

## **COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING 2024 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.

### **WINNERS**

#### **FIRST PLACE (\$5,500): The Opening Minds through Art (OMA) Center at The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen (CACGA).**

Developed through research at the Scripp's Gerontology Center at Miami University and reproduced across the country, Opening Minds through Art (OMA) is an award-winning, evidence-based, intergenerational art-making program for people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias (PWD). The failure-free program provides opportunities for creative self-expression and social engagement for PWD, while providing volunteers with opportunities to improve their attitudes toward aging through weekly interaction with OMA participants. Originally designed to take place in care facilities, CACGA has implemented a center-based program that also includes caregivers. CACGA's OMA Center is offered in 8-week sessions during which "Elder Artists" are paired with specially-trained volunteers who assist the Elder Artist in art-making projects that feature the OMA methodology and key principles. Through CACGA, this program is open to any family dealing with a dementia diagnosis and is offered free-of-charge to participants. Since starting the program in 2022, CACGA has trained over 125 volunteers and has had about 50 participants complete the program.

For more information about The OMA Center, please contact:

Cindy Rinker, Education Coordinator  
The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen  
Address: 2880 Mountain Rd., Glen Allen, VA 23060  
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#### **SECOND PLACE (\$3,500): The Art, Leisure, and Recreation Program through Richmond Aging and Engaging**

Richmond Aging and Engaging (RAE) provides intergenerational arts, leisure, and recreation activities to support the health, wellness, and quality of life of older adults living independently in low-income senior apartment buildings. Programming is provided on a weekly basis in the buildings where participants live. The programming is flexible and adaptable to meet the unique interests and needs of residents in each building served and is guided by feedback from participant advisory committees. Activities may include physical games (e.g., balloon pickleball, cornhole, bowling), crafting (e.g.,

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crochet, weaving, clay sculpting, card-making), and social/cognitive games (e.g., charades, family feud, bingo, board games, cards). Additionally, the award-winning and evidence-based Opening Minds through Art (OMA) is implemented yearly at each site and concludes with a community art exhibition, with previous work even featured in statewide art exhibits. Local college students assist in leading the activities and engaging with participants. These intergenerational experiences foster social connectedness and promote a more vibrant and inclusive society. In a year, Richmond Aging and Engaging has served 46 residents across three buildings with the support of 49 college student volunteers. Richmond Aging and Engaging aims to expand to more buildings in 2024.

For more information about Richmond Aging and Engaging, please contact:

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Richmond Aging and Engaging  
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### **THIRD PLACE (\$2,500): The Audio Accessibility and Inclusion Program through Virginia Voice, Inc.**

Virginia Voice's Audio Accessibility and Inclusion Program focuses on providing access and inclusion for those with blindness and low vision to the same everyday community engagements their sighted peers enjoy. The Radio Reading Service features volunteer-led readings of print materials, such as local newspapers, national media, and topical programming on subjects such as pet care and gardening, via radio, smart speaker, and online streaming 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. The Live Audio Description (LAD) of events provide real-time audio descriptions of visual aspects that are key to the enjoyment and understanding of local arts performances, such as the theatre and ballet, as well as for community events. Through LAD, Virginia Voice partners with area museums to record audio descriptions of current exhibitions and with local businesses that need to provide audio described information for their employees and customers. Virginia Voice supports a community of 11,000 Central Virginians with blindness and low vision, 80% of whom are adults 65 and older with medical diagnoses that impact their vision who often experience isolation. Nearly 73% of our listeners say that Virginia Voice's services make them feel more connected to the Richmond metro community, and 81% say Virginia Voice helps to alleviate their social isolation.

For more information about Virginia Voice, please contact:

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Virginia Voice  
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### HONORABLE MENTIONS

**Arlington Neighborhood Village (ANV)** helps older adults age in place safely in their own homes by providing access to friendly volunteer support and social connection. Over 285 trained and vetted volunteers provide the practical help and social support needed for successful aging in place. Volunteer-provided assistance, which includes rides, errands, friendly visits, daily check-in calls, foodbank deliveries, and technology help, make it easier for older Arlingtonians to remain in their homes. ANV's full social calendar and opportunities for connection also help keep loneliness and social isolation at bay. ANV membership is open to adults 55+ in Arlington. ANV's current membership is 393 members, ranging in age from 58 to 102. Roughly three in four members are female; 44% are over 80 years old; 16% represent diverse backgrounds; 31% have challenges with mobility, hearing, or sight; 60% live alone, and 35% are lower-income seniors who receive financial aid through ANV's Discounted Membership Program. In 2023, ANV fulfilled 97% of member requests. Of the 4,000+ volunteer services provided, ANV responded to 1,764 requests for transportation, 752 requests for errands, 664 requests for friendly visits, 510 requests for household chores, and 218 requests for technology coaching. Membership increased 20% in 2023 (from 328 to 393 members), and in the coming year, ANV projects that it will increase to 450, of which 160 will be lower income members through the Discounted Membership Program.

For more information about Arlington Neighborhood Village, please contact:

Wendy Zenker, Executive Director  
Arlington Neighborhood Village  
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**Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging (AAA)/Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS)** developed **The AAA Rhythm Makers**, an innovative hand chime program that creates opportunities for people with cognitive impairment and their caregivers to have positive and successful interactions through music. By utilizing music to create this unique group, the program gives individuals with early to moderate stage cognitive impairment a purpose and routine, and it is open to community residents who may not normally be able to participate in other group settings. Student volunteers from local high schools are integral to the success of the program as they provide support by assisting the group leader. Since the inception of The AAA Rhythm Makers in 2022 the group has grown significantly and is at capacity

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(26 participants). Participants return each month and never miss the opportunity to perform. The AAA Rhythm Makers have held several live performances at senior centers and parks, which have been attended by hundreds of community members.

For more information about The AAA Rhythm Makers, please contact:

Name: Lori Stahl, Elder Resources Case Manager  
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Website: [Loudoun.gov/aaa](http://Loudoun.gov/aaa)

**Southern Area Agency on Aging's (AAA) Volunteer Driver Program (VDP)** utilizes residents of Henry, Franklin, Patrick and Pittsylvania Counties as well as the cities of Danville and Martinsville who volunteer their time and use of their vehicle, to transport ambulatory older adults to out of town medical appointments. Many medical specialists and medical surgeries cannot be obtained within the West Piedmont Planning District borders. For many, care must be sought out of the region. Through the VDP, volunteer drivers are screened with a criminal/DMV background check, vehicle safety inspection, and driver safety test. Southern AAA reimburses the volunteer drivers for gas and vehicle wear and tear. In the last three years, over 1,240 clients have been served, making an ongoing impact with about 80% of clients receiving multiple trips, often on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. In Fiscal Year 2023, the VDP completed 1,076 one-way trips.

For more information about Southern AAA's Volunteer Driver Program, please contact:

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Southern Area Agency on Aging  
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