Option Quest - A Vital Community Service

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Fraida Estrin, Coordinator of Mollie's Meals, a Division of the JAA, is the only Kosher Meals on Wheels in Western Pennsylvania that delivers much needed meals to 75% of the Jewish residents – most of whom speak only Russian. Fraida commented that it is lovely to see people with significant disabilities volunteer to deliver meals to the elderly.

When Community Options first contacted Ms. Estrin to discuss volunteering, the timing could not have been better. She had just been notified that one of the volunteer delivery drivers, who was essential in delivering meals, had just resigned. As a result, this opened the door for the individuals who participate in Option Quest, to become an integral part of the delivery program.

Option Quest is a community-based day program operated by Community Options. The program is geared towards people with disabilities who do not have a desire to work competitively but who want to be an active part of their communities by volunteering.

Each week, routinely on Wednesdays and Fridays, people in the Option Quest program arrive at the Charles Morris Nursing and Rehabilitation Center of the Jewish Association on Aging which is located on the Weinberg Village Campus in Squirrel Hill (http://jaapgh.org/care/skilled-nursing-rehabilitation), the kitchen that prepares the kosher meals to pick up, organize and deliver meals to 6 different locations. On each day, there are five vehicles that arrive from Community Options, filled with people eager to volunteer to help the Pittsburgh needy community. They receive prepackaged meals in bins, which they then sort, and load into separate vehicles according to the delivery location.

Each vehicle delivers to a different location. Seniors who live in Squirrel Hill, homestead, Oakland, East End, and Shadyside receive meals on wheels. One location, Community Life (www.commlife.org), a program for all-inclusive care for the elderly, located in Homestead, PA has residents in five different buildings so the fact that we have several vehicles greatly helps in getting the meals delivered quickly and efficiently.

Rena Becker, Executive Director, Weinberg Terrace, and formerly the Director of Home and Community Services for the Jewish Association on Aging said that she has a perspective from the side of the recipients who receive the meals and on the side coordinating the deliveries due to her various positions.

"It means a lot that everybody will get their meals," says Becker. She really appreciates our program and says it is wonderful because she feels our volunteers feel a sense of doing good deeds and good work. Becker says it is truly a win-win situation on both sides and she hopes we continue to volunteer.

Terran Bailey-Walls, Employment Coordinator, assists in the meal deliveries. They are experienced and efficient volunteers! We have been delivering meals for about 2 years. They arrive, sort, pack and leave within a matter of minutes which is essential. As they arrive to their delivery destinations, once again experience is evident. Meals are delivered, usually to

the front desk for distribution; and bins are packed back into the vehicles for the next delivery. People we support enjoy volunteering for Meals on Wheels. They give back to their community, help those in need, and have the opportunity to socialize and visit their local communities.

Employment Specialists, Mary Wofford and Jennifer Martinson believe that the collaboration between Community Options and Meals on Wheels provides core value and service learning for the people we support. The interaction between seniors and the people Community Options supports is an excellent source of community integration for both groups and allows for a sense of connection between two isolated social groups for the benefit of both.

Scott Savarino, a person supported in the Option Quest program, says he really likes helping with meals on wheels, the elevators are fun and it really makes him feel happy to help.