NVCN Volunteer/Director Interview Final Draft 6.28.2023

Michael Reisman

Friends in Action Volunteer in Ellsworth (Hancock County), Maine

It’s true what they say—when you volunteer to help people, you get even more out of it than they do perhaps. Connecting with people and listening to their life experiences connects you in a personally rewarding way. Helping others has been a major part of my life.

After leaving college, I moved to Bar Harbor, Maine, in 1972, worked in restaurants for a while, and became a volunteer commissioner of an adult softball league. I also refereed basketball games at the local YMCA, which led to my becoming a program director there.

Within ten years, I was the YMCA Executive Director. I eventually left that position to become program director at Island Connections, a Faith in Action inspired organization that recruited and trained volunteers with a mission to keep older people living independently at home. Taking this position in turn re-energized me.

After six years I left Island Connections to become executive director of a cancer resource center located in Ellsworth. This organization supports people with cancer by providing resources and support groups, yoga classes, and helping find volunteers to drive cancer patients to daily radiation appointments.

Hancock County’s Friends in Action also helped provide transportation volunteers for cancer patients. That’s when I became a volunteer caregiver too.

Over the years, I asked many to volunteer, and I figured it was my turn. Jo Cooper, the Executive Director of Friends in Action, became a great friend and has inspired me to continue volunteering to this day. She was one of the people in our area who started building a coalition of volunteer caregiving twenty years ago. She helped write grants and got many others involved in the cause.

My volunteer time has been spent driving people who often have no one to doctor appointments. While driving and talking, I learned so many things. When I take someone to an appointment and assist them and realize that no one else is there to help them, I sympathize with those in challenging situations. I sometimes empathize, too, by putting myself in their place and trying to gain a great understanding of what they are going through. Respect is also something for all the people I have driven.

My community is a small town. In connecting with those I drove, I found that we often knew the same people. You realize the deep connections you have with people in getting to know them. I felt that some of my passengers were so interesting—just learning about their daily routines and history—I was getting much more from them than they were from me.

Not only did I look forward to these experiences, I learned from them. Sometimes, I delivered meals to folks and, in the process, would stay and talk with them a bit.

One person had a dog-named Honey that I helped. I would take her dog once a month for grooming, allowing me to spend some time with my youngest daughter, who rode along (mainly due to the dog). I have three children, three stepchildren, and nine grandchildren. All my kids have been involved in volunteer caregiving, whether helping put up holiday decorations or helping me with special fundraising events.

If I had to stop volunteering tomorrow, I would miss helping others every week. I like being part of a bigger organization that is well known and thought of highly in the community. It gives me a connection to my community that I would sadly miss.

Social Media Post #1:

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*Michael Reisman*

*Maine Volunteer Caregiver*

*Friends in Action in Ellsworth*

*(Hancock County), Maine*

*Social Media Post #2:*

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*Michael Reisman, Maine Volunteer Caregiver*