

2025 Best Practices Awards Winners and Honorable Mentions



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 and AARP Virginia, the Council encourages the development of these innovative programs.

2025 WINNERS

FIRST PLACE (\$5,500): Fellowship Fresh

Fellowship Square's Fellowship Fresh provides nutrient-dense healthy food to financially vulnerable seniors, enabling them to age in place and avoid the negative health outcomes of food insecurity. Residents of Fellowship Square senior affordable housing communities live on an average Social Security fixed-income of under \$10,000/year. Even with stable housing provided, seniors on limited-incomes often must make tough choices when it comes to healthcare costs vs. groceries. They commonly purchase some of the least healthy food available because of price. But an unhealthy diet can exacerbate senior health conditions like high blood pressure/cholesterol, diabetes, diminish mental acuity and weaken immunity. With Fellowship Fresh, seniors get the food they need to help them eat nutritiously, thrive, maintain independence and age in place. By engaging community organizations, retailers, restaurants, and volunteers to donate and hand-deliver fresh and shelf-stable groceries, FF has distributed more than 429,758lbs of food to the 800+ older adults in Fellowship Square communities (536lbs per resident). Via weekly hand-delivered food bags from volunteers and regular transportation to/from grocery stores, the program prevents food insecurity, provides nutritious food options, helps solve physical challenges of shopping/meal preparation that many seniors face as coordination and balance weaken, and provides a series of cooking classes and community meals that not only nourish residents but also provide social connections critical for senior health.

For more information about Fellowship Fresh, please contact:

Cindy Zeitz, Chief Executive Officer
Fellowship Square
Address: 11260 Roger Bacon Dr. Suite #20, Reston, VA 20190
Phone Number: 703-860-2536
Email Address: czeitz@fellowshipsquare.org
Website: <https://www.fellowshipsquare.org/>

SECOND PLACE (\$3,500): The Beat Goes On: A Community Choir Project

The Beat Goes On, started in 2023. This intergenerational community choir is open to all - no audition required. It was designed by music therapists to be both accessible and approachable, while specifically including persons living with dementia (PLWD) and their carepartners. In addition to PLWD and their carepartners, the choir includes college students, faculty, staff, and other community members with an age range of 2-86 years old. During the academic year, we have weekly rehearsals beginning with snacks and chat before we move into singing, dancing and lively discussion about lyrics and melody. Rehearsals are a celebration of togetherness, community, and joy with relationships between people of all ages blossoming. Our inaugural season ended with a free community concert – to a packed audience of over 100 - accompanied by a local rock band of retirees to hear the choir sing familiar pop, rock and R&B tunes. The choir began with an internal start-up award of \$6,000, which supported snacks, t-shirts for members and support staff, and honorariums for the band and the choir's codirector. We also purchased smart devices for all members to learn more about the impact of group singing on health. In our second season, the choir has grown and boasts between 30 and 40 persons of all ages and abilities at each rehearsal. We are preparing for our spring concert, which will be all music about dancing. Currently, choir investigators are preparing international conference presentations (Summer 2025) and a manuscript about initial findings related to participation.

For more information about The Beat Goes On: A Community Choir Project, please contact:

Joanna Culligan, Therapeutic Program Manager & Instructor

Engagement Center for Creative Aging, Virginia Tech

Address: 102 Wallace Hall (0416) Blacksburg, VA 24061

Phone Number: (540) 231-3161

Email Address: joculligan@vt.edu

Website: <https://ads.hdfs.vt.edu/the-beat-goes-on-a-community-choir-project/>

THIRD PLACE (\$2,500): Virginia HEAR— Helping Elders Access Resources—Elder Justice and Ageism Program

Virginia Helping Elders Access Resources (HEAR) is a video-based program designed to educate Virginians on elder justice and ageism, working to make Virginia a safer place to grow old. Elder mistreatment is a serious, underreported, and growing social issue, affecting at least 1 in 10 older Americans.

Through Virginia HEAR, participants learn to recognize and respond to elder mistreatment using a community-based, multidisciplinary approach to strengthen

collective action across the Commonwealth. The program also connects older adults, their families, and caregivers with valuable information and local support resources. Additionally, Virginia HEAR offers opportunities for those passionate about elder justice and serving older adults to champion and facilitate the program in their local communities, expanding awareness and support statewide.

For more information about Virginia HEAR—Helping Elders Access Resources—Elder Justice and Ageism Program, please contact:

Aisling Clardy, Project Manager

Virginia Center on Aging, VCU Gerontology, Virginia Commonwealth University

Address: PO Box 980228, Richmond, VA 23298

Phone Number: 804-335-9766

Email Address: clardya@vcu.edu

Website: <https://vcoa.chp.vcu.edu/initiatives/abuse-in-later-life/portfolio/hear/>

2025 HONORABLE MENTIONS

Safety and Wellness for Independent Living empowers older adults to continue living in their homes, with dignity and on their own terms. Trained volunteers deliver services and education events that focus on home safety and maintaining wellness.

Services include home safety checks and minor repairs, friendly visits and phone check-ins; and special projects. Safety education events promote fall prevention, avoiding scams, decluttering, and safe movement. Wellness education events include nutrition, chronic disease self-management, enjoying music, and healthy movement. Frequent interaction with volunteers, who themselves are older adults age 55+, reduces isolation and loneliness while supporting social connections. In addition, volunteers help identify individuals needing additional support and access to helpful resources. Prevention and special response activities support older adults during urgent events such as extreme weather and water outages.

As a result of this program, participants report that they are more empowered to remain in their homes, are less isolated, know that they are not alone, and have opportunities to experience joy.

This program operates within a virtual village organization serving older adults within a multigenerational community. The infrastructure we've developed helps support programs like Safety & Wellness for Independent Living. The activities contained in this program were among our early efforts and therefore represent a good way for communities to begin or expand support for older adult neighbors.

For more information about Safety and Wellness for Independent Living, please contact:

Jeanne Comeau, Executive Director
LOWLINC
Address: PO Box 518, Locust Grove, VA 22508
Phone Number: 855-569-5462
Email Address: execdirector@lowlinc.org
Website: <https://lowlinc.org>

Meet Me: Community Outings are free monthly community activities designed for both the diagnosed individual and a care partner or friend to participate together in a brain healthy activity supported by Insight staff and volunteers. Outings give families living with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) or early stage memory loss an opportunity to connect and stay engaged in their community, in a safe and supportive way. Meet Me: Community Outings are chosen with brain health principles in mind, such as visits to museums, gardens, creative arts centers and performances. All outing locations have been researched by Insight Memory Care Center, and venues have been vetted to be both engaging and dementia-friendly. Additionally, Insight staff participate in each outing to provide extra support for the group. Coming together with others on a similar journey can forge lasting relationships as they share new discoveries and confidently remain engaged in their community.

For more information about Meet Me: Community Outings, please contact:

Name: Amy Stirnweis, Grants Manager
Insight Memory Care Center
Address: 3953 Pender Drive Suite 100, Fairfax, VA 22030
Phone Number: 703-204-4664
Email Address: amy.stirnweis@insightmcc.org
Website: <https://www.insightmcc.org/family-support/meet-me-community-outings/meet-me-outings.html>

AGE (Advocacy for Generational Equity) Program is a dynamic partnership between Peninsula Agency on Aging (PAA) and Christopher Newport University's Social Innovation Studies program. Through community-engaged learning, students work alongside PAA to tackle systemic challenges faced by older adults. Since 2023, they have mapped outreach data to identify service gaps, analyzed communications for inclusivity, and participated in advocacy at the Virginia State Assembly. In 2025, the program expanded into a social action campaign focused on policy change to strengthen support for aging services.

This sustained collaboration provides a national model for embedding students in real-world problem-solving. Unlike one-off projects, each semester builds on previous work, ensuring long-term impact. PAA plays a key role in shaping student projects by

identifying critical needs. For example, students created an interactive outreach map to improve service delivery and reviewed PAA's messaging to enhance age-positive, inclusive communication.

Beyond research, AGE connects students and older adults with legislators to advocate for policies that increase funding and resources for aging services. By combining data-driven advocacy with hands-on experience, the program strengthens the region's ability to support its aging population. It also fosters intergenerational collaboration, equipping students with skills in policy research and social innovation while providing PAA with sustained university support. The result is a transformative learning experience that challenges ageism, embeds inclusivity in aging-focused programs, and advances meaningful policy change for older adults.

For more information about AGE (Advocacy for Generational Equity) Program, please contact:

Randi Keesee, Vice President of Development
Peninsula Area Agency on Aging

Address: 739 Thimble Shoals Blvd. Suite 1006, Newport News, VA 23606

Phone Number: 757-933-2618

Email Address: Randi.keesee@paainc.org

Website: <https://paainc.org/>