

Rachel Guenther ***Volunteer Coordinator*** ***of the Year***



Rachel Guenther serves as a volunteer coordinator through AmeriCorps VISTA at The Beacon, which aims to reduce the number of homeless in Dane County and to provide a safe place for them to come during the day where they can connect to services. The Beacon relies on volunteers to run vital services within the program, including the computer lab, showers, laundry, and the kitchen to serve an average of 225 individuals each day. If these areas are not staffed with volunteers, the guests may not have access to assistance completing employment applications, the staff struggles to get breakfast and lunch set up and served, and the laundry and showers, which are vital to the guest's hygiene and dignity, cannot open.

Rachel has been critical to The Beacon, taking on extra responsibilities and keeping their program running smoothly when they lost their full time staff volunteer coordinator. Rachel created relationships with outside agencies through tours and presentations that have increased volunteer efforts by community organizations and brought awareness to the community of The Beacon and what it provides. Since Rachel started at The Beacon, she has trained 84 new volunteers and maintained 163 active volunteers, with these volunteers providing 10,582 service hours.

In addition to her service increasing the number of volunteers, Rachel has put significant focus on improving communications with volunteers and working to improve the services they provide. Rachel revamped the volunteer newsletter and made changes to their website to allow for more frequent communication with the volunteers to keep them connected to what is happening at The Beacon. She updated the orientation program to clarify the training and make it available online. She created and sent out surveys to volunteers to get feedback on their volunteer program and utilized the feedback to make changes to how volunteer stations run so that they are more efficient, such as creating number magnets that move with an individual's laundry from the beginning to the end so that there are fewer errors in the laundry room.

The staff at The Beacon believes that she has been vital to the growth and continuation of their volunteer program, as her genuine relationships and efforts with the volunteers have opened the door to create a more efficient program. Additionally, without her knowledge of the behind the scenes work needed to run the program, staff feel they might have stumbled with these operations due to staff transition, but Rachel helped to keep the program running smoothly so that the guests and the volunteers were not impacted by the change.