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# Making a Difference

A New York group is taking its successful program for connecting older adults and nonprofits on the road

*By Kelly Greene*

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David Snyder, a 70-year-old former software developer in Manhattan, reluctantly retired from Deutsche Bank AG three years ago, spent about a year enjoying the chance to sleep in—and then got bored.

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THE JOURNAL REPORT

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"You can't sit around and do nothing," says Mr. Snyder. So, when he heard about a group in New York that matches retirees with nonprofit organizations and government agencies that can use their skills, he signed up. The group's name: ReServe Elder Service Inc.

Now, Mr. Snyder spends 20 hours a week, at \$10 an hour, working for Safe Horizon Inc., a victim-assistance group that serves more than 350,000 people a year. He is helping to funnel restitution payments to crime victims more effectively, among other tasks.

"It's good to know I'm making a contribution," Mr. Snyder says.

It promises to be one of the biggest changes in retirement: the growing desire for meaningful work—and a bit of extra money—in later life. At the moment, efforts to connect experienced workers with nonprofits and related employers tend to be hit-or-miss. Many older adults simply start knocking on doors or volunteering their time. In many cases, neither the individuals nor the nonprofits get what they need.

## Making Matches

ReServe tries to find better connections for both. Like a specialized employment agency, it works closely with nonprofits and with older adults, whom it refers to as "ReServists," to find the best match. It's not easy (the employers must cough up a paycheck), and it's not perfect (some matches are a bust). Still, ReServe has placed about 1,000 adults ages 50 and older in part-time jobs at more than 200 nonprofits and public agencies in New York.

Now the organization is expanding to other cities—and developing a way to accelerate the "matching" process. It's introducing training programs that, in as little as two or three days,

educate groups of 10 to 20 retirees for specific tasks. These "graduates" will then concentrate their efforts on particular needs in their communities, including education and health care.

Ideally, this added focus on volume and speed will help more retirees and more nonprofits—in more places—in a shorter amount of time.

"We want to have multiple placements because we're going to be targeting larger social problems," says Mary Bleiberg, executive director of ReServe (reserveinc.org).



ReServe Elder Service connected David Snyder with a group that assists crime victims SHERRIE NICKOL

The spark for ReServe came from Herbert Sturz, a longtime nonprofit entrepreneur, and Jack Rosenthal, president of the New York Times Co. Foundation. The two were

struck by the lack of opportunities in retirement for educated, experienced older adults interested in public service.

## Labor-Intensive Program

The original model was, and remains, labor-intensive: ReServe's staff of 19, including seven ReServists, meet face-to-face with applicants and partner agencies, helping both come up with a specific description of what they are seeking. ReServe follows up with those placed after a few weeks, and again at six months, to make sure the job is what they expected.

Among the matches ReServe has made in its first four years:

- Former lawyers are reviewing contracts for New York City agencies.
- A retired banker and two former social workers are staffing a court-appointed guardianship project.
- A former mixed-media artist and engineer are teaching art and computer skills at a neighborhood center.

Typically, the employers pay \$15 an hour, with \$10 going to the ReServist, and the rest being split between ReServe and a contractor that handles the ReServe payroll. ReServists usually work 10 to 20 hours a week, with some scheduling flexibility.

"In 2008, our [nonprofit] partners invested \$1 million and got back \$4.4 million in market-value labor," Ms. Bleiberg says. "It should be worth it to agencies to do this."

The economy, of course, isn't making ReServe's work any easier. Nonprofit funding has dropped, making agencies more inclined to recruit unpaid volunteers.

ReServe counters that a stipend—even a modest one—brings a degree of professionalism to a position, with ReServists and employers both taking the job more seriously. To that end, ReServe hosted a conference in July attended by 70 representatives of nonprofit and government agencies to help drum up more jobs.

Ms. Bleiberg is also hopeful that federal funding may soon help the organization increase ReServists' numbers by providing some of their paychecks: The Serve America Act, a federal law that went into effect Oct. 1, is expected to increase the number of AmeriCorps spots earmarked for people 55 and older possibly to as many as 25,000 in eight years. And ReServe hopes to land an AmeriCorps grant to fund more ReServists.

Now, ReServe, with annual funding of more than \$1 million, hopes to expand to five cities over the next three years. Already, work has begun in Chicago, Philadelphia and San Francisco. To get the satellite programs up and running more quickly, Ms. Bleiberg says, the group plans first to replicate three of its newer programs, training retirees to assist college counselors at high schools, help isolated elderly patients being discharged from hospitals, and work as grant writers. After those programs are in place, the satellite projects then could start drumming up new kinds of individual placements and matching them with ReServists, Ms. Bleiberg says.

ReServe's Health Navigator program, which started last year in New York, so far has trained 15 retirees to help frail older patients leaving the hospital line up services they need at home, escort them to clinic visits, and make sure they get timely follow-up appointments with doctors. The ReServists make weekly home visits and regular calls, helping three to five patients at a time. The results last year were promising: All but two of their 22 patients (average age: 78) have stayed out of the hospital, at an estimated cost per client of \$1,980—far less than a second hospital bill.

## College Counseling

ReServe is in the middle of starting a program called Ready, for which it plans to train 20 ReServists by year-end, to support college counselors at New York high schools where few students' families have experience applying for college. Dan Cohen, 57, is the group's director of education services. He is also a former television producer and newspaper ad executive who has mentored students for 20 years.

The group's Grant Writing Residency, led by a retired journalist, along with a professional grant writer, last month started its first program for eight former journalists and professional writers. The idea is to place retired journalists with nonprofits that need grant writers but are reluctant to hire someone who has never written grant proposals. The nonprofits involved have annual budgets of up to \$8 million and include groups focused on criminal justice, the arts, neighborhoods and other causes. Each contributed \$10,000.

"I'm retired, almost all my contemporaries are retired, and we're not little old ladies sitting around," says Linda Amster, 71, co-director of the project and former research director of the New York Times. "We have passionate interests in the nonprofit world, and this program will allow people who want to move on to another career to do it."

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