

Mildred “Dolly” McGeshick

AmeriCorps Seniors Volunteer of the Year

Mildred “Dolly” McGeshick has dedicated her life to helping others and continues to make a difference to the people of Wisconsin through her AmeriCorps Seniors service with the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council Senior Companions Program and the care that she consistently shows for those within the local tribal communities.

Dolly began showing this commitment to others at a young age. Despite loving school and being a strong student, Dolly stayed home from school after her mother left in order to take care of her younger brothers and sisters. Dolly instead would complete schoolwork that was sent home to her. When later caring for three of her uncles, she drove them to Elder Association meetings at different tribal locations each month, and although she was too young to attend the meetings, she was allowed to stay to assist her uncles. Her involvement grew, and she was ultimately voted to the board in 1966 of what is today the Great Lakes Native American Elders Association.



Feeling it is her duty to care for other people, she expanded the scope of this commitment, traveling to Washington, DC to advocate for Native American causes, becoming the first Indian Child Welfare worker in the country, and assisting with the development of the Indian Child Welfare Act. She has had a significant impact on numerous people, from the 69 children she has helped raise from both her own Mole Lake Sokaogon Ojibway tribe and others, to all of those impacted by her advocacy and efforts.

Dolly’s impact through AmeriCorps Seniors began before she was eligible to start serving with the program itself. Dolly wrote the first grant for the Foster Grandparent Program, serving children from Wisconsin tribes in Northern Wisconsin. Today, this program is also administered by the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council (GLITC). Dolly became an official volunteer with the GLITC Senior Companions Program (SCP) in 2015 and has since served over 6,000 hours and counting. Through her service, she has helped tribal elders in her community by offering friendship, companionship, running errands, doing chores, and giving rides. She has not just enhanced the life of these individuals, but she has also been a major asset to GLITC’s program as a go-to person when questions need answering or phone calls and other connections need to be made.

A key example of the impact she has had through her service comes from the companionship she provided to a tribal elder with multiple co-morbidities and lack of community and family support during the COVID-19 pandemic. This elder from the Lac Du Flambeau Lake Superior Ojibway tribe had kidney disease and was given an intense dialysis schedule. The elder was both nervous and sad at the prospect of sitting alone several times per week for hours at a time at the dialysis center during her treatment. When the GLITC-SCP could not find someone in her tribal community willing to be her companion as she went through these treatments, Dolly volunteered to be the Senior Companion to sit with the elder and console her during her treatment, even though she came from another tribe and lived about an hour and half away. With a gentle approach, Dolly was able to help the very emotional elder agree to begin her dialysis treatment. With a good sense of humor and a positive attitude, Dolly helped the elder become noticeably calmer throughout her treatment as they bonded through conversation, telling stories, and sharing memories.

Reflecting on her desire to help those in her community, she explains that “when I get food, I feed others.” Throughout her life and through her AmeriCorps Seniors service, Dolly has made a true impact for tribal communities that has sustained and bettered the life of countless individuals.