

Were it not for VOAWW programs, Al might have been homeless.

Al is 65, he has coronary artery disease, underwent aortic valve replacement, he suffers from hypertension, lipid disorder, COPD and other ailments.

When Al moved to Seattle, he knew no one, had no job, and hardly any money. He stayed in a cheap motel for two weeks looking for work but could not find anything. He was out of money, out of food.

Al looked in the phone book and found Aging and Disability Services of King County which connect him to 2-1-1 and Volunteers of America's Senior Companion Program. Immediately, Al got connected with help.

He was given food and rent vouchers, paid job training, a temporary job and placement as a Senior Companion Volunteer. The tax-free stipend, mileage and meal allowance he received as a Senior Companion volunteer helped supplement his social security income, besides keeping him active and involved helping others in the community.

Since 2006 he has been advocating and helping seniors and disabled adults in King County. Through the Senior Companion Program, Al helps several seniors at the Heritage House, at the Theodora, and other individuals who live alone in their own homes. Al says: " I want to help out, where I can, and I'm privileged to help so many good people. It feels good to give it back to the community." Thank you Al for everything that you do for your community!



David's Story: Our Volunteer Spotlight

David volunteers for VOAWW's Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSPV) in Skagit Valley. David joined the RSVP Advisory Council five months ago for the purpose of helping RSVP use best practices to ensure everything was being done to make volunteer opportunities available and accessible to people with disabilities. David reaches out and recruits people with disabilities to volunteer, share their expertise, and help seniors not feel so isolated.

Lisa Gray, RSVP Director says, "David makes presentations to after-school students to dispel myths about what it's like to be disabled." He talked about how, when he was young, he was told "he shouldn't go to college because he would never be able to do anything. He was also told that he would just end up living in a nursing home." David went on to college and is now employed at Chinook Enterprises in Skagit County. David also volunteers at the local Middle School to help tutor the children, talk to them, and be there for them to support with their mobility aides.

David has played a key role in helping to develop the Mobility Project, a collaborative community project between many community groups, such as: Lion's Club, as they procure donations and stores mobility aides until the Mobility Project core group can refurbish them to get them ready for use. Mobility aides include: manual chairs, crutches, and walkers for seniors. The equipment, mostly purchased with Medicaid dollars, is donated by the families when people no longer need the items. The project involves: the Mount Vernon School District, the Senior Centers in Skagit County, VOAWW's RSVP Program & Advisory Council in Skagit Valley, Chinook Enterprises, and Don Hill - an RSVP community volunteer who brought the Lion's Club into the Mobility Project effort. In addition to these support agencies, a partnership with LaVenture Middle School pairs students with senior volunteers to fix up the mobility equipment, make them safer and in better condition. The repaired equipment will then be placed in lending closets in senior centers through Skagit County so that seniors will have access to free, safe, and empowering mobility.

David comments, "We've come a long way in Skagit County. There's still work to be done to create more mobility assistance, transportation, accessible facilities, and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. I believe that if I help people with disabilities, this will help the community."

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Currently, David is working on recruiting RSVP volunteers to help put on monthly game nights for people with disabilities. These game nights will be held at Chinook Enterprises. Volunteers of America's Disability Services staff refer their clients to participate in these game nights. Another fun thing, David's involved in is People First, where he serves as President for the past thirteen years. They will be holding a dance at Skagit Valley College on April 29th and May 20th from 6pm - 8pm. Interested volunteers should contact Lisa Gray (lgray@voaww.org | (425)542-8485) or David Wilder (425)428-0140 for more information.

David just returned from a trip down to Olympia, where he was honored by Governor Chris Gregoire in receiving the 2011 Volunteer Service Award. We're very happy to have him volunteer with us at Volunteers of America Western Washington. He's truly an inspiration to us all. Thank you David for all you do!



Finding Choices at VOAWW – Kent’s Story

Kent McDaniel is someone who knows first hand the power of choice. Having lived with cerebral palsy his entire life, he fought to maintain his independence. Despite having a disability, Kent is his own advocate and power of attorney. But at one time, he did not even get to decide where he lived.

When Kent’s previous care provider was not able meet his housing needs, he contacted Volunteers of America. The Disability Services program worked with Kent to establish housing arrangements and living assistance that better fit his needs and lifestyle.

“Volunteers of America allows clients to make their own decisions about how to live their lives.” Kent explains. “They care about me. I am not shy about expressing my opinions, especially in the areas that need improvement, and they haven’t given up on me yet!” says Kent.

For many low-income families, seniors, and adults with disabilities, choices are a privilege. Many times their choices are very limited because of financial means, deteriorating health, disability, or countless other barriers. Sometimes, they feel like they have no choices.

At Volunteers of America we believe all people should be empowered to live with independence, dignity, and choice. That’s why we provide food, supportive living services, and many other critical, basic supports that help people lead better lives.

YOU have a choice too – help empower individuals and families in your community! [Give](#), advocate, or [volunteer](#) to help.



Volunteer Spotlight: Kimberly's Story

Kimberly is not your average volunteer. Between balancing a family with small children and a full course load at the University of Washington, Kimberly has become an irreplaceable volunteer at the Community Resource Center in Greenwood.

Kimberly began volunteering at the Greenwood Food Bank for a service project while attending junior college. This experience struck her passion and need to give back to the community in which she grew up.

"I grew up in this community and while my family didn't utilize services like the Greenwood Food Bank, our situation wasn't much different from those families who did. I see the needs of the families here aren't that far off from those of my own growing up" said Kim.

Kimberly has not been the typical food bank volunteer; she has been out in the community, spreading the word about the Food Bank and the needs in the community. As a volunteer, Kimberly worked on marketing and community outreach efforts that helped the Greenwood Food Bank and Community Resource Center become visible and well known in the Greenwood Community. Because of her efforts, the Greenwood Food Bank has partnered with local businesses such as the Green Bean Coffeehouse which highlighted the Food Bank as its charity of the month this past September.

"I feel like it's my responsibility, having a family and the privilege of education, to give back to the community in any capacity possible. I want to use my education and experience to raise awareness and advocate for those in need."

"Many of the volunteers utilize the services themselves. I saw the need and opportunity to apply my education and resources for the greater good and I encourage others to do the same. Our community needs volunteers to step up and share their skills, networks and resources to not only do direct service, but to help organizations like Volunteers of America increase their capacity to serve those in need."



Home for the Holidays: Paul's Story

Paul is the first one to admit that he should have asked for help. As a man with a lot of pride, as things started to unravel in his life, Paul didn't want to rely on his friends and family for support so things only got worse.

When Paul was let go from his job as a facilities manager for an apartment building, he lost his apartment too. For a short time he stayed with friends while trying to find work. As the weeks went on, Paul decided it was time to leave his friend's couch, that is when he became homeless, sleeping on the streets.

This wasn't the first time Paul had been homeless. After leaving the military, he was unable to find work. Refusing to let his friends and family know he was struggling, he "camped out" on the streets until finding a job to support himself.

Cold nights on the streets brought back old memories from his younger years when he was too proud to ask for help. Still not wanting to tell his friends and family what had become of him, Paul decided he would ask for help.

Through another agency, Paul received rent subsidies that would help pay his rent. He was so excited to once again have a place to call home; but one thing stood in the way, the \$500 security deposit he had to pay before moving in. Paul was homeless and unemployed, he didn't have enough to cover the \$500 deposit. When he began to lose hope Paul was connected with the Volunteers of America Rent Deposit Loan program. Through the program, Paul received a loan for the \$500 that he was committed to paying back. "It felt so wonderful to know that someone trusted me. It made me feel like I was worth something again;" said Paul.

Because of the assistance he received, Paul was able to move in to his own apartment. Even though he still has not found work, he was committed to paying back his loan, he even made his last payment a month ahead of schedule. "If it wasn't for the help I received I would still be on the streets. Now I am happy where my life is and look forward to the future."