Media Contact
Emma Fried-Cassorla
Director of Communications and Programming
Office: (541) 323-0432
Cell: (215) 313-5582
efried-cassorla@councilonaging.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Council on Aging Seeks Volunteers to Grow Nationally Recognized Caring Connections Program with New Grant Support

Bend, OR, July 24, 205 — The Council on Aging of Central Oregon is calling on community members to help address a growing and often invisible crisis: loneliness among older adults. Through its Caring Connections program, the Council matches trained volunteers with older adults for regular phone calls or in-person visits. These regular check-ins offer friendly conversation and meaningful connection for older adults who might otherwise go long stretches without social interaction.

The need for connection is clear. In the Council on Aging's recent Community Needs Assessment, nearly 50% of older adults in Central Oregon reported feeling lonely or isolated some or all of the time. "Chronic loneliness isn't just emotionally painful, it's linked to serious health issues like depression, cognitive decline, and heart disease," said Jamie Lacore, Caring Connections Program Manager. "But the powerful thing about Caring Connections is that it doesn't take much to make a difference. What's

encouraging is that even a small, consistent connection can have a big impact for both the older adult and the volunteer."

The program is continuing to grow across Central Oregon thanks to a $50,000 grant from the JTMF Foundation and increasing recognition of its impact. Lacore recently presented Caring Connections at the 2025 USAging Annual Conference, where aging professionals from across the country learned about its success in reducing isolation and building meaningful social ties for older adults.

The Council on Aging is focused on recruiting volunteers especially in rural communities like La Pine, Madras, and Prineville where older adults often live alone and have fewer opportunities for social connection. Volunteers in Bend who are willing to drive to nearby areas are also greatly needed.

Caring Connections volunteers receive training and ongoing support. Many volunteers report that the relationships they build are as meaningful for them as they are for the clients they serve.

To sign up as a volunteer or refer an older adult to the program, visit https://www.councilonaging.org/programs/caring-connections/ or contact the Council on Aging at (541) 678-5483 .

About the Council on Aging of Central Oregon

Since 1975, the Council on Aging of Central Oregon (CoA) has served as the designated Area Agency on Aging for Deschutes, Crook, and Jefferson counties, offering adults aged 60 and older and their loved ones a range of support services. CoA advocates for, empowers, and guides older adults and their loved ones to live with independence and well-being. To find out more about the Council on Aging of Central Oregon, visit www.councilonaging.org or call (541) 678-5483.

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