

Volunteers of America Meals on Wheels

Food for Life; Food for Friendship

By Deborah Bobowski, VOA/RSVP Station Reporter, Northern Colorado

Early in 2009 Dorothy Bentley, 68, was in failing health and seriously depressed. Her doctor advised her to improve her diet or risk rapid deterioration. For a long time, Dorothy's primary diet consisted of popcorn three or more times per day - but not because she loved the snack. Rather, she lacked the resources for obtaining more and healthier foods.

Fearing her continued poor diet would lead to further decline and untimely death, her doctor suggested she contact Volunteers of America, Northern Colorado Services, for meals assistance. Approximately four months ago, Dorothy did just that and signed up for the Meals on Wheels frozen meals program for the home-bound. Now, each week she receives a package containing seven frozen meals and supplemental unfrozen items. Meals are provided on a donation basis, at a suggested donation of \$2.50 per meal. The price can be less for those, like Dorothy, who cannot afford the suggested amount. Getting nutritious meals through the program has done more for Dorothy's physical health and emotional attitude than either she or her doctor expected!

Dorothy now knows she will have at least one complete healthy meal each day. These frozen, fully cooked meals are easily reheated. Meal menus are rotated from week to week, providing a good variety of items. One of the meals Dorothy recently received included Hawaiian chicken with vegetables, steamed rice and green beans. Another had veal parmesan with tomato sauce, mashed potatoes, broccoli and carrots. She also receives small containers of frozen juice, and unfrozen items like bread, muffins, margarine, and non-fat dried milk. Each frozen meal is of sufficient size to satisfy her for a lunch or dinner

Dorothy admits before she started eating the meals she receives through Meals on Wheels she did not like or eat many vegetables. Now she thoroughly enjoys the prepared vegetables and looks forward to the different variety she receives with each week's delivery.

Before joining the Meals on Wheels program Dorothy lived with major stress about her economic situation. Balancing her very limited monthly income (currently \$425 from Social Security and \$27 in food stamps) against the cost of her food, household expenses and accelerating medical needs had made her so depressed her doctor prescribed anti-depressive medication. Now, however, the nutritious and tasty meals she eats at least once a day have Dorothy well on the way to improved physical and emotional health.

Dorothy's doctor tests her blood monthly. Within the first full month of participating in the frozen Meals on Wheels program, her doctor found Dorothy's sugar levels, and other health indicators, were dramatically improved. Dorothy herself noticed improved energy and stamina since enrolling in the Volunteers of America meal's program.

Dorothy also finds other benefits from the frozen meal program, including a major improvement in her emotional outlook. She no longer needs medicine for depression, giving her additional funds each month for food. She also knows that she is cared about and thought of by others. Dorothy says "I didn't think anyone cared about me anymore. Then my nice delivery person asked how I was doing." Karen Raymond, a RSVP Volunteer, and Dorothy's regular delivery person, has enjoyed meeting and chatting with Dorothy each week as she drops off her frozen meals package.

Karen, 70 and retired, moved to Fort Collins from Texas this past year. Shortly after her move, she read a newspaper article about Volunteers of America Northern Colorado Services. Karen says, "After doing for myself and sitting at a desk my whole life I wanted to do something for others. Becoming a RSVP Volunteer fit my idea of who I wanted to be and what I wanted to do." Once each week Karen picks up several packages of frozen meals (five or seven meals per package) and makes deliveries to people, like Dorothy, who are home-bound and in need.

Volunteers of America's RSVP volunteers like Karen and clients like Dorothy gain greatly from their participation in the Meals on Wheels program. Volunteers and clients touch each others' lives in different ways, each benefiting from the other. To make a positive difference in another's life is a major benefit to the volunteer. To be thought of, cared about and to avoid hunger are major benefits to those receiving the home-delivered meals. These delivered meals are food for life and food for friendship.



Left to right; Karen Raymond, RSVP Volunteer and Dorothy Bentley, Volunteers of America frozen meals recipient.