

AmeriCorps Seniors Program of the Year

Coulee Region RSVP



Founded in 1973, Coulee Region RSVP has made a lasting impact for people and organizations through the service of their AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers. Over the past 50 years, they have had over 3,000 RSVP volunteers who have provided service at more than 350 locations throughout La Crosse and Monroe counties.

By putting its mission that “through collaboration with community non-profit and public organizations we provide meaningful volunteer experiences for Americans age 55 and better” into action, Coulee Region RSVP makes a difference in the communities it serves in several ways. Their volunteers step up when organizations come to them with a specific need and RSVP volunteers provide numerous services that assist those living in communities in La Crosse and Monroe counties through Coulee Region RSVP programs. In addition to the impacts the program has for others, service through their program keeps its own older volunteers active and engaged, which can help decrease the risk of social isolation, depression, and loneliness by helping to connect them with people in need in their community.

The Coulee Region RSVP Transportation program has made a significant impact in the community by being able to give fifteen or more rides per day to clients to get them to their medical appointments, food sites or grocery store. To better assist those that need rides on a regular basis, the program pairs drivers and clients to help them form a bond, building friendships and helping clients with feelings of loneliness. The relationships they build often lead to recommendations by current clients to others, as Coulee Region RSVP typically has multiple new clients each month that express interest after hearing from others how great the program’s volunteers are when providing rides. As their number of drivers continues to increase after being impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, they currently have around 27 volunteer drivers who volunteer about for 225 hours and drive over 5,000 miles per month.



The Coulee Region RSVP Handyman Program also keeps its volunteers busy, as they typically receive multiple calls each week to assist with various "minor fix it" repairs. The fifteen AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers with the program do more than simply fixing a doorbell or replacing smoke detectors, as they helped nearly 100 clients stay safe and living independently in their homes. Some projects focus on safety and mobility, such as installing grab bars or new railings on stairs, fixing a power lift chair, or securing linoleum in a bathroom to eliminate a fall hazard. Others simply make it possible for clients to maintain their homes, including fixing leaky faucets and garbage disposals, replacing toilets, and repairing lamps and replacing lighting and light bulbs too difficult for clients to safely reach. The RSVP volunteers typically go above and beyond what each client initially requested, often completing a few more items they see that need to be done to help individuals live safely in their homes and staying and talking with those they are helping for a few hours due to the client often having not seen anyone in a couple of days and being lonely.

Volunteers with the Coulee Region RSVP Handcraft volunteers have given out over 5,000 items during the past year to more than 25 local organizations that are in need of wheelchair and walker bags, cancer turbans, hats, mittens, scarfs, quilts, lap blankets, clothing protectors, and other items. These efforts are powered by more than 125 handcraft volunteers who in the last year have put in over 21,000 hours. These projects range from general need items to specifically designed items to help with medical and behavioral needs. Their volunteers have made bonding hearts for families with babies in the NICU that are made out of flannel and designed to transfer scents between parents and their preemies, “comfort cloths” for the behavioral health units at the local medical facilities to help calm patients when they become anxious, and twiddlemuffs designed to provide a sensory experience for those suffering from Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

When describing working with their AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP Volunteers, Coulee Region RSVP program director Ruth Kinstler explains that “I look forward to coming to work each day and being able to interact with RSVP volunteers... Our retired folks have so much to offer the community and it is my pleasure to make sure they are staying busy and not isolated in their homes...The volunteers have such a giving heart, and that is what makes my job so rewarding and fulfilling.”

