



## KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS: CROSS MEALS ON WHEELS

### Focusing on customer care and connection to resources

Melissa's mother wasn't in a good place. She was showing signs of depression after her oldest daughter passed away a few years before, experiencing increased memory loss and Melissa's family was concerned that she wasn't eating well.

Melissa and her husband decided to contact CROSS Meals on Wheels earlier this year about starting meal delivery for her mother. They saw Meals on Wheels as a way to connect her mother with, at minimum, a healthy daily meal and a daily visit.

What they didn't know was that Tonya Houston, CROSS Family Advocate and Meals on Wheels Intake Specialist, would show up with flowers, a loaf of bread and a card when they conducted a home visit with Melissa's mother following the enrollment process.

Melissa was nervous that her mother wouldn't accept help, but said Tonya's visit helped positively influence her mother's decision to try Meals on Wheels.

Months later, her mother is still receiving meals, exhibiting more energy and has become more socially active. Melissa credits Tonya's initial visit with convincing her mother to begin receiving meals.

"We feel like we have my mom back!" says Melissa. "I look forward to calling my mother in the afternoons to ask her what she's eaten and while we chat, she walks around the house for her exercise."

Melissa's mom's story is partially the result of a new emphasis on customer care by CROSS, which serves about 45 recipients a day in Rogers, Maple Grove, Osseo, Corcoran and Dayton. CROSS is a larger social service organization that operates food, clothing and housing assistance programs, in addition to its Meals on Wheels program.

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## Good ideas to go

At our July member gathering, we asked our members to share some of the ways they go the extra mile to provide outstanding customer service. Here are some great ideas that came from the discussion:

"We send a welcome letter with a decorated placemat the first day."

- Jo Rimmereid,  
Wayzata-Plymouth

"We check in after two weeks with a phone call."

- Annette Moynihan, Hastings

"We send birthday cards signed by the whole staff."

- Debbie Ross-Staska,  
Kosher Meals on Wheels

"We offer two meals for free to start, which helps if people are hesitant."

- Tom Lindquist, Meals on Wheels South Shore

Other good ideas listed by multiple attendees:

- If you use Metro Meals on Wheels central enrollment services, put Metro's number on your program's voicemail message as a backup during regular business hours
- Send client satisfaction surveys to recipients to gather feedback - include stamped envelope so they can easily return it in the mail



Stephanie Lehman and Tonya Houston  
of CROSS Meals on Wheels



## CROSS continued from first page

Tonya was already working within CROSS, but the new position she started at the beginning of the year allows her to focus on conducting in-person check-ins and connecting recipients to community resources. In addition to offering a friendly visit that helps CROSS understand recipients' special needs, Tonya can also provide information on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and help with applications if a recipient is eligible for the program.

"Tonya's so great," says Stephanie Lehman, who manages the CROSS Meals on Wheels program. "She's turning into a senior expert."

Tonya checks in with new clients when they begin receiving meals, and follows up with every client (or their caregivers) every six months. Because CROSS also operates a food shelf, she is able to bring grocery staples like a loaf of bread or cake or dessert for a special occasion such as a birthday.

Stephanie says Tonya's addition to her staff has helped her do the things she wanted to do, but never had the time to as she only works part-time for Meals on Wheels. Tonya's position was made possible through a successful grant application which relied on \$5,000 in matching funds. CROSS was fortunate to raise an additional \$15,000 from individual donors. CROSS also used a \$7,500 Capacity Building Grant from Metro Meals on Wheels to establish the position.

The program expanded upon a program offered in partnership with the Maple Grove Fire Department which provides annual home safety checks to meal recipients. As part of that program, fire department personnel checks in with meal recipients one time each year to make sure their home is free of safety hazards and that their fire alarms are functioning properly.

CROSS has also implemented a sliding fee scale for meals in hopes of being able to provide services to individuals who don't qualify for waivers, but face difficulties in affording the cost of food. CROSS asks for self-reported income to determine where recipients may fall on the sliding scale.

Both the sliding scale and home visit programs are designed to increase access to meals and provide an extra level of customer service to those who receive meals and their caregivers. Both programs demonstrate the Meals on Wheels Advantage by offering recipients something that other meal delivery options cannot.

*If you'd like to contact CROSS with questions about their home visit or sliding scale program, Stephanie can be reached at **Stephanie@CROSSservices.org** or 763-425-1050.*

## Recipient resources

Did you know there's a section on our website listing additional resources that can also help meal recipients live independently? You can find these at **meals-on-wheels.com/resources**.

Have a great resource that you use and would like to see listed for recipients and caregivers metrowide? Contact Grant at **grant@meals-on-wheels.com** or 612-623-3363.

## Staffing update

We have three new staff members starting at Metro Meals on Wheels in August.

**Cory Georgopoulos** joins Metro Meals on Wheels for a year of service through the AmeriCorps VISTA program. Cory will be developing a program for shared volunteer resources that includes recruitment, training and shift management. Cory can be reached at **cory@meals-on-wheels.com**.

**Tara Kumar** returns to Metro Meals on Wheels as Special Projects Manager. She will spend some of her time working in client and donor relations but will also be helping with other short-term projects. She'll be working very closely with Mary on the SERVTracker conversion. Reach her at **tara@meals-on-wheels.com**.

**Eva Kranz** will be taking over the majority of our client intake and referral services. She has a background in customer service and most recently worked as a registration clerk for Mayo Healthcare System. Her experience will be of great benefit to seniors and their caregivers. Kathy will transition to a backup role and provide support for the billing program offered to members. Eva can be reached at **eva@meals-on-wheels.com**.

