TAPPING THE SKILLS OF THE OLDER ADULT AND BABY BOOMER GENERATION:
AN OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNITY AND PERSONAL IMPACTS

Lindsay Day, MSW Intern; Jennifer Crittenden, Fiscal and Administrative Officer; and Paula Burnett, RSVP Program Director, University of Maine Center on Aging

There are two complimentary senior volunteer programs that actively engage Baby Boomers and older adults in service to their communities. Each has demonstrated an improved sense of well-being and purpose in life for those who have chosen to participate. With a growing body of research supporting the benefits of volunteerism as a key to successful aging, studies have, as well, consistently shown a strong relationship between volunteering and health. Those who volunteer experience greater longevity, higher functional ability and lower rates of depression. Research also indicates that volunteering provides greater benefits to adults age 60 and over, compared to younger volunteers. These benefits include improved physical and mental health and greater life satisfaction (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007).

To further support the research surrounding the benefits of volunteerism, an analysis conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service (2007) found a relationship between volunteering and lowered incidence of mortality and heart disease at the state level. The data collected indicates that states with high volunteer rates also have lower rates of mortality and incidences of heart disease. A comparison of states demonstrates that health problems are more prevalent in states where volunteer rates are the lowest. Additionally, this report also highlights evidence which indicates that older adults who devote a “considerable” amount of time participating in volunteer activities, on average one or two hours per week, are most likely to derive significant health benefits.

These findings are especially important as approximately 77 million Americans, known as Baby Boomers, approach the age typically associated

Continued on Page 2
with retirement. According to United States Census data, the number of volunteers age 65 years and older is expected to increase 50 percent over the next 13 years, from just fewer than 9 million in 2007 to more than 13 million in 2020 (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007). This presents an emerging opportunity to engage individuals in this age cohort in meaningful service. This holds especially true in the state of Maine given its rapidly growing aging population. Maine has the oldest population of any state in the nation (median age 41.2 years). County by county, the state’s population is at or exceeds the national average, one of only four states where this is the case. Baby Boomers make up 30% of the population, while the Silent Generation makes up 15% (Maine Commission for Community Service, 2009).

Given the size of the Baby Boomer population and the strong relationship between volunteering and health, special consideration of these individuals as an important yet untapped volunteer base is warranted. If this population is engaged to participate in a considerable amount of volunteer service, many community problems may be resolved while at the same time improving the health of the growing number of older adults in our nation. However, research indicates that unlike other cohorts of volunteers, baby boomers are interested in finding opportunities that make use of their existing skills and expertise while seeking out opportunities that are challenging and personally interesting to them (Met Life Foundation, 2007). The most important motivators for adults 55+ to get involved in volunteer work includes the opportunity to make a difference, contribute to a cause they care about, use their skills, and meet new people (Met Life Foundation, 2007). According to the Met Life Foundation study, volunteer opportunities that are most attractive to baby boomers include activities that help them learn new skills, activities that most people can do without specialized experience or training, and activities that make use of their work and non-work skills.

**Maine’s Resources for Engaging Older Adult Volunteers**

Volunteer Coordinators or other agency personnel in Maine looking to harness the experience and interest of older adult and baby boomer volunteers have resources to which they can turn. Two such resources include the Encore Leadership Corps and five Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs in Maine.
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Encore Leadership Corps (ENCorps) is a free statewide program in Maine designed to support volunteers 50+ who are working to improve the economic, environmental, and human health of their communities. ENCorps members enjoy free monthly educational workshops on a variety of topics including how to deal with conflict in your volunteer work, grants writing basics, using the internet to market your volunteer project, etc. ENCorps members are provided with opportunities to socialize with other volunteers through regional gatherings and an annual summit. Stipends are also available to members to help support their community volunteer work. ENCorps also offers training to organizations that use older adult volunteers to help them strengthen their volunteer opportunities and volunteer management skills.

Evaluation data from ENCorps indicates that providing educational supports and socialization opportunities to older adult volunteers has had positive impacts on both their volunteer work and their personal health and well-being. For example, 82% of those who participate in ENCorps report learning new skills that they can apply to their volunteer work, 83% met new people as a result of participating in ENCorps and 61% have gained confidence in their own leadership abilities. Fifty-six (56%) of ENCorps members report that their involvement has improved their physical health and 70% have noted improvements in their emotional health as a result of participation. Likewise, the impacts on Maine communities and non-profits is also a tangible measure of these supports. Over 160 volunteers within ENCorps have provided over 19,000 hours of volunteer service to Maine communities and non-profits, valued at over $314,000.

ENCorps members serve in a variety of settings and have taken on a vast array of assignments (nearly 300 projects/volunteer locations) within all 16 counties of Maine. To learn more about how you can connect your older adult volunteers to ENCorps, or to learn more about ENCorps in general, please visit www.encoreleaders.org or call Patti Foden, ENCorps Program Coordinator at 207-767-5352.

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is one of three National Senior Service Corps programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service. (The other two programs are Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions). Free membership for adults age 55 and older provides potential volunteers with assistance with placement, training, liability insurance, and in some cases mileage reimbursement, as well as on-going support and educational opportunities once they have been placed. RSVP members choose how and where they want to serve—from a few hours to more than 40 hours a week. The average

Continued from Page 2

Continued on Page 4
TAPING THE SKILLS OF THE OLDER ADULT AND BABY BOOMER GENERATION: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNITY AND PERSONAL IMPACTS

Continued from Page 3

The average age of RSVP volunteers is 75, and many of those serve 500 hours in a year despite chronic health conditions or physical limitations. RSVP volunteers can be found delivering meals to homebound individuals, reading aloud to children at Head Start programs, leading exercise classes for seniors through a Bone Builders program, assisting at food cupboards, leading activities for those at adult day services, serving on advisory boards, providing capacity building activities for non-profit organizations, providing information on senior health and safety, and new volunteer opportunities being developed to specifically target veterans.

RSVP volunteer positions offer a variety of options for individuals based on their personalities, skills, challenges, and time commitment. Some may want to volunteer from home, others may want to volunteer where there is a great deal of social engagement, and many may choose to design their individual volunteer experience. Volunteers each have their own motivations behind selecting volunteer service. Some may even come “kicking and screaming” to volunteering as a result of a concerned family member or doctor encouraging them to get out more often; the usual response is “Why didn’t I do this sooner?” as they come to realize that volunteering gives them a reason to get up in the morning while alleviating their depression and social isolation. Through RSVP, bonds of friendship have been created; some to the point of marriage. For many, the agency at which they volunteer becomes their second family. Over the years RSVP directors have heard many volunteers speak about how putting the needs of others before their needs have helped them to conquer depression, better manage their chronic health conditions, and be sharper mentally. Annual volunteer satisfaction survey results indicate that over 90% of RSVP members believe volunteering has helped them to have a healthier lifestyle and allows them to engage in more active, rather than passive activities such watching TV, and that volunteering has added to their quality of life and independence.

Regardless of the volunteer position taken, overall, volunteers reap benefits for their well-being, and these are also cost-saving benefits for our over-burdened healthcare system.

If you know of a senior who could benefit from volunteering and would like more information on RSVP volunteer opportunities in your area, contact your local RSVP program. You can find a listing of the programs online at: www.maineservicecommission.gov/retired-senior-volunteer-program/
Hot Topics in Aging

Articles and websites related to this month’s article: (click on blue, underlined words to link to article)

Corporation for National and Community Service: www.nationalservice.gov
The Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America, and leads President Obama’s national call to service initiative, United We Serve. The CNCS website contains resources and information specific to volunteers and the organizations that serve them. For Senior Corps/RSPV specifically, please go to www.seniorcorps.gov/about/programs/rsvp.asp.

Maine Commission for Community Service: www.maineservicecommission.gov
The mission of the Maine Commission for Community Service is to “Foster community service and volunteerism to meet human and environmental needs in the State of Maine.” The commission carries out this mission by “funding programs, developing managers of volunteers and service-learning practitioners, raising awareness of sector issues, and promoting service as a strategy.” The commission website is a great source of information on volunteerism in Maine, available funding opportunities, and other resources of interest to volunteer managers. The commission also maintains a list of Senior Corps programs throughout Maine.

Volunteer Maine: www.volunteermaine.org
Volunteermaine.org is a Maine-based online resource for volunteers and organizations that utilize volunteers. Organizations can post volunteer opportunities through its online volunteer listing service in addition to accessing volunteer management resources and publications.

Independent Sector’s Value of Volunteer Time: www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time
This webpage hosted by Independent Sector provides a valuable tool to volunteer managers looking to assign a dollar value to the time and effort provided by their volunteers. This page provides a dollar value by state.

Citations for this month’s feature article:

Maine Legislative Update:
The Maine Association of Area Agencies on Aging offers updated information on topics that are facing Maine’s elders including Medicare, bills that are being followed in the legislature as well as links to each of the five Area Agency on Aging. To access the website with its timely information, click on: http://www.maine4a.org/

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22\textsuperscript{nd} Annual Maine GERIATRICS Conference – 2012

Harborside Hotel & Marina . Bar Harbor, Maine
REGISTRATION IS OPEN!
June 7-8, 2012

Who Should Attend:
The Geriatrics Conference is designed for Allopathic and Osteopathic Physicians, Physician Assistants, Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, Nursing Faculty Administrators, Certified Nursing Assistants, Psychologists, Social Workers, Mental Health Practitioners, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Substance Abuse Counselors, and all others who by virtue of their position or interest are involved in the field of aging.

** CME Credits will be available

Hotel Information:
The Geriatrics Conference will be held at The Harborside Hotel & Marina in Bar Harbor Maine.

However, special group rates are available at both The Harborside Hotel & The Bar Harbor Regency.

Harborside Hotel: $159.00 + taxes
Bar Harbor Regency: $112.00 + taxes

** Please contact hotels directly to book your stay.
Group room discount deadline: May 7, 2012

Registration Fees:

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After 5/24/12 an additional $25.00 will be added.

* MGS Members & Diamond Sponsors

Registration Deadline: June 1, 2012

For additional information or to register for this event please contact the University of New England’s CME Department at: (207)602-2589 or cme@une.edu

Stay tuned for Conference brochure & printable registration form at:
http://www.une.edu/cme/geriatrics11.cfm

A few of this years Keynote topics will include:

- Patient Centered Medical Homes
- Transitions in Care
- Elder Care Network
- Hospital Care for Older Adults
- Office of Elder Services

For more information and other upcoming CME events visit our web page at:
http://www.une.edu/com/cme

UNE - Department of Continuing Medical Education 11 Hills Beach Road, Biddeford, ME 04005