

STERLING

PHILANTHROPIC SOCIETY

Newsletter

SUMMER 2021

Need for Housing Assistance Rising Among Older Adults

During the pandemic, PCOA saw a steep rise in the need among older adults for assistance with basic needs, including access to food and other necessities. As many aspects of our society and economy rebound, some of those needs have tapered off, but the urgent need for housing support continues to increase.

For many, increases in rent are pricing them out of their current housing. This includes some older and disabled people who rely on City of Tucson Section 8 vouchers for subsidized housing, and whose property managers are no longer accepting vouchers because they can charge substantially higher market rates. According to a RENTCafe May 2021 report, rent in Tucson rose 14% since last year.

We hear from many people who can't afford to move, even if they can find affordable housing. They are often looking at immediate eviction and afraid they will lose their homes and their belongs. We recently received a plea for help from Graciela, a woman living with her disabled adult son. They both rely on service animals to help keep them safe. Their landlord is raising rent beyond what their Section 8 voucher will cover and they are trying to be proactive in looking for new housing, but Graciela is discouraged about

finding a place she can afford with her voucher.

PCOA is doing everything we can to assist Graciela and so many other people in similar situations. While we don't have the capacity to pay rent on an ongoing basis, for those who can find an affordable situation they can maintain, we are sometimes able to help with one-time expenses like moving costs and deposits.

The funds we use to provide this assistance come solely from donations to our emergency fund. We are so grateful for the extraordinary generosity of our community to help us assist older adults in meeting their most urgent needs during the difficult last year and a half - but the needs continue to grow while donations have slowed substantially.

Your support can help us prevent people like Graciela and her son from becoming homeless and losing their service animals. If you would like to help, we would welcome the chance to speak with you, or you can donate online at givepcoa.org. Select COVID-19 Emergency Fund if you want us to use your gift to help with housing and other essential needs.

Partner Spotlight

PCOA is grateful for the partnership and support of Mercy Care and Mercy Care Advantage. Through PimaCare at Home, our nonmedical home care agency, we work closely with Mercy Care to serve Medicaid-eligible people in need of in-home support across Pima County. We appreciate the work Mercy Care does in our community to improve the lives of older adults like Wesley Gonzales.

Wesley's Recovery Journey

Wesley Gonzales often spots cars while he's out and about. "It's a good brain game," he says as he tries to figure out the make and model. Wesley suffered a stroke in November 2016, at 55 years old. The stroke affected his mobility and speech, but he feels lucky because the outcome could have been very different.

Wesley has not let the stroke define who he is. He's worked hard through physical, occupational, and speech therapy.

"He increased his strength and improved his ability," said Sabir, his case manager. "Wesley has successfully lived independently since March 2020."

He has gone from using a wheelchair to a walker with the help of Mercy Care Advantage (HMO SNP) staff, his sister, and peer support groups. Sabir got him a wheelchair and other durable medical equipment to aid his recovery.

"When I was in assisted living, I knew that people there were affected by stroke in different ways," said Wesley. "My memory is intact. I made a promise to myself that because I know where I've been and what I've gone through, I'll use my knowledge and experience to help other people. They can avoid some of the pitfalls I had."

Wesley has participated in the Mercy Care Member Advisory Council since 2017. He advocates for other Mercy Care Advantage and Mercy Care Long Term Care members.



In council meetings, members can provide input to enhance Mercy Care's services. In 2019, he nominated the Stroke Resource Center of Southern Arizona to become a community partner, and Mercy Care selected the center for a five-year term.

"I also speak with several [peer resource] groups regularly, and people I have met along the way. I try to set an example."

Wesley had plenty of practice setting a good example before the stroke. Prior to relocating to Tucson, he lived in Atlanta, Georgia. He worked in the IT field for over 35 years for companies such as AT&T, Bell South and Sprint. One of his last projects was IT consulting with The CHAAMPS Project, studying childhood health data in Africa and Southern Asia.

Before retiring, one of Wesley's favorite hobbies was travelling the country, playing in ultimate frisbee competitions. These days, life is simpler. He likes hanging out with his cat, Oreo. He also works with a personal trainer at the gym, twice a week. Wesley continues to improve and reminds everyone to "be kind."

Southwest Gas Fuels Home Repair Program

PCOA is honored to have been selected for a third time as a beneficiary of Southwest Gas's Fuel for Life workplace giving program. Through Fuel for Life, a committee of Southwest Gas employees selects a handful of nonprofits to which employees can donate through their paychecks. Beneficiaries are selected for two years, giving each participating organization the opportunity to receive significant philanthropic support.

PCOA's Pima Meals on Wheels program was a beneficiary of Fuel for Life in 2015-2016 and 2017-2018. In that time, Southwest Gas employees donated an astonishing \$178,320 to PCOA! Their gifts delivered nearly 30,000 meals older people struggling with having enough quality food to eat. We are grateful to once again be a beneficiary for the 2021-2022 campaign, this time for our home repair program for low-income older adults.

PCOA's partnership with Southwest Gas goes back more than 15 years, when they first began donating water heaters for PCOA to install in the homes of low-income older people who could not afford to

replace them. Over the years, these donations have helped us ensure that over 150 of our older friends and neighbors have had access to hot water in their homes.

"Our employees generosity and big-heartedness is apparent by their overwhelming support for non-profit agencies throughout the communities we serve," says Julie Williams, Vice President, Southern Arizona Division Southwest Gas. "In Southern Arizona, 91% of Southwesterners make personal donations to their selected FUEL for LIFE charities on a monthly basis. Agencies such as Pima Council on Aging make it easy to contribute as they provide critical services and programs to those in need. We are honored to play a part in making a positive difference in Southern Arizona."

Southwest Gas is among PCOA's most cherished corporate partners. We value their dedication to our community, their financial and in-kind contributions to support older adults, and the example they set for corporate philanthropy.

Cowell Family Legacy Lives On



Jane Cowell, right

Jane Cowell has been a friend and donor to PCOA for the past two decades. Over the years, Jane occasionally turned to us for help with Medicare. We were saddened to learn of her death in December at age 101, and honored to be notified that Jane had remembered us in her estate. Jane is remembered as an avid reader, excellent cook and wonderful role model.

A couple of months ago, an attorney for Jane's estate called to let us know a check for \$125,000 was waiting for us at his office. We were astonished and deeply grateful for Jane's generosity.

Imagine our shock when we picked up the check and were told to expect a second disbursement from the estate in a few weeks for at least \$250,000! To date, PCOA has received \$385,000 from the Cowell Family Trust due to Jane's kindness and foresight. We only wish we'd had the opportunity to thank her personally for this extraordinary gift, which will make so much good work possible in our community. Thank you, Jane.

Register Now!



Join us for the next **Aging Mastery Program** 10-session workshop in aging well, starting September 14.

Gain new skills to make small meaningful changes in your life!

\$85 by September 2 or \$95 through deadline of September 9.



A Matter of Balance fall prevention classes start in-person September 13, or by Zoom October 12.

This program is designed to reduce the fear of falling and increase activity levels among older adults.

Donation of \$30 for 8 weeks.

Call (520) 305-3410 to register for all classes.

The Sterling Philanthropic Society newsletter of PCOA is a report to our donors about how you help older adults live healthier, happier, more independent lives. Thank you for being a valued partner in our work.