



News Release

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2020 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS

(RICHMOND, Va.) — Staples for Seniors and Fido's Pantry, a program of the New River Valley Agency on Aging, won the \$5,000 first place Best Practices Award from the Commonwealth Council on Aging. The program offers food assistance to homebound seniors in rural areas and their cats or dogs.

The program's mission is simple: eating should be a choice, not a challenge. Since launching the program in 2019, New River Valley Agency on Aging has served 248 seniors with necessary groceries each month. Fido's Pantry has provided monthly pet food assistance and supplies to 87 of those 248 seniors.

"Staples for Seniors and Fido's Pantry are meeting critical needs in our community," said Tina King, executive director of the New River Valley Agency on Aging. "However, it has been most rewarding to see both programs fostering community spirit and bringing citizens together across our valley, addressing the needs of older adults," she added.

The Commonwealth Council on Aging advises the Governor on issues affecting the 1.8 million Virginians age 60 and older and acknowledges organizations whose innovative programs can be replicated across the Commonwealth. The council judges nominees on seven criteria, including community impact, potential for replication, innovation, outcomes and promotion of aging in the community.

The second-place award of \$3,000 honored Jimmy's PetPals, a companion pet program developed at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital to help patients with dementia have a better hospital experience. PetPals are life-like robotic dogs and cats that pant, bark, turn their heads, wag their tails, purr, meow, and roll over. A hospital employee provided a robotic companion pet to her father, Jimmy, the program's namesake, when he was struggling while hospitalized. The program has served 25 patients since it began in 2018.

Two programs tied for the third place award, splitting the \$2,000 award:

- Medication Safety for Older Arlingtonians, a program of Arlington Agency on Aging, in which older adults receive medication safety education, assistance with Medicare and Medicare Part D prescription coverage and sign-up, information on the safe disposal of medications, and drug deactivation kits.
- Volunteer Solutions' Helping Hands Program, a program of Fairfax County Area Agency on Aging, which helps to de-clutter, organize and perform intensive yard work for older adults and adults with disabilities, allowing them to age in place safely and with dignity.

The following programs also received honorable mentions:

- Housing Stability Learning Labs by Longevity Project for a greater Richmond
- Ride Connection program by Senior Connections, the Capital Area Agency on Aging
- TAKE CHARGE: Care Transitions Intervention by Central Virginia Alliance for Community Living

"Many of the problems facing Virginia's steadily growing older adult population existed before the pandemic, have continued during it, and will be issues for them after its conclusion," said Council Best Practices Committee Chair Dr. Richard Lindsay.

"Our winning programs addressed many of these problems including malnutrition, dementia care, home maintenance and the training of volunteers to assist in service programs. I add my congratulations and thanks to all of our winners and program applicants," he added.

Dominion Energy graciously supports the Commonwealth Council on Aging's Best Practices Awards, which serve to encourage organizations across the Commonwealth to develop and support programs and services that assist older adults to age in their community.

In lieu of in-person recognition ceremonies at this time, the agency will plan a virtual webinar and reception to highlight the 2020 winners.

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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 www.vadars.org or follow DARS on Facebook at www.facebook.com/vadars or Twitter at @vadars.