

# AmeriCorps volunteers comfort lonely seniors. Trump just cut their programs.

More than a dozen senior volunteer programs were impacted by DOGE cuts to AmeriCorps, leaving those who relied on the free services without them.

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Members of the Senior Companion Program in Chester, South Carolina, hold cards of encouragement for residents of a local assisted-living facility. (Mike Wessinger/Senior Services Inc. of Chester County)

By [Mariana Alfaro](#) and [Tobi Raji](#)

Each week, a group of people 55 years or older fans out across Chester, South Carolina, offering comfort and companionship to the elderly residents of the small town.

The town's Senior Companion Program pairs the 18 volunteers — known as companions — with seniors who need assistance with daily activities such as shopping, preparing meals and gardening. The program benefits vulnerable residents and volunteers alike, said

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program director Mary Mobley. She said some companions, who earn \$4 an hour, have told her that, without the program, “I’d probably sit home and die.”

On April 25, AmeriCorps terminated the program’s \$183,000 grant, ordering it to shutter services “effective immediately.”

Across the country, more than a thousand national and local nonprofits, schools, and faith-based and community organizations are reeling after Elon Musk’s U.S. DOGE Service ordered AmeriCorps last week to [terminate close to \\$400 million in grants](#) — roughly 41 percent of the national service agency’s total grant funding. Of the 1,031 organizations affected by the cuts, more than a dozen are a part of the AmeriCorps Seniors network. It deploys nearly 200,000 volunteers each year to mentor students, participate in community activities, and offer assistance and friendship to seniors who have difficulty with daily living tasks.

Now, people who depended on AmeriCorps for reliable, free care have been left without it, and the volunteers have been forced to abandon programs that kept them active and involved in their communities — work that experts say can help reduce the effects of aging in an increasingly graying, isolated nation.

The White House, DOGE and AmeriCorps have not yet responded to The Washington Post’s requests for comment.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers has been [quick to defend](#) AmeriCorps, arguing that the administration’s sharp cuts to the agency endanger the future of U.S. public service.

Standing before community service leaders and advocates at a hotel banquet room near Capitol Hill on Wednesday — the final day of National Volunteer Month — Rep. Jack Bergman (R-Michigan) promised to do all that he could to save AmeriCorps.

“We’re going to make sure that these entities like AmeriCorps and others continue forward, to make sure that these young men and women have the opportunity to serve,” he said.

## A ‘lose-lose’ scenario

Founded in 1993, [AmeriCorps Seniors](#) brought together several even older programs. The senior program has three branches: the [Foster Grandparent Program](#), which provides mentoring, tutoring and social-emotional support to children; the [Retired and Senior Volunteer Program](#) (RSVP), which engages older Americans in mentoring, workforce readiness and disaster preparedness; and the [Senior Companion Program](#).

Before DOGE, which stands for Department of Government Efficiency, stepped foot in AmeriCorps headquarters in April, President Donald Trump’s administration had already

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begun cutting off grants to realize one of his top priorities: [ending](#) all diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

The Shepherd's Center in Kansas City, Missouri, was presented with a “lose-lose” scenario by the Trump administration in February, said executive director Janet Baker: Either remove any language touching on DEI from its website, or lose \$350,000 in funding for its AmeriCorps Senior Companion Program.

The center decided to maintain its programming for marginalized communities — including LGBTQ+ seniors and older community members of color — on its website. It was stripped of its AmeriCorps Seniors funding and lost 37 volunteers, Baker said.



Staff members for Shepherd's Center in Kansas City, Missouri, stand alongside food collected during a drive held by a member of the program's LGBTQ+ coalition. (Courtesy of the Shepherd's Center)

A teary-eyed Baker told The Post that the community is already feeling the consequences. Senior companions, who do not qualify for unemployment, were forced to adjust to the loss of their small monthly stipends.

“Our mission, our work, is wholly committed to serving all older adults, especially those who are most marginalized,” Baker told The Post. “We’re not walking away from that.”



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On Wednesday, their AmeriCorps grant was officially shuttered. But Baker said that hasn't stopped some volunteers — a group of predominantly Black, low-income women — from continuing their service.

“We’ve had several companions, more than several, say: ‘Well, I’m not going to quit going, she needs me,’” Baker said. “They are helpers, and they are companions, and they are going to continue to care for those homebound clients.”

Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II (D-Missouri) told The Post that stripping Shepherd’s Center of its senior program is “un-American” and “unreligious.”

“They are coming up with ways to blame the elderly for not having enough money to give to the business elite,” Cleaver said. “I hope people understand that the reason we’re going through all of these programs and making cuts that don’t make sense like this is because [the Trump administration] is having difficulty finding enough money cuts to compensate for the huge tax break they’re getting ready to offer the richest of the rich.”



A pair of AmeriCorps Seniors members are pictured in Kansas City, Missouri. (Courtesy of the Shepherd's Center)

## The graying of America

In Keene, New Hampshire, 71-year-old Helen Ann Kelly spends one day a week reading to first-grade students at John H. Fuller Elementary School. The retired elementary schoolteacher said she and her fellow [America Reads](#) volunteers — a program offered through RSVP — broke down in tears when they learned that the program would no longer receive federal funding from AmeriCorps.

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“How could this be?” the grandmother of four said. “It’s kind of like someone said to me, ‘Here, Helen Ann, stand on this little rug,’ and then, whoosh, somebody pulled it out from me.”

[John Rowe](#), professor of health policy and aging at Columbia University, told The Post that there’s a large body of evidence showing that significant civic engagement is a central factor in aging well.

“Several hours a week of volunteering ... [has] the beneficial effect equivalent of stopping smoking,” Rowe said. “There’s evidence that volunteering is beneficial, and so, for a society, it’s a very risky strategy to reduce opportunities for volunteering.”

The South Carolina companion program secured a \$15,000 grant from a local nonprofit to keep the initiative running a bit longer.

Mobley said the extension buys time for affected seniors, companions and their families to make care and financial arrangements.

Mobley said she tried to contact South Carolina Sens. Lindsey Graham (R) and Tim Scott (R), and Rep. Ralph Norman (R) on Sunday but has only heard back from Graham, who said in an email that he would keep her comments in mind. Graham, Scott and Norman did not respond to The Post’s requests for comment.

Mobley expected the money to run out in less than a week.

“I really am not looking forward to having to deliver this news. ... It makes me want to cry,” Mobley said. “It’s just going to be such a blow to them.”