

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

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The project includes an estimated 153 unduplicated volunteers serving in the four Minnesota counties of Meeker, McLeod, Renville and Kandiyohi. An estimated 122 unduplicated RSVP volunteers will serve in the projects' Primary Focus Area, Healthy Futures, by providing services to frail seniors and individuals with disabilities and low income individuals in four objective areas: 1) Food Pantry Support; 2) Companionship; 3) Transportation; and 4) Bone Builders programs that will improve health and increase strength. Working with a network of 33 non-profit organization partners including Veterans Service Office, Habitat for Humanity, Area Agencies on Aging, thrift stores, and regional health service providers.

At the end of the three year performance period, anticipated results include: 150 individuals with disabilities will report having increased social ties / perceived social support through transportation to medical appointments and companionship; 130 veterans will receive CNCS supported assistance; 194 clients will report participating in health education programs; and 400 individuals will report increased food security of themselves and their children.

The CNCS federal investment of \$37,510.00 will be supplemented by \$24,949 of non-federal resources.

## Strengthening Communities

The rural Minnesota communities served by Ecumen RSVP are in the counties of Meeker, McLeod, Renville and Kandiyohi with a total population of 116,862 residents. The economic focus of the four county areas is primarily agricultural with products and services supporting the industry. The population has a large percentage of seniors. According to the 2012 U.S. Census Bureau results, the percent of persons 65 years and older in the area is 17.6 % which is about the Minnesota average of 13.6%. Of the total population 96.85% is white with few minorities over age 65 and 10.1% being below poverty. Due to increased state budget cuts more organizations are looking to RSVP volunteers to help fill voids in services and meet the needs with volunteer help. The seniors in the communities are being called upon to serve in the capacity as volunteer staff in these organizations and on the RSVP advisory council to identify and address unmet needs.

The community needs identified include: Minnesota Transform 2010 Data indicates that for seniors to retain their independence, there is a high need for reliable / flexible transportation. The Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging 2012 GAPS analysis regional summary reports on 27 counties in

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Southwest Minnesota, of which Ecumen RSVP's four counties are a part of. Some services identified as inadequate/unavailable were Adult Day Services, Chore Services, Transportation and Companion Services.

According to the 2012 US Census 13.6 percent of Minnesota's population is 65 years old or older. In the four counties served by Ecumen RSVP (Meeker, McLeod, Renville and Kandiyohi) the average is 17.62 percent, 23.8 percent of these people live in institutions. These can range from nursing homes to assisted living, or group type homes. Social isolation in the elderly is a common occurrence frequently brought about due to disabilities, illnesses, and loss of social support systems due to the death of a spouse, siblings, retirement and/or relocation of residence. Regular supportive visits from caring peers can help decrease feelings of isolation. Facility staff requested volunteers to provide companionship and socialization to help residents feel less isolated and show fewer signs of loneliness, or dejection.

According to the 2005 Survey of Older Minnesotans, 25% of persons 50 and older live alone, with 77% suffering from loneliness, and 86% with depression; this isolation leads to early and otherwise unnecessary nursing home placement. According to the same survey, 48% of persons 65 and older have difficulty getting needed medical service due to transportation problems.

By 2020 half of all American citizens older than age 50 will be at risk for fractures from osteoporosis and low bone mass if no immediate action is taken by individuals at risk. Osteoporosis can lead to a downward spiral in physical health and quality of life, including losing the ability to walk, stand up, or dress, and can lead to premature death. According to the National Institute of Health, Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases National Resource Center

- 1) Osteoporosis is responsible for more than 1.5 million fractures annually.
- 2) These fractures cost an estimated \$18 billion in hospital and nursing home services.
- 3) Nine out of ten women over the age of 76 have osteoporosis.
- 4) One-half of all American women will experience a fracture due to osteoporosis by the age of 75.
- 5) Six million of the 28 million people who suffer from osteoporosis are men according to the Minnesota Falls Prevention Initiative.

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- 1) Minnesota is the fourth highest in unintentional fall death rate in the country.
- 2) The Minnesota rate of falls is increasing at a faster rate than the rest of the country.
- 3) Falls are the leading cause of hospitalized injury.

These statistics demonstrate the urgent necessity to make this program available in every community across the nation.

The Primary Focus Area of Ecumen RSVP is Healthy Futures. The need for transportation to medical appointments, companionship for home bound seniors, or those living in nursing homes and assisted living facilities, and the need for health education for seniors is strong in the rural communities of the four counties served by Ecumen RSVP. Volunteers are recruited to fill the voids in communities identified through the 2012 Minnesota County GAPS analysis and local advisory boards. Through on-going communication with the communities served, RSVP is able to identify the needs and then recruit volunteers to fill the voids.

Volunteer leaders are trained as Bone Builder leaders and lead the classes twice per week. Volunteers will also be trained as volunteer leaders for Matter of Balance and will conduct trainings for groups in the four counties as another option for seniors. In cooperation with the Meeker Council on Aging and Meeker County Veterans Services, volunteers are utilized to provide transportation as volunteer drivers to bring seniors to medical appointments. Volunteers are identified through community partners, other volunteers, current RSVP stations and local recruitment drives.

Food Shelves in Minnesota are seeing an unprecedented demand. The USDA reports that roughly 10 percent of Minnesota households are food insecure. Food shelves often fill the gap but they too are strapped. The Hunger in Minnesota study conducted by Feeding America and Mathematica Policy Research reports that 85 percent of food pantries / shelves noted an increase in the number of clients seeking emergency hunger relief over the past five years and 71 percent of soup kitchens reported an increase in the number of clients served.

RSVP volunteers serve as companions to seniors in assisted living and independent home settings. Some volunteers take seniors on outings, to church, medical appointments and do grocery shopping and delivery for them. Volunteers work in thrift stores and food shelves to meet the needs of seniors

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and people in poverty in their own communities throughout the four counties.

Ecumen RSVP works with its volunteer station sites to ensure they are supported in recruiting, training and placing volunteers. Each station is trained on what information must be tracked and reported on monthly to Ecumen RSVP to ensure that work plan outputs and outcomes are being met and measured correctly. We have a strong Advisory Council consisting of community partners that guides our program. To ensure we are focusing on the correct areas of need. RSVP staff help enhance the capacity of station staff as a resource to information and training. We work with station staff to ensure the partnership with RSVP is meeting their agency mission and goals as well. MOU's, regular site visits, volunteer follow-up and surveys, and collection of impact data ensure that success is monitored in an on-going fashion, and plans for integration of RSVAP volunteers into substantive roles are fully and successfully implemented.

Planned activities in service to veterans and military families: Veterans face extremely difficult challenges in Minnesota: homelessness, mental illness (particularly Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, suicidal ideation and propensity toward domestic violence), physical effects of wartime injuries, and family reunification difficulties. According to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, nearly half of all veterans of both genders are over age 55. One potential gap is providing transportation for veterans to medical appointments in anticipation of reduction in funding currently received for this purpose.

Meeker County Veterans Services provides rides to Meeker County Veterans to medical appointments at the St. Cloud Veterans Hospital and Minneapolis Veterans Hospital. Currently the agency does not have enough personnel to transport all of the clients that need assistance. A lack of sufficient transportation services compromises the ability of clients to keep all scheduled appointments, as well as their overall ability to manage their health. In addition, the provision of transportation services takes staff time away from providing other important services, such as solicitation of resources and referral services. Meeker County Veterans Services has partnered with Ecumen RSVP for volunteer help with the service of transportation.

Ecumen RSVP works in collaboration with area hospitals and clinics, county transit providers, social service agencies, public health, county commissioners, Area Agencies on Aging, churches, schools and other community organizations. Ecumen RSVP has formed partnerships with agencies to provide everything from exercise, to fight Osteoporosis, to volunteer rides for medical appointments. Drawing

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on strengths and working to fill gaps in service area, Ecumen RSVP volunteers are able to fill voids whenever possible.

Ecumen RSVP works in collaboration with other county and community organizations to enhance RSVP volunteer services. Some needs identified through the 2012 Minnesota County GAPS analysis in all four counties included companionship service and transportation to medical appointments as limited. Local needs are also identified through Advisory Council members and other community partners and RSVP station. RSVP volunteers help meet the increased need at clothing and food shelves during hard economic times. The volunteers provide much needed companionship to other seniors who are home bound or living in nursing facilities.

Ecumen RSVP provides annual presentations to county boards, to update commissioners and local officials, on services and area of concern in the respective counties to build awareness and support of the program. The Advisory Council meets four times per year, once in each of the four counties for extra input from area citizens and station leaders.

Ecumen RSVP also address; Senior Corps state and national Strategic Plan and Strategic Initiatives to ensure its meeting any of the needs that affect the four county area. One example is working with the Minnesota Falls Prevention by incorporating the Bone Builders program and investing in Matter of Balance training. Other examples include transportation and grocery delivery services to home bound individuals.

### **Recruitment and Development**

Ecumen RSVP provides volunteer placement for retired citizens (age 55 and over) who want to contribute their time and talent in service to others. Approximately 153 volunteers in the four-county area contribute more than 14,000 hours annually to 33 community agencies and organizations.

RSVP has instituted strategic selection criteria for stations including a requirement that evidence-based programming is used, which helped to create an infrastructure that assures a high quality experience for RSVP volunteers. Personalized placement services RSVP staff provides to volunteers include a guided exploration of the volunteers; desire for sharing their experiences, abilities and skills, as well as skill building and leadership opportunities.

Ecumen RSVP supports the new volunteers to find a suitable placement. Placements include exercise groups, museums, health care facilities, libraries, and nutrition centers. In addition, volunteers work with emergency assistance programs, law enforcement agencies, and Veteran;s services; distribute

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food and provide companionship to other seniors. The program also works with community partners to ensure that local needs are being addressed through volunteer services whenever possible. If Ecumen RSVP has an opportunity to fill a void in community service with a trained RSVP volunteer, they do.

Volunteers are encouraged to not only work in areas, in which they are familiar, but to share their existing skills with others and to learn new skills to enhance their volunteer experiences. By learning new skills, they are able to expand on their volunteer experience and to serve in a greater capacity to their communities. Learning new skills and sharing existing skills also helps increase wellbeing, along with building new social networks for the volunteers who serve.

At the time of enrollment, program staff makes an attempt to get to know the volunteer during their interview process. Including interests, hobbies and background to make sure placement is in a position in which they will excel and to which they can contribute. New volunteers are encouraged to visit several potential volunteer stations, before deciding on a placement, especially if they are not sure where they wish to volunteer. The RSVP volunteer experience allows people the choice to use their knowledge by working as advisory members, or community partners to ensure a variety of high quality, individualized, volunteer choices.

As Ecumen RSVP recruits new volunteers to the program, they will continue to work with stations to provide a quality training program so volunteers feel comfortable in their new roles. They will work to retain volunteers by providing on-going training and networks for them so they can avoid volunteer burnout. Volunteers will be provided with a handbook to develop an understanding of the rights, benefits and responsibilities of becoming an RSVP volunteer. RSVP staff will review the handbook with the volunteer and provide basic volunteer training at the time of enrollment. They will receive support and training from their existing stations and in the event that they join other volunteer sites, they will continue to receive updated training.

Ecumen RSVP recognizes their volunteers throughout the year with personalized cards and thank-you notes. The four counties are fortunate that each has a yearly Senior Expo. Volunteers are invited to be guests, of Ecumen RSVP, at their respective counties senior expo. RSVP pays for admission and lunch and has a booth at each event, then provides a special gift for each of the program's volunteers

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as they arrive. This not only allows volunteers to be recognized, but they have access to information and education. It also gives them a chance to socialize with other volunteers. Anyone unable to attend these events will receive their recognition gift in person from their station and will receive a thank you for service from Ecumen RSVP staff. The response to this recognition has been very positive and volunteers have voiced their approval of attending this sort of recognition vs. a dinner. Ecumen RSVP will continue to recognize volunteers in any marketing and press releases along with station recognition. Ecumen RSVP will strive to find new ways to involve its volunteers in recognition. Having the same person serve as director for the Meeker Council on Aging aids greater efficiency in recognition efforts. This person coordinates with the Council on Aging and Area Agency on Aging, in the four counties served, to ensure RSVP is included in area recognition events when relevant.

Ongoing recruitment will be provided for all stations by Ecumen RSVP staff. As the needs of the stations change, Ecumen RSVP will work with station staff to stay ahead of the needs and provide a network for the stations and the volunteers. Newsletters and other communication will be provided quarterly to the stations to update needs and new opportunities. When appropriate, this information will be shared with other community outlets for recruitment purposes.

Retirees donate their expertise to many community organizations that otherwise could not afford such services. According to many volunteers, their RSVP placements keep them active and young. Volunteer benefits include a small mileage reimbursement, Supplement Accident and Liability Insurance while volunteering, an annual recognition event, a newsletter, birthday and holiday greetings, and perhaps most importantly - a sense of belonging. Of the currently enrolled volunteers, sixty have been with RSVP between 10 and 24 years. Thirty-eight have served between 5 and 9 years. Ecumen RSVP volunteers are committed to serving in the communities they live in.

Program and project staff will be provided with initial training from RSVP staff. Contact information for RSVP staff will be provided and they will be encouraged to contact RSVP staff with any comments, concerns or questions as soon as they arise. RSVP staff will respond appropriately and in a timely fashion to requests. They will also encourage the use of the MN Senior Corps web site to connect with other programs and volunteers and share their stories.

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Ecumen RSVP will provide ongoing support not only to its volunteers, but to the stations they serve. Training will be provided to new stations and existing stations will receive updates to any policy and procedure changes. When filling out the station application, RSVP staff will work with station supervisors to determine station-specific needs. Annual site assessments will be conducted by RSVP staff with each station to ensure that all training needs are being met and implemented. Ecumen RSVP will work hard with volunteers to meet their needs, the needs of their stations and to keep them connected to other volunteer opportunities. By providing networking between the volunteer, they can develop new skills and pass on their existing knowledge to others. Community partners benefit by utilizing volunteers whenever possible to serve at stations and also fill leadership roles at stations or in the community.

### Program Management

It is the goal of Ecumen RSVP to provide new stations each year, and provide a quality volunteer experience at each station with a focus on impact based services. Ecumen RSVP will develop new, impact based, stations as necessary in the communities it serves to continue to address the changing needs of those communities. Working with the advisory council, Meeker Council on Aging, Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging and focus groups ensures that community needs are being met through the stations and volunteers. Giving on-going support to existing stations ensures that all volunteer assignments are current in addressing community needs. If additional or ongoing training is needed, RSVP will ensure that volunteers receive that training. When opening new stations RSVP will work with station staff to ensure the job description is well defined and meets the needs of the station, the volunteer and the service recipient.

Annual site visits will take place along with on-going communications via phone and e-mail with station staff. Review of stations' goals and objectives ensures that Ecumen RSVP is working together with its stations towards a quality program and creating a positive environment for volunteers and those utilizing the services. Following Ecumen's mission: "Creating home for older adults wherever they choose to live," Ecumen RSVP strives to keep its stations and volunteers committed to the mission. Annual audits to ensure MOUs of each station are current are conducted. We work to maximize resources and impact so that RSV staff, stations and volunteers receive the training needed to be effective in their work to meet community needs. Client surveys will be used when appropriate to obtain feedback on services provided. The advisory council will review survey information and station annual assessment forms and client surveys and will make suggestions when appropriate. Assessments will be conducted by the program director with each station and a verbal interview will

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take place. Ongoing support is available for stations thorough out the year. Working with the focus groups and advisory council, RSVP can also assess community needs to ensure stations are addressing all areas of need in the respective communities.

Annually Ecumen RSVP reviews all of its stations and volunteers. Any volunteers not recording hours during the year are contacted to find out the reason for no service hours. After contact with each of the volunteers is made, the database is updated to reflect the changes. Some move out of the area to live with children and some have health issues, or are deceased. We ensure that follow-up is conducted to determine that goals and needs were met and that our service activates have the intended impact on CNCS strategic outcomes.

All volunteer and station information collected by Ecumen RSVP is treated according to HIPPA standards. Volunteer records are kept in a controlled, locked area and no personal information is shared. Using e-mail whenever possible to communicate new opportunities to stations and volunteers and quarterly newsletters also reflects current needs and opportunities. Volunteers can also refer to the MN Senior Corps website for other opportunities and to stay connected with other volunteers across the state.

### **Organizational Capability**

Ecumen RSVP works closely with its sponsor and fiscal agent Ecumen to ensure all funds are accounted for and distributed properly. Monthly accounting records are kept and reviewed internally by the Program Director, Donna Whitcomb, and the accounting department at Ecumen corporate. Mitch Pierson, Staff Accountant at Ecumen, prepares the financial reports; FFR<sub>2</sub>s and requests the funding. Bank statements from Center National Bank are reviewed monthly by both Mitch Pierson and Donna Whitcomb. All volunteer time and mileage is tracked by stations, reported and reviewed by RSVP staff and records are kept at both the station and the RSVP office. Yearly audits are provided by Ecumen's accounting firm. Compliance audits are conducted on the program at least once every three years by CNCS staff.

The sponsoring agency of Ecumen RSVP is Ecumen. Ecumen is one of the country's largest non-profit senior housing and services companies. Ecumen operates a variety of housing options from senior independent living communities to assisted living and long- term care and at-home and community based services. Ecumen provides senior housing development, clinical consulting and senior housing management services for other organizations. While Ecumen serves people in senior housing communities through home care, they are also focused on innovating in technology and services that doesn't rely on bricks and mortar.

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Affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Ecumen's roots extend to 1862, when through the Lutheran Church, foster care services were provided to children. Today Ecumen is one of the country's largest non-profit senior housing, services and development and management companies.

Over the years the organization has been known by several different names: Board of the Society of Mercy (1876), Board of Christian Service (1923), Board of Social Ministry (1962), and Ecumen (2004). The name Ecumen comes from the Greek word for home: "oikos." It underscores the mission to create "Home" for older adults wherever they choose to live.

Ecumen of Litchfield is where the Ecumen RSVP program office is housed and Ecumen of Litchfield is a member of the Ecumen family. Ecumen of Litchfield serves the city of Litchfield and surrounding area with a wide variety of programs and services. Program services include: Long Term Care, Senior Housing, Home Care, Hospice, Adult Day Services, Meeker Public Transit, Home Delivered Meals, Lifeline, Rehab service, Grief Support, Aging in Community Services and the Meeker Council on Aging programs. Most recently memory care services were added to this list. Bethany Memory Care opened in January 2012 at the Ecumen of Litchfield campus. Ecumen has been serving older adults in the state of Minnesota for over a century.

Ecumen supports the Ecumen RSVP program and the four county areas it serves to bring a quality volunteer experience to each of its volunteers and the stations and people they serve. Working with its community partners and Advisory Council, Ecumen and the RSVP program strives to cover all volunteer needs in the service area.

Ecumen and the Ecumen RSVP program staff have years of experience working with and administering federal grants. Drawing upon the available resources of the Ecumen family as needed for extra support. Program Director, Donna Whitcomb has over 16 years of experience in working with seniors and Senior Services. She has a BS degree in Business Administration Management. She served six years as the Director of a Living at Home/ Block Nurse Program and two years as the Volunteer Coordinator for Ecumen RSVP before taking on the role of the Director. If the director's position should become vacant, current and up to date information is available in the office that

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documents the RSVP program and pertinent day to day operations information for someone to step in and take over. The program director reports directly to the Ecumen of Litchfield Campus Administrator. Currently that position is held by Blaine Gamst.

The current program director position is an 85/15 percent position. Program Director Donna Whitcomb serves the Ecumen RSVP program thirty-two hours per week. For the remaining eight hours per week she serves as the Coordinator for the Meeker Council on Aging.

Ecumen RSVP and Meeker Council on Aging enhance each other by serving the senior population in Meeker County. The needs of some of the services provided by MCOA are met by RSVP volunteers. Sharing the Director/Coordinator position allows this person to have an insight on the needs of the seniors in not only Meeker County, but the surrounding area, ensuring there are no gaps in services provided. It is also cost effective for both of the programs. MCOA is a separate 501 (c) 3 with its own Board of Directors.

Meeker Council on Aging and Ecumen RSVP share the office located at 218 North Holcombe Ave., Litchfield, MN. The MCOA makes a donation to the RSVP program in the form of rent, phone and some other support costs including some personnel time for operation. This is a cost-effective way for both the programs to serve the rural population of not only Meeker County, but Kandiyohi, Renville and McLeod County's as well.

Ecumen's 2012 revenues were \$137.7 million. Ecumen currently operates 40 communities across Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Nebraska and Idaho. Of those communities, Ecumen operates 55 independent living and/or assisted living communities (39 owned, 16 managed) and 17 health care centers (8 owned, 9 managed). Ecumen-owned and -managed communities employ approximately 4,000 employees and serve 10,000 people annually through housing, community services and consulting services.

The financial accounting department housed at the Shoreview, MN facility is qualified to oversee and manage grant funding and activities. Lawson is the software used by the accounting department and Razor's Edge 7 is used for grant tracking by Ecumen Corporate. The RSVP program uses Volunteer Reporter and does its grant applications in the E-Grant system on line on the CNCS web site.

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Ecumen Staff Accountant, Mitch Pierson, does the reporting and requesting of funds. He also works closely with the RSVP Program Director, Donna Whitcomb, to balance the bank statements and keep the Ecumen RSVP program on task financially.

### Other

None

### PNS Amendment (if applicable)

N/A