

## **COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING 2022 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS**

Established in 2006, the Best Practices Awards recognize and encourage the replication of model programs, particularly those that foster aging in place, livable communities and home and community-based services. With financial support from Dominion Energy, the Council encourages the development of these innovative programs.

### **2022 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS**

#### **FIRST PLACE (\$5,000): NV Rides**

NV Rides was founded in 2014 after data from Fairfax County revealed that seniors wished to age in place were concerned about transportation when they may no longer be able to drive. NV Rides is a network of volunteer rides programs serving seniors and persons with disabilities in the Northern Virginia region. NV Rides operates in Arlington, Loudoun, Fairfax, and Prince William counties through a partnership of 15 organizations (e.g., community centers, Shepherd's Centers, and faith-based organizations) that provide free rides to older adults via a network of volunteer drivers. Funded via a grant from the Washington Council of Governments with matching funding from Fairfax County, NV Rides supports volunteer transportation in the Northern Virginia region through coordination of rides, marketing, software, and volunteer recruitment and background checks provided to partner organizations. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, NV Rides also provides contactless deliveries from grocery stores, pharmacies, and food banks. In 2021, NV Rides partners served 926 seniors with a network of 506 drivers. Since inception, NV Rides has provided over 60,000 rides and visits, with over 20,377 rides, deliveries and visits in 2021. With its diverse coalition of organizations that serve seniors in the region and an emphasis on recruiting bilingual volunteers, NV Rides works to help seniors get where they need to go.

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**SECOND PLACE (\$3,000): Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology and the New River Valley Agency on Aging (NRVAOA) for COVID Companions**

Launched in 2021, COVID Companions is a program to connect older adults and community members in the Blacksburg area and New River Valley. Older adults are provided with an optional tablet and a resource guide so that they can connect over video or the phone (or in some cases, socially distanced outdoors) with their assigned community member. Connections are made on a weekly basis. While the program began with volunteers, most of whom were Virginia Tech students, it has since expanded to include some faculty and community members from the surrounding area. The program is currently serving about 50 older adults, and includes the unique aspect of serving veterans through the engagement of Virginia Tech's large Corp of Cadets. This program was created to curb older adults' loneliness during a time of social isolation, but surveys indicate that the younger adults' perceptions of older adults has improved due to their participation in the program as well. This program will continue post-pandemic as a way to connect community members and form intergenerational connections. The goal of the program is to create an intergenerational bridge to decrease negative stigmas and help older adults maintain or improve mental health.

To contact Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology or NRVAOA:

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**THIRD PLACE (\$2,000): Northern Virginia Resource Center (NVRC) for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons for Deaf Seniors Stay Connected**

“NVRC Deaf Seniors Stay Connected” is a free, hosted, weekly online Zoom chat for Deaf seniors and American Sign Language (ASL) students that provides meaningful interaction for all participants. This free online chat program connects Deaf seniors and ASL college students/interpreters from several Mid-Atlantic states to converse virtually using ASL in an informal, but structured atmosphere. Each week, a Deaf facilitator introduces a new topic for discussion among the average 12-15 attendees. While initially just for seniors using ASL, the program has now welcomed hard of hearing older adults who do not sign. The goal of the program is to ensure that Deaf and hard of hearing seniors feel less isolated and more connected, especially those who are homebound and unable to access or participate in many community activities. The benefit of the virtual format has even allowed one member who moved to a different area to stay in touch with friends who sign, keeping those friendships from fading. NVRC believes this program reduces feelings of isolation, connects Deaf seniors with their peers, and provides meaningful language practice for ASL students.

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**2022 HONORABLE MENTIONS**

**Arlington Agency on Aging (AAA) for Pop-Up Farmer's Markets:** To address food insecurity, eliminate barriers to access and provide meaningful connections for older adults in our community, AAA partnered with the Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and FreshFarm, a local market manager, to establish a regular pop-up farmer's markets on-site at independent living residences in Arlington. Each month between July and November, a variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables are brought to the community and setup outdoors where residents can shop for fresh produce. The market is open to all, and many of the residents in these communities participate in the Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). An average of 700 Arlington residents participate in the SFMNP but many often struggle to redeem their coupons due to transportation barriers and limited participating vendors at public farmer's markets. In 2021, each Pop-Up event had more than 50 residents attend and AAA's Registered Dietician provided nutrition education handouts and seasonal recipes in both English and Spanish to attendees. By bringing the market to older adult communities, these Pop-up markets not only enable older Arlingtonians to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, but also provide residents the opportunity to enjoy fresh air and socialize with their neighbors.

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**Insight Memory Care Center (IMCC) for Caregiving at a Glance Workshop and Caregiver Cohort:** IMCC's Caregiver Cohort series is an education class and workshop that explores common dementia caregiver concerns in weekly sessions. Each session includes an education portion, group discussion, and interactive activities focused on each chapter of IMCC's "Caregiving at a Glance" guide, which is a fingertip guide for family caregivers of loved ones with dementia. In 2018, IMCC undertook the endeavor of updating the guide to reflect current best practices and reference the growing virtual resources in memory care. During the weekly cohort sessions, guest facilitators provide expert advice on the week's topic. A one-hour consultation is included at the end of the series for families to apply course learning to their specific situations. The Caregiver Cohort series has helped prepare 80 caregivers for the tasks they face while giving them the tools they need to feel confident in their caregiving roles. In fact, 95% of caregivers at IMCC feel their stress as a caregiver has been reduced through participation with IMCC's programs. IMCC has also distributed over 1,000 copies of the "Caregiving at a Glance" guide to caregivers and organizations in the northern Virginia area.

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**Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. (MEOC) for Leveraging Technology to Combat Isolation during a Pandemic and Beyond:** The COVID-19 pandemic decimated MEOC's congregate programming and volunteer opportunities for older persons, including the Foster Grandparents (FGPs) Program, which pairs older adults with Head Start/Pre-K/Primary School students who needed a little help in the classroom. MEOC sought to combat this isolation by enabling virtual connections. MEOC purchased Birdsong tablets, which have an easy user interface for seniors, for 100 congregate meals participants and 25 FGPs, and added internet service plans for those who did not have internet access. Through small, socially distanced trainings, MEOC trained the older adults on how to use the Birdsong tablets. From there, congregate meals participants could socialize together and access nutrition/health education, such as the Matter of Balance falls prevention program, and FGPs could access trainings and socialize with each other. Both groups were also able to take advantage of additional programming that included cooking and educational videos and museum tours, among others.

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**Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC) in Partnership with Aging Together (AT) for the Regional Transportation Collaborative (RTC):**

In 2019, several federal and state funding losses and program changes were anticipated to eliminate transit routes, close multiple volunteer programs, and negatively affect mobility options for older adults. To mitigate this impact, mobility partners and stakeholders in Culpeper, Fauquier, Madison, Orange, and Rappahannock counties adopted a new innovative model called the RTC. Managed by RRRC, the RTC is designed to provide overarching support and long-term stability to the region's mobility programs through strategic planning, grant writing, and data collection, with the goal of efficiently leveraging transportation resources and increasing mobility options for older adults and those with disabilities. In 2021, the RTC's call center received over 5,000 calls and provided over 3,000 coordination calls. RTC coordinated and also documented 2,500 ride requests for volunteer transportation and 2,000 one-way volunteer driver rides. Of these, over 60% of individuals served were older adults, 40% of individuals reported a physical and/or mental disability, and 92% of rides were for medical reasons. Analysis indicates that the equivalent charitable donation to the community from volunteer driver hours and miles driven totaled over \$350,000. Most recently, RTC worked to bring in six grants totaling over \$500,000, tracked over 130 community partnership meetings, distributed \$15,000 in gas card supplements, conducted 30 outreach activities, and supported multiple innovative pilot projects.

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**Senior Services of Alexandria (SSA) for Senior Ambassadors:** In 2017, SSA and the Alexandria Commission on Aging (COA) reflected on how to connect older adult residents with access to important information and resources and expand the reach of information presented through SSA's popular monthly Senior Speaker Series. SSA's solution was the Senior Ambassadors program. To put it together, a task force with representation from the COA, SSA, faith communities, and volunteers developed a plan on how the program would look, including how to recruit volunteers from different economic and socially diverse areas, a training curriculum, and a communication plan to roll out the initiative. The program was launched in 2019, pivoting to virtual meetings via Zoom during the pandemic, and now has over 100-trained Ambassadors who serve as conduits for information from city agencies, local and national nonprofits, community leaders, private businesses, and other resources. Ambassadors meet virtually each week with a representative from a relevant organization, and Ambassadors are free to ask questions and give feedback. Afterwards, the Ambassadors share what they have learned with the people in their communities, which span senior living settings, faith communities, and neighborhood civic associations.

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**Southwest Virginia Legal Aid and Southwest Virginia Elder Justice Taskforce for "SILENCE ISN'T GOLDEN", a Public Education and Awareness Campaign about Elder Abuse:** Developed in December 2020 with the support of Southwest Virginia Legal Aid and the Southwest Virginia Elder Justice Taskforce, the Virginia Law Foundation, Anthem Healthkeepers Plus, and grants from the Virginia Supreme Court's Local Court Improvement Project to Dickenson and Tazewell Counties, "Silence Isn't Golden" is a public education, outreach, and awareness campaign in 17 counties and 4 small cities in southwest Virginia focused on preventing elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation (ANE). Through this initiative, the multidisciplinary Southwest Virginia Elder Justice Task Force is committed to increasing education and awareness about ANE, protecting vulnerable adults, and advocating for investigation and prosecution of abusers. Patterned after a campaign that was launched in San Diego, California by former Deputy District Attorney Paul Greenwood, the Task Force sought permission from Paul Greenwood and Buchalter Consulting, who developed the original concept and public awareness materials, to adapt the "Silence Isn't Golden" campaign for southwest Virginia. To launch the initiative, the

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Southwest Virginia Elder Justice Task Force also strategically placed 26 “Silence Isn’t Golden” billboards in southwest Virginia. The campaign included social media marketing, community outreach, and creating elder abuse awareness materials, such as pens, rack cards, posters, and fans, for distribution.

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**The Longevity Project for a greater Richmond with The Thelma Bland Watson Person-Centered (TBWPC) Personal Care Aide (PCA) School:** The TBWPC PCA School is a program of The Longevity Project for a greater Richmond, a community-university collaborative between Virginia Commonwealth University’s Department of Gerontology and Senior Connections, The Capital Area Agency on Aging. With partnership support from Family Lifeline, Charles City County, and Bremono Pharmacy, the TBWPC PCA School delivers a easily replicable hybrid (online and in person) 40-hour PCA training program with specific focus on strategies for the PCA’s own personal health management and increased focus on interventions for cognitive impairment and new skills acquisition, such as certification in Basic Life Support. In an effort to overcome barriers to enrollment and graduation, the program is offered at no cost to students and with a \$300 stipend per student and computers (if needed) to support inclusion. Throughout the 2-week program, students receive individual appreciative advising sessions and one-on-one support to ensure the completion of all assignments. Graduates are also contacted at 30-, 60- and 90-day intervals to chart success. The TBWPC PCA School has enrolled 25 student learners and graduated 24, all of whom scored 100% on their final exam.

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