

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

### Executive Summary

The YMCA of Greater Whittier has been an effective RSVP sponsor for 42 years engaging over 400 volunteers throughout the Whittier and San Gabriel Valley. The YMCA/RSVP program serves the needs of nearly 6,000 through partnership with 38 volunteer sites. These committed volunteers address the needs of hundreds of low-income seniors who face significant food insecurity, isolation and health challenges. The YMCA/RSVP program's primary focus area of Healthy Futures focuses on food delivery primarily through Meals on Wheels and companionship through telephone reassurance program that provides daily phone calls and monthly visits to homebound seniors. Activities include organized crafts, games and trips to museums and restaurants as well as support groups.

The secondary area of focus is Environmental Stewardship. Through the YMCA/RSVP recycling program 50 volunteers work weekly to recycle paper to provide financial resources and aid to low-income children, families and seniors allowing the YMCA to provide financial assistance to hundreds of people helping them to live healthy and reduce the risks of chronic disease. In addition, the recycling program provides social connection and meaningful work to our many volunteers. Another innovative program sponsored by our RSVP grant, are the Woodworkers of Whittier. These dedicated and skilled senior volunteers recycle scrap lumber to construct building blocks and toys for low-income children, many who would not receive a birthday or Christmas gift without the generosity of these amazing volunteers.

Additional areas of focus in the other category address safety needs in our service area through Community policing, patrol, and administrative assistance in five law enforcement agencies and one fire department. We also assist in collecting, sorting, packaging food for local Food Banks to provide for veteran, military families, and/or individuals in need.

At the end of our three year grant term nearly 400 volunteers will have provided 3,500 people social support and connection to combat isolation and hopelessness. As a result of the meal delivery program 1,500 seniors will have reduced hunger and increased social connection by receiving a healthy meal and a friendly visit from a dedicated volunteer. At the end of the grant period 208 tons of paper and scrap lumber will be recycled saving over 1,700 trees from being harvested and keeping landfills free of scrap lumber, and from being incinerated, thus generating \$20,000 that has been given to low-income children, families and seniors helping them to improve health by fighting obesity and learning important life lessons. At the end of the grant period 13,000 toys made by the Whittier Woodworkers

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will have brightened the life of hundreds of low-income children knowing that someone notices and cares about them.

We will accomplish these outcomes with the CNCS federal investment of \$103,469 annually, supplemented by the YMCA of Greater Whittier match of \$ 51,190.

### **Strengthening Communities**

#### Community Served

The YMCA of Greater Whittier RSVP of Whittier and the San Gabriel Valley serves much of the San Gabriel Valley in Eastern Los Angeles County. It is bounded by the cities of Downey, Norwalk, Santa Fe Springs and La Mirada on the south, the cities of Pico Rivera, Monterey Park, Alhambra, South Pasadena, Pasadena and La Canada on the west, Pasadena, Sierra Madre, Arcadia, Monrovia, Duarte, and Azusa on the north, and Covina, City of Industry, La Habra, La Habra Heights, Whittier and La Mirada on the east. Other cities served include Baldwin Park, Whittier, San Gabriel, Rosemead and San Marino. The service area also includes several unincorporated county areas.

Most of the program's service area falls within Los Angeles County's Service Planning Area (SPA 3) San Gabriel, an ethnically and economically diverse area that has a total population of over 1.7 million people. Adults 55 years and older comprise one-fourth of the SPA 3 San Gabriel Valley population, or approximately 402,000 people. Among this senior population, 36% are White, 34% are Hispanic or Latino, 25% Asian, 4% African American or Black and 1% is other races/ethnicities (California Health Interview Survey, 2011-2012).

Members of racial and ethnic minorities experience the greatest burdens of health disparities. They are struggling to age in their communities and feel isolated. This segment of the population includes seniors with limited English speaking ability experiencing linguistic isolation, which includes the 53% of adults 55+ who report that they speak English "not well/not at all." Among SPA 3 San Gabriel Valley's elderly adults, 37% are living at an income below the county's cost of living thresholds. This is a higher rate of low-income seniors than found in the state (29%) (California Health Interview Survey, 2011-2012). Most (90%) adults in the San Gabriel Valley who are 55 years and older have some form of health insurance coverage (California Health Interview Survey, 2011-2012). But health insurance does not guarantee seniors' access to care or that their health needs are being met. Access to care requires a navigable service delivery system that is suited to the needs of the population for which it is intended. Among this population 9% delayed access to medical care and 11% delayed purchase of prescription medications due to barriers to accessing care. As well as navigating access to health care, 20% of adults 55+ are caregivers for family members or friends with illness or disability, placing

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additional burdens and necessitating access to resources for care. Barriers to aging in the community are often rooted in service gaps: seniors' knowledge of services and how to access benefits are limited by a lack of outreach; services are not provided in seniors' communities; accessible transportation is not available; providers cannot communicate effectively with seniors or their caregivers because of cultural and linguistic divides; and public funding cuts have ensured already-strained resources are increasingly unavailable despite the growing need. 22.3% of adults 55+ in SPA 3 can't afford enough food (food insecure) (CHIS, 2011-2012).

Seniors suffer from a number of health conditions. Overweight and obesity among adults 55+ is a growing concern. In SPA 3 San Gabriel Valley, 35% of adults 55+ are overweight and 25% are obese, which translates to 60% of this population being classified as overweight or obese. Consumption of high fat, high caloric food can contribute to obesity. Of the seniors in the service area, 15% consume fast food 3-4 times a week. On a positive note, 88% of adults 55+ indicate that they can always or usually find fresh fruits and vegetables in their neighborhoods, and 85% indicate the fresh fruits and vegetables are always or usually affordable.

Being overweight brings a multitude of health concerns and is a precursor to many chronic diseases. Among the service area population, 46% have been diagnosed with arthritis; 21% have diabetes and 15% have pre-diabetes symptoms; 17% have heart disease, 60% have high blood pressure, and 5% have had a stroke. Overall, 34% of the population 55 years and older in the San Gabriel Valley indicate they are in fair or poor health.

### Primary Focus Area

The common denominators in our service area are health disparities and a growing number of seniors who feel isolated, thus this project has chosen to make Healthy Futures our Primary Focus Area and Environmental Stewardship our secondary focus area. We will have volunteers assigned in the activities associated with H8 & H9 (Aging in Place), and EN6 (At Risk Ecosystems).

Tackling food insecurity, isolation and obesity are serious issues in our service area and our project will continue to focus on these pressing community needs. To address these issues volunteers will partner with Meals on Wheels to provide nutritious balanced meals to the elderly and disabled to improve health and maintain independence. Currently approximately 1,500 seniors in Whittier and the San Gabriel Valley are enrolled in the Meals on Wheels program. According to the 2012 OAA National survey of meals on wheels clients, 91% said that the meals enabled them to live at home, 89% said that the meals helped them feel more secure therefore reduced food insecurity, provided balanced nutrition

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and aided in independent living.

Related service activities: volunteers sort, pack and distribute food to individuals that are in need of this emergency service.

An alarming number of seniors live alone and face many challenges in maintaining social connections that have led to isolation and loneliness. A senior survey conducted by the California Area Agency on Aging found that one in five seniors said depression or isolation is a challenge. Studies have shown that depression often stems from isolation. Nationally, over 29% of all non-institutionalized elders live alone. Through our partnership with 12 Senior Centers, seniors come together in a spirit of sharing, cooperation and service to others. Activities include discussion or support groups, organized restaurant and museum outings focused on building friendships and support to combat isolation. In addition, volunteers reach out to homebound seniors by weekly home visits, giving them a daily call and sending a card of encouragement and support. Maintaining social connectedness is a critical element of our program emphasis and has been proven to keep seniors living independently longer.

Volunteers involved in our (Environmental Stewardship -- At-Risk Ecosystems) service activities will focus on recycling paper products and repurposing scrap lumber to reduce the depletion of natural resources and mitigate the risks of global warming. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on November 17, 2007 released its Fourth Assessment Report, stating in part that "global warming is unequivocal". To mitigate its effects, new and expanded efforts in waste reduction and recycling are imperative. Nearly 4 billion trees are cut down each year for the manufacture of paper, representing approximately 25% of all trees harvested. The YMCA/RSVP paper recycling program addresses this growing community need by collecting, sorting and delivering 208 tons of recycled paper annually, ensuring tons of wood and paper are being re-used and not dumped into landfills.

The outputs within our Primary Focus Area will be the number of people served within the confines of each performance measure. Performance measure outcomes will also be done in our Primary Focus Area Food Delivery/Meals on Wheels program. An annual participant survey pulled from the CNCS Knowledge Network will be given to each client and collected by RSVP volunteers, which will provide information on the impact on older adults who report having increased social ties/perceived social support. The measured outcomes and outputs will then be passed on to CNCS through annual progress reports.

The manner in which our country and specifically our service area works with the growing numbers of aging Baby Boomers is of great importance in advancing health for the elderly and increasing

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community engagement to integrate seniors into the fabric of community life. Information reported released by the National Institutes of Health. YMCA/RSVP volunteers will assist older adults to live independently by delivering meals, providing telephone reassurance, serving as information and referral agents for social services, providing recreational activities, and providing social support and training to increase the likelihood of older adults living independently. Each of our volunteers have significant opportunities to provide service to others which will impact the daily lives of veterans and/or military families through daily and weekly service activities. The five centers we work with provide supplemental and emergency food, making it possible for veterans and /or military families to receive food with dignity and combat hunger. Four of our sites provide tax tutoring free of charge to veterans and military families. The volunteer woodworkers who consist of about 50% veterans at one of our sites work all year to make toys for children. One of the recipient organizations is the local VA who then distribute toys to military families. We also provide opportunities for volunteers to help support larger special events in nationwide remembrances of our active military and veterans with Veteran's Day and Memorial Day community events, and celebrations.

### **Recruitment and Development**

#### Recruitment and Development

The RSVP of Whittier and the San Gabriel Valley works diligently with nearly 40 not-for-profit organizations and public agencies to provide high quality experiences for its volunteers and to meet the needs of the community at each of our volunteer sites. We work with each of the site coordinators to identify needs and then create opportunities and develop job descriptions for volunteers to get involved in. Volunteers are matched with jobs based on their interests and skills. To ensure an effective match we are in regular communication and make frequent visits to the workstations to check in with site coordinators and volunteers. Our RSVP Director meets with site coordinators in Whittier and our RSVP Field Representative meets with site coordinators throughout the San Gabriel Valley to build connections and relationships to further involve volunteers and address pressing needs of each community served.

The RSVP Director will conduct annual volunteer surveys to identify wants, needs, interests and skills. We use the data collected to work with volunteer sites to increase volunteer satisfaction and engagement. Based on the information collected we have developed a RSVP promotional brochure to communicate volunteer opportunities and benefits of volunteering. Promotional pieces are distributed throughout our service area at all work stations in order to attract more volunteers. In addition to our

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brochure, to date much of our recruitment efforts have been via word of mouth and seeking out new workstations where volunteers already exist. We are now committed to a more proactive approach, acting as advocates for the many benefits of volunteerism. Our recruitment plan includes actively participating in community-wide events where seniors frequent, posting information in local newspapers, and at senior centers. Many of the volunteers started as clients and as they have learned about the benefits of volunteerism have had opportunities to learn new skills, build friendships and give back to their communities. Some of the skills volunteers have learned include public relations, tax preparation, public speaking, fundraising, handicrafts, and computer skills. Community safety volunteers learn crime investigation, fraud prevention and emergency services. By learning new skills and connecting with others in their communities they report feeling a sense of purpose and belonging which is the best retention tool of all! Evidence based research confirms the value added to an individual's quality of life when they serve others.

Once volunteers are recruited, they also receive an orientation and volunteer handbook with information on the national RSVP program along with important tips for a safe, enriching volunteer experience. RSVP staff and site coordinators work together to provide training at the workstations according to the requirements of the station. Information shared includes how to complete RSVP time sheets, volunteer insurance and recognition programs. Also on an as-requested and as-needed basis, RSVP staff members meet formally and informally with volunteer workstation staff and other community groups to provide training in a variety of areas, such as, Health Benefits of Volunteering, drafting volunteer job descriptions, volunteer supervision, and volunteer recognition. Our RSVP Director and Field Representative communicate with workstations bi-weekly to assess training and technical assistance needs.

Training is the first step in volunteer retention but it is vital to retention to follow best practices in volunteer engagement and include a well thought out recognition program. According to the CNCS, nearly one third of Boomer volunteers do not return to the volunteer job in their second year. Boomers are volunteering at much higher rates; however they expect a meaningful volunteer experience that is a good fit for their interests and desires. It is also critical to make sure they feel appreciated for their service. To ensure volunteers feel our gratitude we conduct three Volunteer Recognition Dinners each spring. At these events hundred of senior volunteers are recognized for hours of service rendered, and reinforced in their efforts to give back and make a positive difference in their communities. This past year more than 300 of our volunteers were honored with Presidential Volunteer Service Awards, including Lifetime honorees, and inaugural recipients of our new Lead with

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Service award for exceeding 10,000 hours of volunteer service. In addition to the annual recognition events volunteers received monthly follow-up phone calls to keep in touch. Thank you cards are mailed out annually as well to thank them for their service. We work closely with our sites to make sure we know their needs and work with them to retain and recognize all of the volunteers regularly and with intention.

### **Program Management**

#### Program Management

YMCA of Greater Whittier has been a successful leader and manager of the RSVP for 42 years. Our long robust history of managing the RSVP program includes maintaining appropriate relationships with our partner sites and following program regulations, best practices and laws. All stations sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), receive: Volunteer Station Responsibilities & Procedures, Accessibility & Reasonable Accommodations, Discrimination & Harassment handouts. All sites also receive a volunteer hand book, the same handbook distributed to new volunteers. All stations provide volunteers with job and safety training to ensure they are properly trained and have the tools needed to be successful in their assignment. Program staffs work to cultivate positive open relationships with volunteer site supervisors to keep good communication flowing and to make sure needs are met. Through station visits and positive consistent interaction in the program sites, the program staffs are able to observe the work that is being done which helps prevent and/or identify prohibited activities. Communication is crucial to good site management. All sites are visited by the site coordinator bi-annually at a minimum to update information, review service descriptions and determine any current needs of our partners and volunteers.

The RSVP Director, Assistant RSVP Director and Field Representative also maintain monthly contact with our sites via regular phone calls and emails throughout the year. Sites provide quarterly information used to complete CNCS required reports.

We are partnered with many different non-profits which make it possible for us to place potential volunteers in assignments that are meaningful and interesting to them.

Healthy Futures is the Primary Focus Area that the RSVP of Whittier & San Gabriel Valley has chosen due to its many decades of success in meeting the needs of the community. We will build healthy futures by providing Food delivery and Companionship. As we go forward with the new grant cycle we will continue to track our progress and the satisfaction of the clients we serve with surveys provided by the CNCS knowledge network. To ensure program goals are attained, results of Progress

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Reports are shared with Advisory Council members, sponsoring agency and CNCS. This provides a bi-annual review to ensure program goals are met.

The RSVP Advisory Council of the YMCA of Greater Whittier has a long history in serving the RSVP program and the community. Our council members are representative of volunteers, stations and community leaders. They advise and assist the program in a variety of ways, including meeting CNCS programmatic requirements, assessing community needs, resource development, and recognition strategies.

Our main tool for managing project information is the Volunteer Reporter Software. The Volunteer Reporter maintains a database of active volunteer stations with active volunteers and their job assignments. Information and monthly hours are inputted into the Volunteer Reporter on a continuous basis. This allows the Volunteer Reporter to generate the most accurate and current statistics, MOU stations, station rosters and volunteer reports needed for reporting on RSVP Grant. The Volunteer Reporter also tallies lifetime hours for each volunteer, which is used as a tool to determine the level of Presidential Service Awards to be presented to volunteers at Recognition Dinners.

### **Organizational Capability**

#### Organizational Capacity

The YMCA of Greater Whittier is a human service association chartered in 1915 and will be celebrating 100 years of dedicated service to the greater Whittier area in 2015. The YMCA service area encompasses the communities of Whittier, Pico Rivera, La Habra Heights, La Mirada, Norwalk and Santa Fe Springs. The YMCA has been meeting community needs for nearly 100 years and our RSVP program has also been meeting needs for over 40 years. The Y has grown from an initial 117 members to 19,292 in 2013 and currently operates in three program centers with an annual operating budget of \$4.9 million. The YMCA has operated with a balanced budget for fifteen years and has no debt. It provides a variety of program and services that address the pressing needs of our community. Each of our programs fall into one of three areas of focus: Youth Development, Healthy Living or Social Responsibility. Youth Development programs include Aquatics, Child Care, Camping and Youth Sports all youth programs are designed to nurture the potential of every child and teen. The uniqueness of the Y is that we see all of our programs as tools to get to our greater purpose of developing the whole person in mind, body and spirit. Youth engaged in the Y grow into well-rounded citizens who are prepared to meet the challenges of today's society. Through Healthy Living programs

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we are improving the nation's health and well-being and helping thousands of youth, adult, seniors and families develop healthy behaviors to combat obesity and chronic disease. The Y also focuses on Social Responsibility within all programs to emphasize the importance of social connection, belonging, giving back and providing support to our neighbors. A key component to all of our YMCA/RSVP efforts is to enhance, teach and model the importance of volunteerism, philanthropy and inclusion. We work with people of all backgrounds and make sure our programs and services are made available to all persons regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, marital status, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, or financial circumstances without discrimination.

Vice President of the YMCA of Greater Whittier, Lori Tiffany works with staff in the overall quality of the RSVP program and ensures proper oversight of the RSVP program, reporting and fiscal management objectives are achieved.

RSVP Director Melissa Placencia has the responsibility of the day to day operations for the RSVP program, interfaces with the RSVP community, manages relationships with our work stations and volunteers in our service area. She acts as the staff liaison to our RSVP Advisory Council, recruiting, training and engaging volunteers to maintain a vibrant council. She is a six year YMCA professional with experience in program management, marketing and volunteer development.

RSVP Assistant Director Lupe Moreno is also a career YMCA professional and manages the volunteer database. She makes sure that all administrative duties and reporting for the RSVP grant meet all deadlines and requirements and works closely with the RSVP Director.

RSVP Field Representative Larry Eckholm is a part time employee who manages relationships with our work stations and volunteers in assigned portions of our service area. He is an important member of our RSVP council as well.

All staff members have written job descriptions that detail all responsibilities and expected outcomes of performance. Work performance and appraisals are conducted and documented annually by their immediate supervisors.

### **Financial Management System**

The YMCA of Greater Whittier has a sophisticated financial management system consistent with a not for profit corporation of its size. Monthly operating statements are reviewed by staff, a finance committee, and its 45 member board of directors. Monthly RSVP financial statements are reviewed by a 12-member RSVP Advisory Council.

The YMCA of Greater Whittier has sponsored the RSVP and successfully managed its federal grant for the past 42 years. The RSVP grant is our only federal grant and represents two percent of our annual

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operating budget.

### **Track Record**

The YMCA of Greater Whittier has sponsored its local RSVP program for more than 30 years. Moreover, since its founding in 1844 in London England the YMCA has been a volunteer-driven association. The YMCA of Greater Whittier is no exception, working with 2,223+ volunteers in 2013, in various roles including program delivery, policy making, administrative and fundraising. Among these are many of our 3,000 senior members. Seniors are well represented on our board of directors and staff.

### **Organizational Resources**

The RSVP of Whittier and the San Gabriel Valley benefits greatly from the management systems, internal checks and balances, human resources department, fundraising capacity and purchasing power of the YMCA of Greater Whittier. RSVP staff members are YMCA employees, subject to the YMCA's personnel and ethics policies. These policies include travel reimbursement at the current IRS rate.

### **Organizational Assessment**

The YMCA of Greater Whittier operates in the context of a strategic plan, the current one in effect from 2006 to present. Goal #2 in the current strategic plan states "The YMCA will involve more youth, families and seniors in programs and volunteer opportunities."

All programs including RSVP are assessed continually in the context of our strategic goals. Annually each program including RSVP is scrutinized to determine to what effect it is performing as planned, and what steps if any need to be taken to enhance performance. The YMCA has a tradition and culture of making sure our resources are directed at meeting current community needs, in the most efficient and effective ways possible, and in the context of our mission and current strategic plan. The YMCA Program Services Committee made up of volunteers and staff review program performance and report to the YMCA Board of Directors. This committee also has a structured system for gathering member feedback in all of our programs. The RSVP Advisory Council is represented on this committee. Their feedback is used to enhance and improve programs on an ongoing basis.

### **Other**

This grant narrative does not apply to our RSVP Whittier program

### **PNS Amendment (if applicable)**

The PNS Amendment does not apply to our grant proposal