone knows everyone else, and we constantly look for opportunities to socialize and support each other.

Community is the glue that holds us together, in whatever form it takes! ●

*Peter Langmaid is a semi-retired businessman, RSVP Ambassador, and longtime EIA contributor.*

## 'Trust' by Pete Buttigieg *a book review by Bill Pharr*

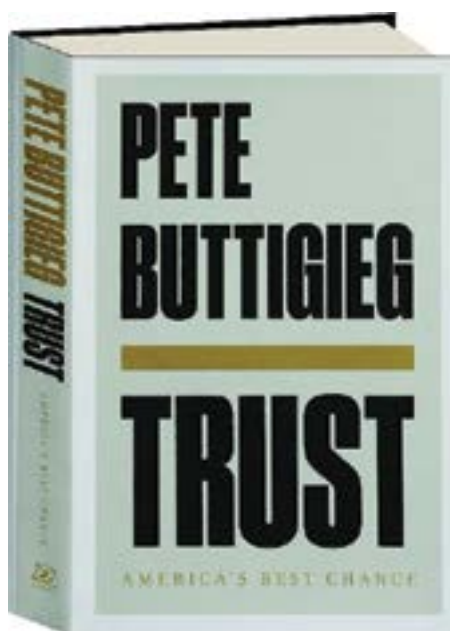
Pete Buttigieg – the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, a former U.S. presidential candidate, and the current Secretary of Transportation – has published an important read for the era we find ourselves living in, titled *Trust: America's Best Chance*.

Mr. Buttigieg's many accomplishments include Harvard graduate, Rhodes Scholar, and Naval Intelligence Officer in Afghanistan. He brings a very unique perspective to his book's thesis, which is quite straightforward: America lives in a time of corruption of social responsibility.

We live in a time of terrorism, financial collapse, populism, systemic racism, and a global pandemic, among other issues. He contends that trust has been squandered, abused, sacrificed, stolen, and really has never been properly built in the first place. There is a current crisis in our institutions, in each other, and in the American project itself. He puts out an urgent call to foster an "American" way of trust.

Mr. Buttigieg writes that "trust" is essential to face the unique challenges America faces in the decades ahead. Simply put, trust is essential to the foundation of American democracy. He puts out a call for Americans to find a way to work side by side solving the monumental problems that we all know exist.

In light of this, the author discusses his feeling that the internet and partisan television networks are largely responsible for Americans losing a sense of shared reality, and simultaneously losing confidence in experts and scientists.



He traces many of the failures we're witnessing today back to the late 1960s, when John Gardner was the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare for Lyndon B. Johnson. Mr. Gardner wrote a book, *The Recovery of Confidence*, in which he outlined the principles and goals that America should follow in future generations.

America has not gone in this direction.

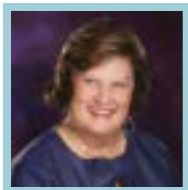
In addition, Mr. Buttigieg discusses the greatest time in American history for social services. Under the presidential administrations of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower – and partway through John F. Kennedy's presidency – the top federal tax rate was 90%. Under Kennedy, the top rate was lowered to 70%, which lasted through Jimmy Carter's term.

Since then, the social issues in this country have increased dramatically for many reasons, with decreased funding as the biggest issue.

Mr. Buttigieg contends that our success or failure at confronting the greatest challenges of the decades – racial and economic justice, pandemic resilience, and climate action – will rest on whether we can effectively cultivate, deepen, and repair where necessary the networks of trust that are endangered

or never even existed for so many. Americans must work side by side to deal with the monumental challenges facing us.

*Trust*, which is an easy read with a compelling message, seeks to inspire Americans to build a powerful movement that will define America in years to come. ●



## Aging with Wisdom

by Carol Scott-Kassner

# Importance of community engagement as we age

**“No one should be alone in old age he thought, but it is unavoidable.”** ~*The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway

Vivek Murthy, the Surgeon General of the United States, recently declared that we are in a “loneliness epidemic,” not just in the United States, but internationally. A large number of older people are less socially engaged, and it is taking a huge toll on them, both physically and emotionally.

Between 17 and 57% of people surveyed in the last few years identify themselves as being lonely. The highest percentages occurred during the pandemic. The number in the U.S. has now stabilized at about one third of elders, which is still dangerously high.

People who are socially isolated are more likely to be depressed, leading to issues such as anxiety, dementia, and heart disease.

If this isolation persists, it can also lead to increased blood pressure, weight gain, smoking, alcohol/drug use, and risk of strokes and coronary heart disease, as well as decreased physical activity, cognition, heart health, and sleep. Each of these conditions ultimately leads to early decline and death.

To counter the effects of loneliness, Murthy has used the power of his office to begin helping communities create Age Cafes, providing spaces where people can gather in relatively small groups to share their stories with each other and receive mutual support.

The first Age Cafes started in Beaverton, Oregon and involved much of the community to provide support and gathering spaces – from libraries to social clubs – as well as many other networks and resources for the elderly. The concept exists now in many places in western Oregon and will soon spread across America.

We all need community – to be together with people with similar interests and backgrounds with whom we have a deep sense of belonging. Ideally, such communities work together to help create a better world. At the same time, we need more than gatherings. We need to have a sense of common purpose and meaning, which could be as simple as having a good time together, or watching young children play.

To combat loneliness, which is one aspect of our spirit, we ultimately need communion – or the “sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially on mental and spiritual levels.” Such sharing can occur in Age Cafes as well as during get-togethers with close friends or relatives. They can also occur in Wisdom Circles, which I’ve written about in a previous article.

Wisdom Circles\* usually meet once a month and consist of 6 to 12 people. Members pledge to keep the contents of their conversations private. At each meeting, every member of the circle has the opportunity to check in with the group or to opt out and just listen. If anyone needs extra support from the group, they can ask for that – but it’s not a place to give advice unless people ask for support and perspective.

Wisdom Circles are powerful vehicles for creating intimacy in community and combating loneliness. They are also spaces to discuss topics relevant to everyone in the group such as listening, loss, transitions, grace, negotiating older age, relationships with others, and so forth.

Other vehicles for creating compassionate communities involve visiting the homebound to spend time with people in need of



companionship. People can share stories from their lives, which could be recorded with their permission, much like StoryCorps on National Public Radio (NPR). The focus may be to share things they’ve learned from reflecting on their long lives, or on important moments they’ve had in parenting, grandparenting, or serving the community in which they’ve lived. These recorded stories can become part of their legacy to pass on to others.

Laughter is another healing therapy – one which we can all benefit from. The technique of laughter therapy is to start to laugh as deeply in your chest as possible, then step by step, move your laughter higher and higher until you feel it in the top of your head. It will feel artificial at first, but you will soon break out into full-throated, unencumbered laughter.

Use these syllables for your laughter: **Ho Ho Ho Ho** (lower chest), **Ha Ha Ha Ha** (upper chest), **He He He He** (throat), **Hay Hay Hay Hay** (face), and **Hi Hi Hi Hi** (top of head) – moving up the body with each new syllable.

Doing it in groups is the greatest fun of all. Talk about communion: This is a communion of laughter, first introduced by a nun from India who has traveled the world helping people laugh. These techniques are often used in hospitals to help people heal. They are a wonderful way to “break the ice” in small group gatherings.

Horticultural therapy is often used in retirement communities but could be expanded throughout entire communities. Planting and nourishing a garden together provides a gathering place for people interested in growing plants.

Gardening can also be intergenerational, including children and young adults. The fruits of your labors can go to feed people experiencing homelessness or another cause you care about.

Finally, two of the most energizing ways to be in community are to exercise together or do social dancing. These activities are great for the body and fitness as well as the breath. They are energizing, and they allow us to connect with others, especially dancing, and to express joy.

A powerful film was published several years ago in which a man with Alzheimer’s who had sat in his chair for years, bent over and not communicating, was given a recording of his favorite popular music from his young adulthood. The transformation was amazing. He immediately stood up and started dancing around the room. He was transformed with joy.

► **May your life be one of deep connections with others.**

► **May you live as fully as possible – physically, emotionally, and spiritually – until the end of your life.**

► **May you experience joy and bring joy and respect to all you meet.**

\* **Learn how to form a Wisdom Circle at [Wisdom Circle Guide: The Sage-ing Journey](#).** ●

Carol Scott-Kassner is a Certified Spiritual Director and member of Sage-ing International, an organization dedicated to awakening spiritually as we get older. For more information and resources, visit [sage-ing.org](http://sage-ing.org).



# Community building as an antidote to social isolation

by Gwen Campbell

“Community building is all about bringing people together and creating a sense of belonging,” states the [MeltingSpot](#) website, a self-described customer community platform.

It encompasses activities such as people seeking personal relationships to enhance their lives, building teams in workplaces, planning towns to increase residents' quality of life, creating classrooms that foster belonging, and more.

And community building seems to be having a moment. “Community builder” appears in over 350 Seattle-area LinkedIn profiles for educators, marketers, housing companies, communicators, advocates, and more.

*The following businesses and organizations even include it in their taglines:*

- ▶ **An online yoga practice:** “Breaking down walls, building up community”
- ▶ **A Bellingham bookstore:** “Building community one book at a time”
- ▶ **Solid Ground** (RSVP's nonprofit parent organization): “Building community to end poverty”

Perhaps the widespread interest in community building is in part a reaction to the recent COVID isolation. In May 2023, Google Trends reported that searches for “how to make friends,” “where to make friends,” and “where to meet people” reached an all-time high. In the same month, the U.S. Surgeon General released a report concerning an epidemic of loneliness and isolation. It details the health effects of loneliness and isolation: increased risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death.

While COVID increased social isolation, the report identifies other contributing factors: decreases in marriage rates, family size, membership in clubs and religious groups, and use of personal technology.

“Despite current advancements that now allow us to live without engaging with others (e.g., food delivery, automation, remote entertainment), our biological need to connect remains,” says the Surgeon General. Not surprisingly, the highest rates of social isolation are found among people over age 65.

*The good news is that people can take action to build social connections and community. The Surgeon General recommends the following to form new friendships and relationships:*

- ▶ **Invest time** in nurturing your relationships through consistent, frequent, and high-quality engagement with others.
- ▶ **Minimize distractions** during conversations to increase the quality of time you spend with others.
- ▶ **Seek out opportunities** to serve and support others.
- ▶ **Be responsive**, supportive, and practice gratitude.
- ▶ **Participate in social and community groups** to foster a sense of belonging, meaning, and purpose.
- ▶ **Seek help during times of struggle** with loneliness or isolation by reaching out to a family member, friend, counselor, health care provider, or the 9.8.8 crisis line.



Friendship can spark community building, but it's not a prerequisite. Clinical and community psychologist Dr. David McMillan (Nashville, TN) identifies four criteria defining a community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Think of a sports team, a faith community, a hiking group, a political organization, or a neighborhood association.

For example, I recently became the secretary of my neighborhood association. I have made new acquaintances, some of whom may become friends. I feel a sense of belonging working with fellow board members, and I'm using my professional expertise in communications to perform my responsibilities as secretary. Board members are working well together; we're aligned on goals and have successfully divvied up the work. I don't yet feel a shared emotional connection, but that may develop in time.

*Volunteering is an excellent vehicle for community building. Here's how to get started.*

- 1) **Select an organization** that aligns with your values and/or interests.
- 2) **Show up frequently** or on a schedule that facilitates regular contact with the same group of people.
- 3) **Engage in the activity** and with the people around you.
- 4) **Add value** by performing your responsibilities as directed and with respect.

“The factors that facilitate, or become barriers to, social connection can also reinforce either a virtuous or vicious cycle,” says the Surgeon General. Volunteerism or service and social connection form a virtuous cycle. The greater the community connection, the more likely people are to volunteer or serve. In turn, volunteerism and service increase connections to both community and individuals.

Lastly, while our focus is often on finding a group of people with whom we share interests, experiences, or life paths, the Surgeon General recommends that we “actively engage with people of different backgrounds and experiences to expand [our] understanding of and relationships with others, given the benefits associated with diverse connections.”

The National Museum of African American History and Culture echoes this, saying: “By considering each other's lives and experiences, and perspectives, we allow a community to be not only about what we have in common but what makes us different.” ●

## WHAT ARE RSVP AMBASSADORS?

**They're RSVP Volunteers willing to help us spread the word about the benefits of volunteering!**

Because of our small staff, we have a wonderful group of volunteers who help us share RSVP's mission with other seniors. If you're willing to represent RSVP at events around King County, we'd like to talk to you. You'll share your experiences and enthusiasm for volunteering, and encourage others to join RSVP. We provide a fun, interactive training!

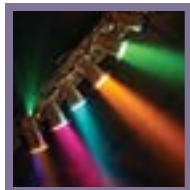
## SEND US YOUR HOURS!

**Your RSVP volunteer hours are important!**

Hours are tied to federal funding with benefits provided to you, and they help our volunteer sites and RSVP reach volunteer hour goals. And importantly, they help us recognize you for your service and the contributions you make to meet community needs when you volunteer.



**To sign up, send hours, or ask more questions, please contact: Megan Wildhood, 206.694.6786 | [meganw@solid-ground.org](mailto:meganw@solid-ground.org)**



## Volunteer Spotlight

by Liz Reed Hawk & Sam Stones

# Larry Cole helps demystify Medicare

If you've ever had to navigate Medicare for yourself or a loved one, you know how complicated the system is. This is why SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors) volunteers play such an important role – and why we're happy to spotlight one dedicated person, Larry Cole, for his commitment and contributions to the program.

When Solid Ground's Volunteer Services department began operating SHIBA in King County in September 2021, we were lucky to inherit Larry and his several years' experience as a volunteer.

SHIBA provides free, unbiased, and confidential Medicare advice. Volunteers help people enroll, compare plans to find the best fit for their medical needs and budget, and sign up for Medicare Savings Programs.

Training for each SHIBA volunteer can take upwards of a year to complete. It's a pretty deep commitment, so the program truly depends on longtime volunteers like Larry to

train and mentor new volunteers about the intricacies of Medicare.

During the pandemic, SHIBA changed from in-person to entirely remote and had to adapt quickly – and Larry stepped up enormously.

He adds, "When Solid Ground started managing the SHIBA program in King County, the transition was during COVID, and we lost many volunteers. It became apparent that training the many new volunteers that Solid Ground found was critical, and I found a new calling!"

SHIBA Coordinator Sam Stones says, "The demand for Medicare assistance grew tremendously during the pandemic, especially when the Public Health Emergency ended. Without Larry's help with training so many new volunteers, there would have been no way we could keep up with the demand for assistance helping our community members find the right health insurance plan for them."

So Larry took the lead on



Larry presents a Welcome to Medicare workshop to a packed room at the Northshore Senior Center (photo by Rachael Green).

mentoring up to eight new volunteers at a time. He also created new volunteer curricula, including case studies and an entire resource library. He tackled technical difficulties with grace – and helped new volunteers troubleshoot challenges to ensure they were able to connect and learn.

Larry's affinity for this avocation originates with his mother. She worked as a Medicare manager for many years, and later became a SHIBA volunteer.

He says, "Unfortunately, she died before I turned 65, so I couldn't turn to her for answers. But I knew what to research – and I knew about SHIBA – and connected with the King County branch. I had done my homework, and the volunteers I met with were impressed with my preparation and suggested I become a volunteer."

In addition to training new volunteers, Larry presents Welcome to Medicare webinars and workshops for local community centers and Seattle Colleges. He's a wonderful advocate for the people he serves – volunteers and community members alike.

A person's health is deeply personal and can be stressful to discuss, and sometimes calls become quite emotional. So Larry trains volunteers in deescalation skills – and approaching callers with compassion and active listening to make sure each person feels heard.

"Before retirement, I was a mental health counselor, and specialized in the older adult

population," he explains. "I had many clients with cognitive decline, and that made it even more difficult to cope with depression and anxiety."

Often, people feel powerless about their insurance options. Larry helps people reframe powerless narratives into ones of strength: "I found that my first – and oftentimes only – goal was to give them a sense of empowerment in coping with their lives. That made all the difference."

Larry says, "It is SHIBA's mission to give people the information to take back control of their lives, starting with the ability to manage their healthcare. My first few meetings with elderly clients – many with cognitive decline struggling to understand their choices (or even just understand that they have choices!) – triggered the 'give them back their power' impulse, and I have been at it since."

For all of the above reasons and more, we nominated Larry for a 2023 Washington State Volunteer Service Award, and he received an Honorable Mention – which we feel is extremely well deserved!

Congrats and thank you to Larry for your dedication to SHIBA and the many people whose lives you've positively impacted through sage and sound Medicare advice. ●

*While we currently have a waiting list for SHIBA volunteers, you can read more about the program at [solid-ground.org/shiba](https://solid-ground.org/shiba) – or contact Sam Stones, SHIBA Project Lead, at [sams@solid-ground.org](mailto:sams@solid-ground.org).*

## Need help navigating Medicare? SHIBA volunteers can help!



**Solid Ground SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors) volunteers offer free, unbiased Medicare education and assistance via the Office of the Insurance Commissioner in Washington state.**

- ▶ Find Medicare options that meet your personal needs.
- ▶ Learn about Medicare cost assistance programs, eligibility, and enrollment.
- ▶ Compare Medicare plans and prices.
- ▶ Report health care fraud and abuse.

**For help, call 206.753.4806 or 1.800.562.6900, or email us at [shiba@solid-ground.org](mailto:shiba@solid-ground.org).**

## VOLUNTEER & COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH RSVP

The following are just a few of the opportunities RSVP has to offer. To talk to a real person about volunteer roles that are just right for you, call Megan Wildhood at 206.694.6786 – or visit our website at [solid-ground.org/RSVP](http://solid-ground.org/RSVP) for volunteer opportunity listings organized by region.

**American Red Cross:** Volunteers respond to disasters, speak to community groups and schools, develop youth leadership skills, support local blood drives, provide care to service members, and much more. The training and support volunteers receive on a regular basis allows them to be successful in every Red Cross program. Volunteer opportunities are available 365 days a year to provide frontline services in your community. ~Countywide

**Catholic Community Services (CCS) – Volunteer Services** welcomes volunteers to enable elders living on low incomes and adults with disabilities to remain independent in their own homes. Volunteers may help the same person each time or be listed for on-call opportunities depending on schedules and interests. Volunteers receive training, mileage reimbursement, and insurance. Requests include rides to medical appointments, yardwork, phone buddies, and grocery, medication, and meal delivery. ~Countywide & online

**Kokoro Kai Adult Day Center** provides respite for family caregivers of Japanese elders in a close-knit, caring, supportive environment. Volunteers are needed Mondays and Wednesdays especially (Fridays coming soon), with morning and afternoon shifts available between 9:30am-3pm. Volunteers should have cultural humility and an interest in Japanese culture. ~Countywide

**Community Food Education (CFE):** Solid Ground's CFE is designed to teach people living on low incomes how to prepare healthy and delicious meals on a limited budget. CFE seeks volunteers who are passionate about food and nutrition to help with 6-week class series and one-time events. Work alongside a staff coordinator to facilitate fun, lively, and informative classes. Volunteers work with participants on educational activities and help them prepare a shared meal. In-person and virtual classes are available, and training is provided. ~Seattle & possibility of online

**Full Life Care** is dedicated to enhancing quality of life for low-income elders and adults with disabilities. Volunteers support elders through the ElderFriends Program, which custom matches volunteers with lonely and isolated older adults in King County for 1:1 companionship via in-home or remote friendly visits in Seattle and King County. ~Countywide

**Habitat for Humanity** seeks regular volunteers to help build and repair homes for hardworking families in King County. Volunteers also coach families in Habitat's Family Support program, helping them find homes. Remote and in-person options are available. Join them for a volunteer orientation session to learn more. ~Countywide

**Hopelink** is opening back up to the public, and we need your help to ensure all members of our community have access to food! Volunteer in Bellevue, Carnation, Kirkland, Redmond, or Shoreline. Opportunities occur Monday through Friday during regular business hours and include check-in (computer skills required), customer service (must be able to lift up to 15 pounds), and restocking (must be able to lift 35+ pounds). ~North & East King County

**Lifelong:** Lifelong's volunteers – the heart and soul of the organization – have played a vital role helping provide quality care and services to clients for more than 30 years. Lifelong's food program, Chicken Soup Brigade, eases the lives of people living with or at risk of serious illnesses. Volunteer opportunities include: repacking food donations, prepping food, packaging meals, delivering nutritious food, and assembling health care kits. ~South Seattle

**North Helpline Emergency Services & Food Bank** believes all people deserve adequate food, housing, and respect. We're actively looking for volunteers to join our onsite programs, particularly for the following activities: food bank distribution (W. & Sat. mornings, Th. afternoons), home delivery box packing (T. & Th. mornings), and food donation sorting (T.–Sat. mornings). ~North Seattle

**Port of Seattle:** The SEA Airport (Seattle-Tacoma International Airport) volunteer program seeks new volunteers to join our dedicated team. Volunteers elevate the customer experience by addressing their needs. Whether providing directions, distributing special lanyards for passengers with hidden disabilities, or providing PacNW tourist recommendations, our volunteers are invaluable members of the airport team. As SEA traffic continues to pick up, the need for additional volunteers also increases. ~South King County

**Reading Partners:** Are you ready to help a student become a lifelong learner? Reading Partners seeks 400 volunteer tutors to work one-on-one with students during the school year. Give a little over one hour per week. We offer flexible Monday to Thursday volunteer times between 8am – 4pm. No experience required; we provide volunteers with a structured curriculum, training, and ongoing support to help you and your student succeed. ~South Seattle

**Sound Generations** is a nonprofit organization serving aging adults and their loved ones in King County since 1967. Our staff and over 2,100 volunteers are dedicated to ensuring older adults can live ample and fulfilled lives in a community that respects and affirms the aging journey. Requests include assisting with events, social media ambassadors, phone-a-friend connectors, and digital card making. ~Countywide

**Youth Tutoring Program (YTP)** provides free 1:1, virtual tutoring for children living in five different housing communities for those living on low incomes around Seattle. YTP student scholars represent many nationalities, cultures, languages, and religions. Volunteers meet with the same student scholar every week to mentor and tutor them in academic and life skills. Afternoon and evening hours are available. Sign up for one hour a week or more and help a child succeed. ~North Seattle, South Seattle, online

**Washington DECA** serves 13,000 high school students to prepare them to become innovative leaders and entrepreneurs who make a positive social and global impact. We're currently looking for volunteer judges to evaluate both written and oral business competitions. Students value your feedback as they prepare for the International DECA competition. ~Eastside & online

- Please call to help me find a volunteer opportunity suited just for me.
- Please send information about RSVP.
- Please note my new address.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please mail this form to:** RSVP, 1501 North 45th Street, Seattle, WA 98103