Founders Update – Fall 2019

With every passing week, more people are finding out about UR Community Cares and our innovative neighbors-helping-neighbors approach to at-home assistance. In October, we officially registered on Grants.gov and we applied for our first local grant opportunity (Cruisin’ on Main Street’s mini grant program in Manchester). We established contacts with the four lead organizations working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to launch its new National Volunteer Care Corps. Be prepared for exciting progress ahead!

In caring community,
Michelle and M.D.

MISSION AND MORE

UR Community Cares, Inc.™ was established in 2019 to introduce a low-cost, intergenerational platform that connects local volunteers with age-qualified adults (age 70+, or age 18+ for those with a physical disability) who need assistance at home. As the population of older adults grows dramatically, we provide tangible support for “aging in place” and maintaining social connections for improved health outcomes. Each town we serve has its own dedicated base of volunteers who are assigned to residents in that town, fostering additional opportunities to build neighborly communities.

Our volunteers provide community members with housework/indoor, yardwork/outdoor and companionship support. Because we are always focused on safety and confidentiality, UR Community Cares is fully insured; all volunteers and community members undergo annual background checks and meet other requirements to register with us.

If participants are unable to use our computer-based online system themselves, we suggest an advocate to arrange registration and scheduling. We appreciate and accommodate the time commitment of all volunteers, and offer the opportunity to schedule repeat visits with the same community member if desired.

UR Community Cares, Inc. is an IRS-determined 501(c)(3) Corporation. We have a DUNS number and are in the process of trademarking our corporate name and logo. We are a registered non-profit on Charity Navigator and AARP.com’s volunteer job board, among others. Our internet address is www.urcommunitycares.com and we actively use Facebook, YouTube and other online media.
In the name “UR Community Cares,” the word “UR” has an intended double meaning: the word “Your” (shortened to “ur” in texting and tweeting style), and the phrase “You are” (reminding each of us that we are responsible for our community). This is carried through in our “Nurture UR Neighborhood” tagline.

ABOUT OUR FOUNDERS

MICHELLE PUZZO is co-founder and president of UR Community Cares. She graduated from the University of Connecticut with a Bachelor of Science degree in physical therapy. She began her career as a physical therapist specializing in outpatient orthopedics, and now has nearly 10 years of experience in home-based patient care. Michelle is a published author of children’s books inspired by the adventures of her two young sons. Combining her passions, she envisioned the launch of UR Community Cares as a scalable solution to help others, enrich local communities and bring people together.

McCann “M.D.” BIRMINGHAM is co-founder and treasurer of UR Community Cares. He holds a Master’s degree from the University of New Haven’s School of Education, and a Bachelor’s degree in sociology from the University of Connecticut. His work as an entrepreneur has earned him several U.S. and international patents, trademarks and copyrights. M.D. is an independently published author, and business owner of ventures focused on building global community. His production engineering company, McCann D. Birmingham LLC, is responsible for UR Community Cares’ technical platform, from concept design through ongoing project management and operational enhancements to support the organization’s planned expansion.

OUTREACH

Based on registrations received to date, volunteer helpers are relatively easy to enroll so much of our outreach efforts are focused on enrolling community members in need of help. Throughout Connecticut, we are educating social service agencies and other influencers on the benefits of referring community members to join our network. For example, as an active member of the Manchester Community Services Council, we interact with dozens of MCSC members on a monthly basis. In addition, we have a substantial and growing database of community organizations and interested individuals including local and state elected officials. These established points of contact comprise the core targets of our outreach efforts.

As part of a recent grant application, we were honored to receive a letter of support from a municipal agency which read in part:

"UR Community Cares fills a critical need ... by providing assistance to our Town’s most vulnerable older and disabled adult residents. The assistance provided by UR Community Cares enhances the lives of these residents and, in some instances, allows residents to remain in their homes when the only alternative would be a skilled nursing facility."

A variety of groups whose mission it is to serve the public – such as health departments, healthcare providers, safety and emergency teams, senior centers, public libraries and more – are expected to benefit from UR Community Cares being part of their local support network.
How It Works

Our online platform, launched in spring 2019, easily connects one qualified volunteer helper with one elderly (or physically disabled) community member in need of at-home help. All participants can choose from three categories of “community deeds” — housework/indoor assistance, yardwork/outdoor assistance, and companionship.

Our age requirements for participation are as follows: Age 15 and older to be a volunteer helper; age 70 and older for community members to receive help, with the exception for persons with physical disabilities to join starting at age 18.

Our volunteers range from high school students (performing mandatory community-service hours) to retirees who are able-bodied and looking for purpose-driven life activities; older adults can easily help with light-duty, non-physical tasks.

Our community members are seeking at-home assistance for non-licensed services (for example, we cannot perform plumbing or electrical repairs, or professional services such as accounting or legal aid). They often look to us to help “fill in the gaps” between home-based healthcare and hourly fee-based services such as certified health-aide agencies. They may request one-time assistance (for example, put up holiday decorations) or multiple visits (weekly laundry and bed changing).

Whenever needed, in addition to our existing volunteer base, we are always able to recruit and enroll at a level sufficient to fulfill the number and timing of home visit requests.

Currently, there is no monetary fee involved to either volunteer or receive community member services with UR Community Cares.

Metrics

As our capacity grows, we plan to track and analyze various quantitative measurements, including the monthly totals of: community members referred, completed registrations for new community members and volunteers, scheduled “community deed” visits, completed visits and visit evaluations, visit requests by category, repeat-visit requests and visit demographics.

We will also gather and analyze qualitative information, including: informal surveys (e.g., how did you hear about us), visit testimonials and permission to include in marketing materials (optional) and suggested improvement opportunities.

Funding Resources

As we grow in numbers of volunteers, community members and completed home visits, we are well-positioned with our scalable technical platform to attract larger and ongoing funders. We continuously pursue regional and statewide funding resources, as our service area steadily expands. We enrolled in Grants.gov, the single access point for grant programs offered by federal grant-making agencies, and our website offers the convenience of secure online donations 24/7.