Dear Friend:

At Volunteers of America, we have talked so often about how to continue providing the highest-quality service during an unprecedented year. Is it still unprecedented when we are in year two? The answer is yes for an organization that cares for more than 600 people in need in residential settings. Today, our challenges have never been greater.

In my nearly 15 years of service to VOA, managing a pandemic has tested our organization like never before. From providing hope for pregnant and parenting moms overcoming addiction to providing housing to families facing homelessness, we are working every day to keep people safe and healthy. Our mission is to change lives, and we cannot ever rest or stop – no matter how long the pandemic continues.

Here’s what I have learned during this difficult time: VOA can never do our work alone. Helen Keller said, “Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.” These words are so true today. VOA’s work and service is defined by collaboration and unity. We have relied on the determination and selfless service of more than 600 VOA heroes who comprise our workforce. And we have relied on you – the supporters who have rallied around us during this difficult time when so many more people are counting on us to be there for them.

At our Power of 1 event this fall, we heard from Ken, a courageous Air Force veteran who struggled so much when he returned to civilian life that he felt he had no future. After battling addiction and living in his car, Ken found VOA, and we placed him in stable, long-term housing. He said VOA “was a ray of light that gave me hope.”

Providing that light – and shining it toward a future filled with promise and possibility – is our mission. And we cannot do it without you. Thanks so much for helping us serve Ken and thousands more who count on VOA.

Jennifer Hancock
President and CEO
With your help, last holiday season Volunteers of America helped nearly 500 families in need. This year, help Niki, Robert and Lucas and so many more.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) makes it easier for you to deduct your charitable giving at tax time. Go to voamid.org/donate to learn more.

GIVE HOPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

HOW CAN YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR FAMILIES OVERCOMING HOMELESSNESS OR BATTLING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER?

- All of our families need gift cards to places like Target, Wal-Mart, Kroger and Amazon.
- Personal items like hygiene products, underwear and winter coats.
- Household items like cookware, utensils, linens and towels.
- Entertainment items like craft supplies, journals and toys for all ages.
- Adopt a family – change a life.

For a list of items we need the most, drop-off locations in your area and other ways you can help families in need, visit voamid.org/holidays.

Connect with VOA on Amazon.
View our Amazon Wish List.
Before Covid, Derek never stayed home all day. A resident of Volunteers of America’s River Road home for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, he was always busy. He worked 40 hours every week at a workshop where he assembled, collated, and packaged various projects. When he wasn’t working, Derek always served as the house handyman. Derek is great at working with his hands and is the go-to person at River Road for helping VOA staff with tasks like putting together furniture or fixing electronics. That’s why the quarantine requirements of the pandemic have been so challenging for Derek and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The restrictions are both a change in routine and difficult to understand. As Derek and others moved from their busy lifestyles to suddenly being required to stay at home most days, our VOA team has worked diligently to battle loneliness and isolation. VOA’s Northern Kentucky team immediately began creating ways to help our clients stay engaged through their second long period of social distancing and staying home. The second wave of Covid was even harder as people hoped we were through the worst of the pandemic, and VOA staff knew something new was needed to keep everyone active and happy. That’s when VOA’s River Road team embraced the spring and summer seasons and chose to plant a garden – an activity they had never done before. “We all have been learning about gardening together,” said VOA Home Manager, Monica Pennington. Together with Derek and other residents including Dolores, Meagan, Anthony, Ina, Carl and Annamae, they researched what to plant and how to care for the garden. Understanding together how to manage the garden was part of the fun.

Derek enjoyed the physical activity of breaking up the ground, moving dirt and all of the planting of the garden. “The garden has helped me to eat more vegetables. I would like to start walking to go along with eating better,” said Derek. The River Road team chose to plant peppers, lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelon and pumpkins. As the summer continued, Derek was also a leader in the maintenance process. “Derek has a routine of going out and watering the garden after dinner each night. He also likes to check on the plants and monitor their growth. Our house backs up to a wooded area and we have lots of wildlife like deer and raccoons that can damage the plants. He keeps an eye on them,” Monica said.

This garden not only has been a great way to provide some delicious food for the residents, but also has built a new and deeper bond among the housemates. Derek and his friends have more to talk about together as they monitor their homegrown vegetables. Their time alone in their rooms has decreased and they have been sitting outside around the garden and talking and enjoying each other’s company more. Healthy eating has been an additional bonus. Derek has never been a fan of vegetables, but he has started to eat green peppers and broccoli since the garden has been planted. His latest favorite is trying peppers with his eggs for breakfast. Most River Road residents have a health-related goal and the garden has helped encourage better food choices.

By next summer, everyone is hopeful that Covid and quarantine will be a memory, but the garden won’t be going away. This year, watermelon was a favorite, and everyone is thinking about how to do better with their tomato plants next season. Derek and his housemates are working to be ready for spring next year. Planting their second garden will be one of their most-anticipated activities.

“The garden has helped me to eat more vegetables. I would like to start walking to go along with eating better.”
- Derek
What does it take to provide around-the-clock, personal care to some of the most vulnerable individuals in our community? Volunteers of America, which provides comprehensive support to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in residential homes in Kentucky, Tennessee and Clark and Floyd Counties in Indiana, knows the answer to this question.

It takes concern and caring. It takes patience and dedication. It takes professionalism and commitment. It takes a deep belief in the value of helping others. It takes love.

And during the pandemic, it takes a heightened call to service. VOA’s team has set aside personal concerns to “True heroism is not the urge to surpass others at whatever cost, but to serve others at whatever cost.”

- Arthur Ashe

Thanking our VOA Heroes for serving the people who need us most during the toughest time

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And during the pandemic, it takes a heightened call to service. VOA’s team has set aside personal concerns to remain focused on the people who depend on us for their daily care. Like so many organizations that have served others during this unprecedented time, we’ve placed signs that say “Heroes work here” outside our residential homes. After nearly two years of adjusting to the realities of Covid, maybe it’s easy to overlook those signs and the people inside VOA buildings doing this hard work.

But VOA couldn’t be more grateful to our amazing team. The Dalai Lama said, “Be kind whenever possible. And it’s always possible.” Our VOA Home Managers and Direct Support Professionals have lived these words every day, and they are truly VOA Heroes.

Shareeta McCutcheon

“Everything I do is for the individuals we serve,” said Resident Service Coordinator, Shareeta McCutcheon.

Shareeta found her passion as a young girl when she helped take care of her aunt who was intellectually and developmentally disabled. She joined the VOA team 15 years ago as a Direct Support Professional determined to become a voice and advocate for the people she served. Today Shareeta manages several homes in Tennessee – traveling to each one every week and ensuring they have everything they need.

Sandra Yarbrough

For 17 years Sandra Yarbrough has been an LPN serving VOA clients at Claudia House in Tennessee. “This is not just a job to me, it’s my heart calling,” Sandra said. Sandra says nothing gives her more pleasure than dedicating her days to bringing smiles to the faces of the clients she serves. In March of 2020 the priorities of Sandra along with all of our frontline workers shifted. Instead of focusing on interacting with others and planning fun journeys outside into the community, staying safe at home became the daily activity.

“You just want them to have the best and stay healthy,” she said.

Lenora Robinson

Growing up Lenora wanted to become a nurse and take care of those in need. And when she came to VOA in 2001, she knew she found her calling. For 20 years Lenora has dedicated her days to providing around-the-clock care to the residents of Phoenix House in Tennessee. From daily medications to household management, Lenora ensures that her clients receive the highest quality of care.

“Giving them their meals, bathing them, giving medications – these are the things I do every day. And after 20 years, I’m still happy to do it,” said Lenora Robinson, a Direct Support Professional in Tennessee.

Delila Edwards

“We have a client who came to us in the middle of Covid and all she knows is our faces behind a mask,” said LPN Delila Edwards. For 16 years, Delila has been a nurse in VOA’s Claudia House in Tennessee and the pandemic has affected the way she connects with her patients. Her bright, reassuring smile may be hidden behind a mask, but that doesn’t stop her from ensuring the people she serves feel at home and comfortable in her care.

“We had a resident come to us who was combative – he didn’t know anyone and was scared in a new place. But after a while he opened up,” she said. “It’s amazing to be able to see the outcome,” Delila said.
MAKING VACCINATIONS CONVENIENT FOR THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

Flu season is here and residents at Spanish Cove, one of Volunteers of America’s senior living facilities, are staying safe thanks to VOA’s annual flu shot clinic. Every year CVS Pharmacy brings the flu shot to VOA and helps our senior residents stay safe during cold and flu season.

“It’s really important for our residents to receive the flu vaccine because they are at a higher risk for serious flu complications,” said Spanish Cove Service Coordinator, Nikiala Anderson. Every year, Nikiala organizes the clinic to protect her residents from the virus. “With my residents being 65 and older, I feel they bear a great burden during flu season,” she said. Ninety-two year old Blanche Bowen is the oldest resident at Spanish Cove and receiving the vaccine every year is important to her.

“I have been getting the flu shot since I was in 1st grade. I can’t miss a year now that I’m 92,” Blanche said. “The convenience of having the flu shot brought to her annually gives her and her family peace of mind. Along with a flu shot clinic, Nikiala organized a Covid vaccine clinic with CVS earlier this year and is currently working on bringing the booster shot to them as well.

“Doing an annual clinic is just us doing our part,” Nikiala said. “I think that it’s important for us to be able to reduce any respiratory illnesses that we can and the best thing I can do is provide the clinics, protect them and protect others. And getting vaccinated is the best way they can do their part too.”

VOA AND OUR TENNESSEE COMMUNITY LOOKS OUT FOR VETERANS

When the pandemic forced so many people to stay home and socially distance, our VOA team in Johnson City, Tennessee went to work for unhoused veterans in need of support.

With the help of compassionate and committed community members, our Johnson City Supportive Services for Veterans Families team started a resource pantry for veterans in need. Johnson City residents have rallied behind the project by donating cleaning supplies, non-perishable food, personal hygiene products and other day-to-day essentials that support our veterans. “If you’re going to donate, why not give to those who sacrificed and fought for our country?” said Johnson City resident David Weimer.

David heard about the community project from VOA Case Manager, Leslie Eller. David has continued to donate needed items helping to keep it stocked throughout the pandemic for veterans. “If you’re going to donate, why not give to those who sacrificed and fought for our country?” said Johnson City resident David Weimer.

David has continued to donate needed items helping to keep it stocked throughout the pandemic for veterans. The work of our hard-working team in Johnson City is just one way that VOA serves nearly 2,000 veterans and their families every year.

FINDING RECOVERY THROUGH ART

Volunteers of America knows that recovery from substance use disorder happens for everyone in many different ways.

VOA’s Shelby Men’s Recovery Center provides evidence-based services to help men find the root cause of their substance use disorder and gives them the resources they need to overcome their addiction. VOA’s Arts in Healing program helps our residents express their struggle with substance use disorder through artistic outlets.

As an exercise in the program, previous residents wrote a collection of poems expressing their unique experience with addiction and their work was gathered and published in the book, “The Junkie Who Loved Horses.”

As a tribute to the authors, some of VOA’s current residents read poems from the book on a Facebook Livestream and in front of their peers. The reading was not only a salute to the men who went through the same battle they are facing today, it was a meaningful step on their own paths to recovery.

“No matter what social or ethnic background you come from, the disease of alcoholism and addiction doesn’t discriminate,” said Colin Casey, resident of VOA’s Shelby Men’s Recovery Center. “And through readings, through poetry and art and music you’re able to see the true potential of people who otherwise go unheard.”
As the Delta variant spread and Covid positivity rates began to skyrocket again across Kentucky, Volunteers of America believed it could take action to help the communities it serves stay safe and healthy.

As one of the first organizations to require employees to receive the Covid vaccine, VOA had learned many lessons about how to encourage people to become vaccinated. VOA's campaign to support employee vaccination included education, incentives and personal stories from colleagues. A six-month campaign of employees sharing their personal experiences about why they were vaccinated particularly connected with reluctant co-workers. Fun incentives and in-depth discussions with expert doctors made a difference as well.

As Clay County - where VOA has expanded with services including Freedom House, Family Recovery Program, Restorative Justice and the Recovery Community Center - became one of America's worst Covid hotspots, VOA responded.

VOA, the Kentucky Association of Health Plans (KAHP) and Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky led a coalition of local leaders including AdventHealth Manchester, Clay County Public Schools and Cumberland Valley Health Department to sponsor “Take 1 for the Team,” a voluntary vaccine campaign designed to increase the vaccination rate in Clay County.

The campaign featured 15 sites offering convenient and easy vaccination opportunities, including all nine public schools and two private schools. “Take 1 for the Team” offered an array of incentives for being vaccinated, including being entered into drawings for prizes as large as $250. The school with the highest participation rates received athletic and extracurricular equipment valued at approximately $6,000. And VOA invested in a high-profile marketing campaign highlighting the real stories of why people in Clay County decided to become vaccinated and encourage their friends, neighbors and loved ones to join them.

“Take 1 for the Team” and “Healthy West Lou” campaigns work to drive down Covid rates in Clay County, West Louisville

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“We couldn’t sit by while the Covid positivity rate surged in Clay County and the hospital became overrun with Covid cases. The situation was dangerous and we wanted to do everything we could to keep the people we serve safe. This campaign was all about education and outreach that protected the health of people in Southeastern Kentucky,” Jennifer Hancock said.

While Clay County’s positivity rate kept surging until it became one of the worst Covid hotspots in the entire nation, the Delta Variant was also affecting Jefferson County, and particularly neighborhoods in West Louisville. VOA teamed with KAHP and Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky to start “Healthy West Lou,” which also promoted vaccination and highlighted local leaders and influencers.

Kicking off with a campaign at the Republic Bank Foundation YMCA promoted throughout the community, VOA continues to provide convenient vaccination sites and to promote persuasive personal testimonials in West Louisville neighborhoods.

“We’re meeting people where they are, encouraging them to take the healthy step of receiving the vaccine and making it easy and convenient. We’re also listening and honestly answering concerns about the vaccine and I know it’s making a difference,” said Dr. Janukaa Sherrod, Director of Community Health and Equity for VOA.

After nearly three months of work on the outreach and education campaigns, VOA and the communities it serves are seeing results. In Clay County, where the positivity rate was almost 40 percent at the beginning of September, the rate is now near five percent. A county that was once one of the three worst in the nation is now one of the best in Kentucky. Rates are coming down in Jefferson County as well, and VOA continues to provide incentives and education in the Healthy West Lou and Take 1 for the Team campaigns.

“VOA works every day to change lives and give people hope. Our vaccination campaigns are a simple – but important – extension of that mission of service,” Hancock said.

VOA Campaign Increases Vaccination and lowers Positivity Rate

Clay County vaccination rates BEFORE Take 1 for the Team

33% August

46% November

Clay County Covid positivity rates BEFORE

38% August

5.2% November

Margena, who is 92 years old, received her first COVID vaccine at our Healthy West Lou event on October 16 at the Republic Bank Foundation YMCA.
After serving our nation in the U.S. Air Force, Ken Anderson found the adjustment to civilian life much harder than he could have ever imagined. “I thought as a veteran, there would be more services available to me. But everywhere I went was a dead end,” Ken said.

Ken’s struggles with post-traumatic stress led him to a battle with addiction, and eventually left him without a job or home, until he was living in his car and wondering where his next meal would come from.

“I turned into a person I never thought I could be. And I was ready to give up hope,” Ken said.

That’s when Ken found Volunteers of America. He heard about our Supportive Services for Veterans Program and learned that VOA could help him find affordable housing. At first he was skeptical, but he worked with VOA staff and soon Ken had an apartment of his own, and hope for a brighter future.

“VOA was like a ray of light that gave me hope. After so many disappointments, I finally found someone who kept their promises,” Ken said.

Ken told his story at VOA’s 13th annual Power of 1 event, where VOA asked our supporters to help us continue to serve veterans like him – and the thousands others served in VOA’s more than 40 programs across four states.

This year the Power of 1 was held virtually as VOA continues to take every step possible to keep clients, colleagues and supporters as safe and healthy as possible. Power of 1 is a vital part of VOA’s work to fund and support essential programs that address homelessness, substance use disorder, community safety and health equity among so many others.

Jennifer Hancock spoke to supporters to thank them for their generous support during the challenges of the pandemic, and to let them know that VOA cannot do this work without them.

“Hard work makes VOA who we are. And hard work is the challenge we accept. It’s the work we won’t postpone. And today, I am so grateful that you do this work with us,” Hancock said.
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AN OLD VEHICLE CAN OPEN UP A WHOLE NEW WORLD FOR SOMEONE IN NEED.

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