Good, nutritious meals are at the heart of a healthy senior life!

For those who serve seniors throughout the state, providing a congregate and home delivered meal program is fundamental in supporting this segment of the community. It is not an overstatement that having a meal program is part of a vital safety net for many seniors across West Virginia.

The Association on Community Living along with other national organizations recognizes March as National Nutrition Month. Mason County Action Group, Inc. is one of West Virginia's many county providers that enthusiastically make every effort to ensure that this program is available and sustainable. As in past years, the Mason County Action Group, Inc. is participating in the 14th annual March for Meals – a month long, national celebration of Meals on Wheels. Renae Riffle, Executive Director of MCAG, understands the need to keep and increase awareness of this program in her county.

As seniors continue aging many will experience isolation, challenges to affording food, and transportation issues, all of which have a substantial impact on obtaining regular access to nutritious meals. "I know seniors appreciate what we are able to do in delivering meals to them," said Riffle. "But I don't think it is generally well understood the thought and ongoing consideration that goes into creating a meal program that works successfully."

Last year, through MCAG's Meals on Wheels program, Riffle was able to serve approximately 20,000 meals to 162 homebound seniors, five days per week on two routes. These deliveries present the opportunity for socialization along with a client wellness check. These daily checks offer the chance to assist or call for help if a client is experiencing a problem or emergency. The group purchased a Ford F150 Hot/Cold Meal Delivery truck in 2015. This was a great improvement over the 2005 passenger van that was not designed to maintain food temperature. "We had to be very creative in making it work effectively, and delivering food appropriately," said Riffle. Deliveries can include a combination of hot and/or frozen meals depending on holidays that occur in a given week. In addition, once per year, five emergency shelf-stable meals are also provided. If deliveries cannot be made due to circumstances such as inclement weather, contact is made with the client or a family support member. Along with this effort approximately 14,000 congregate meals were also served to 305 seniors at the Point Pleasant and Mason senior locations.

The kitchen staff is responsible for creating, and serving nutritious, tasty, and cost effective meals. They constantly review menus, develop variations in preparation, and check inventory to eliminate repetition and waste. Key to the entire process is good communication and Riffle appreciates the brainstorming and suggestions they bring to her attention.

Mason County Action Group, Inc. never stops looking for ways to raise additional funds for their meal program and fill the gap between those served and those in need. “Whether it’s a March for Meals BINGO fundraiser, requests for donations or other efforts,” said Riffle. “We must do all that we can to fight senior isolation and hunger, so they may continue to live independently and well.”

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