



News Release

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Commonwealth Council on Aging announces 2024 Best Practices Awards

(RICHMOND, Va.) — The Opening Minds through Art Center at [The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen](#) in Henrico County won the \$5,500 first place Best Practices Award from the Commonwealth Council on Aging.

The OMA Center uses the Opening Minds through Art evidence-based program developed by Scripp’s Gerontology Center at Miami University. The program pairs “elder artists” and trained volunteers for art projects that support creative self-expression and intergenerational social engagement.

“We truly believe that art is a powerful tool that transforms lives and communities,” said Cultural Arts Center President K Alferio. “We are delighted to be recognized by the council’s 2024 Best Practices Awards. Through this award, we hope that it will shed light on the needs that exist as well as how the arts can play a significant role in healing, coping, and joy.”

The council advises the governor and general assembly on issues affecting 1.9 million Virginians aged 60 and older and acknowledges organizations whose innovative programs can be replicated across the commonwealth. The council reviews nominees on seven criteria, including community impact, potential for replication, innovation, outcomes and promotion of aging in the community.

[Richmond Aging and Engaging](#) earned the second-place award of \$3,500 for its Art, Leisure and Recreation Program. Richmond Aging and Engaging provides intergenerational activities to support the health, wellness and quality of life of older adults living independently in low-income, senior apartments in the Richmond region.

[Virginia Voice, Inc.](#) received \$2,500 for its Audio Accessibility and Inclusion Program, which provides access and inclusion for those with blindness and low vision. The Radio Reading Service features volunteer-led readings of print materials and Live Audio Description of local arts performances and community events.

The following programs also received honorable mentions:

- [Arlington Neighborhood Village](#)

- [Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging and Loudoun County Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services](#) for The Rhythm Makers Program
- [Southern Area Agency on Aging's](#) Volunteer Driver Program

“The nominations and the winning programs this year truly highlight the importance of community and connections,” said the council’s Best Practices Awards Committee Chair Debbie Preston. “As we continue to learn more about the negative effects of loneliness and social isolation, it is so important that we acknowledge and celebrate innovative programs that create community engagement through the arts and culture and through services that support aging in place.”

“With a vision to elevate aging, the Division for Aging Services believes the council’s awards are a wonderful opportunity to showcase best practices throughout the state,” said Kiersten Ware, DARS Deputy Commissioner.

The council will hold recognition ceremonies as well as a virtual webinar with the Virginia Association of Area Agencies on Aging later this spring and summer to highlight the 2024 winners. To learn more about this year’s Best Practices Award winners or the council, please visit <https://vda.virginia.gov/boardsandcouncils.htm>.

The council thanks Dominion Energy and AARP Virginia for their financial support of the awards.

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The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, in collaboration with community partners, provides and advocates for resources and services to improve the employment, quality of life, security and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families. For more information, visit dars.virginia.gov.