

Welcome Remarks
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Aging
Cindy Padilla

Session on "Effective Models for Using Older Volunteers"
N4a's 35th Annual Conference and Trade Show

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Good morning. Thank you all for joining us as we talk about one of America's most valuable resources... An abundant and wise resource, one that doesn't deplete with age, and only gets better, Muhammed Ali once said, "The man who views the world at 50 the same he did at twenty, has wasted thirty years of his life."

I am very excited to be here today, and to be a part of the Administration on Aging. This is an exciting time for our Country... As we celebrate the 45th anniversary of the Older Americans Act, the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the dawn of Health Care for All Americans, and beginning of a new era for America's largest generation ever! Yes, the Boomers are turning 65!

When I heard that this workshop was taking place, I sort of invited myself to the panel... As a lifelong volunteer, and community organizer working with volunteers, Community Service is something I am very passionate about.

As the Secretary of the New Mexico Aging & Long Term Services Department ago, I had several priorities for the Agency. One of which was Civic Engagement. New Mexico had been selected as one of the first states to participate with the National Governors' Association Civic Engagement Institute in 2007. We partnered with the Corporation for National and Community Service – Senior Corp, AARP, the NM Community Foundation, and several institutions for continued learning, together we created Engage New Mexico! A program that at the local level, continues today.

As we all know, volunteering is anything but new... As a community organizer many years ago, and as a fan of Historian and Professor, Howard Zinn's book, A Power No Government can Resist, we know that history was shaped by people, who when organized and focused could change the course of history... And they did.

We stand at yet another doorway of opportunity... ready to make history, as an army of new, and I won't go as far as saying "improved", but I will say new and different, volunteers are ready and willing to be re-engaged, re-energized, and re-tooled.

This new volunteer pool: will be the largest, healthiest, best-educated generation of older Americans in U.S. history – the Boomers. They, we, are looking for new kinds of volunteer opportunities and they, we, want to continue to be involved and to make a positive impact in their communities.

Furthermore, with growing budget constraints on program spending, many agencies turn to the use of volunteers.

And of course as many of you know, volunteers have historically served at every level and delivered all types of services within the Aging Network. So volunteering within the network isn't anything new either, but as the types of volunteers we will see grows and changes, we too must grow and change.

Which means that in order to capitalize on this growing opportunity, and to modernize volunteer possibilities in the Aging Network, we must be more strategic and intentional in order to use volunteers more effectively to meet both our needs and theirs.

We can not just look at using volunteers just as a "free" set of helping hands. We must incorporate them into our overall workforce analysis. Having agency job descriptions that are not designated as staff or volunteer – allows for these "positions" to be filled by both, staff and volunteer.

And of course, we need to remember to also focus on the value of volunteering... Research points to civic engagement as important to healthy aging. And I would add, can sometimes make the difference between life and death.

Why can I say that? Let me tell you about "Jose" and "Henry"... a Senior Companion Story...

- As Secretary of NMALTS, I was visiting senior sites, meal sites, a Foster Grandparent and her "children" – who affectionately call her grandma, and

Jose, who at 84 lost his wife. He lived with his son and daughter-in-law and young granddaughter, typical of New Mexico. His family was concerned, Jose was depressed, lost his will to live... His family had to both work, but didn't want to leave Jose alone... for fear... until they found Henry, through the local senior program. Henry is a Senior Companion. There we were in Jose's living room, talking half in English half in Spanish, and I learned how Henry saved Jose's life... by visiting, and re-engaging him into socialization, Jose no longer talked about suicide... he talked about his family, his granddaughter, and Henry.

Other types of volunteers are being placed in Long Term Care facilities.. like my dad... ok so he isn't a boomer, I am, but his story is yet another one of healthy aging, and making a difference.

- My dad will be 74 Wednesday. A year ago, my aunt fell and broke her hip... she had lost her husband a year prior, and had been in a slow stage of deteriorating health since then. As she was recovering from her hip surgery, my father and cousin would go visit her at her assisted living facility. My dad, came back and would tell me stories.. one in particular had a profound impact on him... he told me of a gentleman who he would see each day at 8 am and again in the evening when he left, sitting in the same chair almost in the same position all day... he said.. Cindy, don't let that be me. I told him, then don't let it be you... you should volunteer, how about being an Ombudsman. What's an Ombudsman, he asked. So I told him and he agreed, after finishing his intensive training, returning from his first job assignment, he was beaming... and he said he had a great day, visiting with people – they appreciated talking to him in Spanish – and he said, you know Cindy, in as much as I think I helped a little, I think I got more out of it than they did.

The 2006 amendments to the Older Americans Act highlighted the role of volunteers as a strategy to support and enhance the Act's programs. And it highlighted the partnership between AoA and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

At AoA, we were very excited that the Corporation invited us to be part of a panel at the June Conference on Volunteering and Service in New York City. More than 5,000 people attended the conference, which was organized by the Corporation

and the Points of Light Foundation. Almost 300 people attended the session on “Boomers as a Resource.”

That gives you an idea of how “hot” this topic is across the nation and why this is an ideal time to discuss how we can grow these opportunities.

In 2011 Congress will consider reauthorization and amendments to the Older American Act, effective in FY 2012. Right now we are soliciting input so if you have ideas regarding civic engagement and volunteerism, this is the time to be heard. Go to www.aoa.gov to provide your input.

But AoA isn't waiting until 2011 to strengthen our commitment to civic engagement of older Americans.

In addition to our current activities spearheaded by the National Council on Aging, and which you will hear more about later, we just closed an announcement to create a National Aging Civic Engagement Technical Center.

This new center is part of our vision to demonstrate the power and value of volunteers, particularly older ones – as part of the Aging Network workforce and as volunteers in their communities. The center will assist us in forging and harnessing this national movement – one of growing “engagement” that will showcase volunteers and help strengthen the Aging Network’s ability to attract and retain them.

We are excited about this new Center, and we will start by bringing together key stakeholders from the aging and service communities and from national, state, and local levels, to help us identify and develop a civic engagement action plan for AoA and the Aging Network.

One of their tasks is to identify the players already out there and figure out how we can work more closely together. Another task will be to find out how we can help you grow your volunteer force. We hope that the center will be up and running by September. As we work to connect the dots, we will help to facilitate coordination, collaboration, and the leveraging of resources.... Both financial and human... and as we look to this growing abundance of our best resources yet, we will continue to change the course of history, keep people engaged, and support one another.

I now want to turn the microphone back to Carol Crecy so you can hear from our panelists. I want to express my special thanks to Kristen McSwain, the Chief of Program Operations for the Corporation for National and Community Service. Kristen flew in this morning for this session and will fly out today. Now that is a dedicated partner!

Kristen will tell you what's going on at the Corporation, including the fact that it has a new Chief Executive Officer, Patrick Corvington, and a new Director of Senior Corps, Erwin Tan. Thank you for coming, and I hope you enjoy the conference.