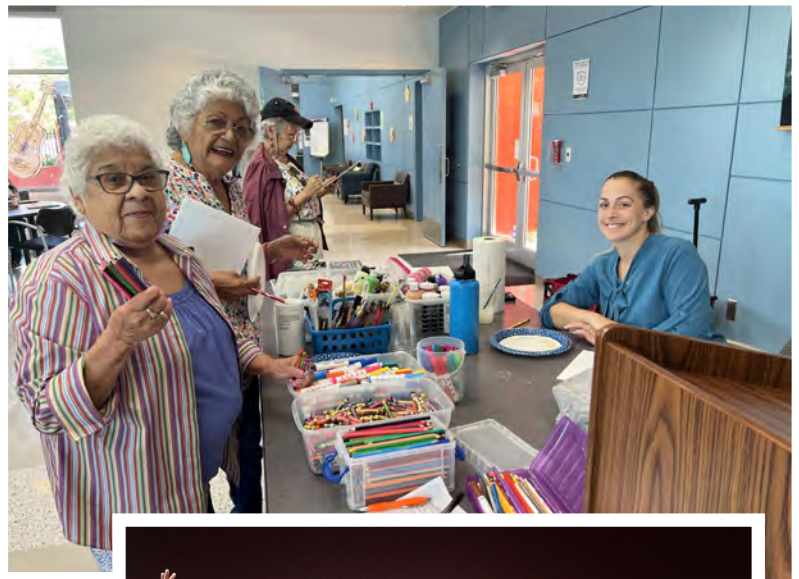


September 2022

Strengthening Community Connections

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Welcome to National Senior Center Month

Senior Centers: Strengthening Community Connections

September 2022

National Senior Center Month, celebrated every year in September, is a wonderful opportunity to showcase your center and market the valuable programs, activities, and services you offer. It's also the perfect time to promote a positive image of aging, highlight how your center improves the lives of local older adults, show your center's importance in the community, and create interest in prospective new participants and collaborative partners.

The National Institute for Senior Center's 2022 theme for National Senior Center Month is ***Strengthening Community Connections***. The 10,000 senior centers in communities and neighborhoods across the country provide access to information, opportunities, and support to improve the lives of people in their communities as they age. Senior centers have evolved since their beginning in the 1940s, through their inclusion in the Older American's Act in 1973, and up to today. But the mission has remained: to be the local, trusted place in the community that connects people to the programs, services, and opportunities they need to age well. Senior centers work with community partners to provide access to health, economic security, social engagement, purpose, creativity, mobility, nutrition—all in a social and fun environment!

This has never been as evident as over the past two and a half years during the coronavirus pandemic. Senior centers continue to be lifelines in the community—helping older adults stay safe, stay active, and stay connected, and, often, serving as core partners in emergency response for the whole community. We learned high-tech, low-tech, and no-tech ways to reach older adults outside the centers' walls. Now, as we are all learning to live with the pandemic, senior centers are applying these new strategies to reach people where and how they are most comfortable.

This September, join senior centers across the nation and celebrate how you *Strengthen Community Connections*! Locally, plan events and activities during Senior Center Month to promote the impact you have and the value you bring to your community—your current and potential participants, collaborative partners, funders, and governance.



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As you plan, consider the following areas for making connections!

Healthy Aging: Highlight how your center connects people to aging well through information and opportunities to learn skills and strategies to prevent and manage chronic disease, prevent falls, participate in physical activity and movement classes, boost nutrition, and more. Learn how senior centers can improve health at www.ncoa.org/article/improving-health-in-senior-centers. Visit NCOA's Center for Healthy Aging at www.ncoa.org/professionals/health/center-for-healthy-aging for more information.

Economic Security: Highlight how your center connects people to greater economic security through information, referrals, and access to benefits and other resources. Learn more about the tools and resources available through NCOA's Center for Benefits Access at www.ncoa.org/article/about-the-center-for-benefits-access. Learn how you can use BenefitsCheckUp® (BenefitsCheckUp.org), a powerful online and newly updated tool to connect older adults and people with disabilities to federal, state, and local benefits.

Generations: Highlight how your center connects all ages through intergenerational programs and activities and by supporting the critical role of grandparents. Consider offering Grand Connections (<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/4256-grand-connections>), a free, downloadable workshop series especially for grandparents of children under five, whether they're caring for grandchildren part-time or 24/7. Check NCOA Connect at <https://connect.ncoa.org/> to register for our September webinar. Sept. 11 is Grandparents Day! Plan a special event to celebrate—check out this guide from Generations United (<https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2018/06/Intergenerational-Report-Grandparents-Day-Take-Action-Guide.pdf>) for ideas.

Diverse Populations: Highlight how your center welcomes all people, including older adults who identify as LGBTQ:

- Learn how you can better support LGBTQ older adults (www.ncoa.org/article/how-can-senior-centers-better-support-lgbtq-older-adults)
- Check out how some senior centers connect with their unique communities like the Center on Addison (www.ncoa.org/article/senior-center-spotlight-center-on-addison-supports-lgbtq-community), the Intercultural Senior Center (www.ncoa.org/article/senior-center-spotlight-intercultural-senior-center-evolves-to-serve-seniors-with-language-barriers) and the Good Samaritan Senior Center (www.ncoa.org/article/senior-center-spotlight-good-sam-senior-center-gives-sense-of-ownership).
- NCOA's Center for Healthy Aging has a number of resources on reaching populations, such as people with disabilities (www.ncoa.org/article/resources-engaging-adults-disabilities-evidence-based-programs), veterans (www.ncoa.org/article/tip-sheet-engaging-veterans-evidence-based-programs), and Native elders (www.ncoa.org/article/how-to-customize-marketing-for-programs-in-indigenous-communities).

Digital Connections: Highlight how your center helps older adults with digital connections, including accessing broadband, gaining skills and confidence in using internet connected devices, and with opportunities to participate in virtual and hybrid programs. Share information about the Affordable Connectivity Program (www.fcc.gov/acp), a Federal Communications Commission benefit program that helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need.

Facts about Senior Centers: As you share information about your senior center, you can use our fact sheet at www.ncoa.org/article/get-the-facts-on-senior-centers to support the value and impact of senior centers across the country.

Connect to NISC and the Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center

- The National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) is the largest national membership organization dedicated to serving senior center professionals. Free to join, NISC supports senior centers with best practices and innovations in programming, as well as networking and training opportunities. If you are not a member yet, please join NISC today at www.ncoa.org/page/nisc-membership-application. And share the link with your colleagues!
- Senior centers nationwide are at a critical juncture and stand to benefit collectively from NCOA's newly funded Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center (www.ncoa.org/professionals/senior-centers/modernizing-senior-centers-resource-center). Gain the tools and resources necessary to develop and implement programs and services that meet the ever-changing needs of older adults.

The National Council on Aging thanks the Administration for Community Living (ACL) for their support of the Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center. Initially funded in September 2021, this three-year Resource Center will help senior centers address their challenges and amplify their successes as they strive to meet the ever-changing needs of older adults. The overarching goal of the new Resource Center is to ensure senior centers have the capacity, tools, and resources necessary to develop and implement programs and services that meet the current and future needs of diverse older adults. This Guide is supported by ACL funding of the Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center.

Save the Date!

Virtual Senior Center Summit – Connecting Across the Country!

Join us online Sept. 23, 2022 from 1-4 p.m. ET as we celebrate senior centers together! Featuring updates from the Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center including insights from our Environmental Scan of Senior Centers, introductions to other ACL resource centers you can use, and an opportunity for small group networking with your colleagues!

Register now at <https://connect.ncoa.org/products/senior-center-summit-celebrating-senior-centers-strengthening-community-connections>

Share Your Stories

Senior centers impact the lives of millions of older adults in big and small ways every day. At NCOA, we know the heart of senior centers are the individual participants and their unique stories. These stories are poignant, impactful, and should be told. Whether your center has improved socialization, supported better physical and mental health, increased community involvement, or offered an evidence-based program that's changed the life of an older adult for the better—your senior center has made an impact, and we want to hear about it.

Please visit www.ncoa.org/article/share-your-senior-center-story to share stories about your participants and how your center has positively affected their lives.

You can also share the template available at <https://www.ncoa.org/article/senior-center-success-stories> with your participants so that they can tell their stories. Then send them to us at membership@ncoa.org

National Senior Center Month Checklist

Strategize. How will you bring recognition to your senior center in your community?

Customize the 2022 poster to bring recognition of National Senior Center Month to your center.

Educate your elected officials about the value of your center to the community.

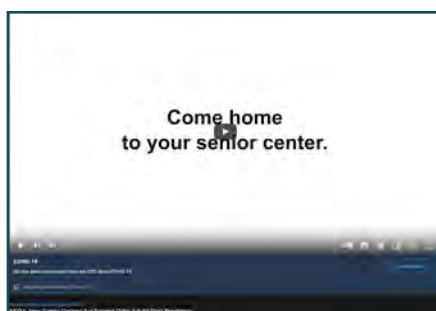
Mix it up. Consider planning a different event each week. Or choose one week out of the month to hold several activities.

Enlist senior center participants. The people who go to your center know best what appeals to their peers. Enlist them to help you create and implement activities.

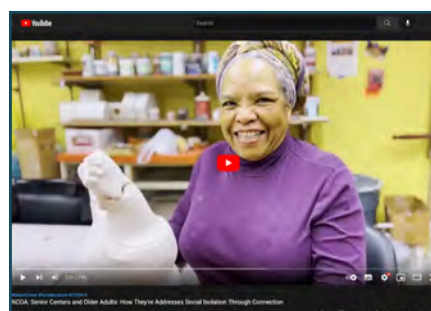
Use the Publicity Guide to capture awareness and promote community involvement and support for your celebration. The guide offers a step-by-step media plan with timelines and tactics.

Share our videos. Supported by the Administration for Community Living, NCOA created two videos that highlight senior centers and how they are welcoming people back! Show the videos in your center, link to them on your website, embed them in your materials! Let people know that they can *Come Home to Your Senior Center!*

youtube.com/watch?v=MpE9AwTwBns



youtu.be/ZaTeXzqdPYs



And then, on Sept. 23, join senior centers throughout our network in a Virtual Senior Center Summit!
[Register here.](#)

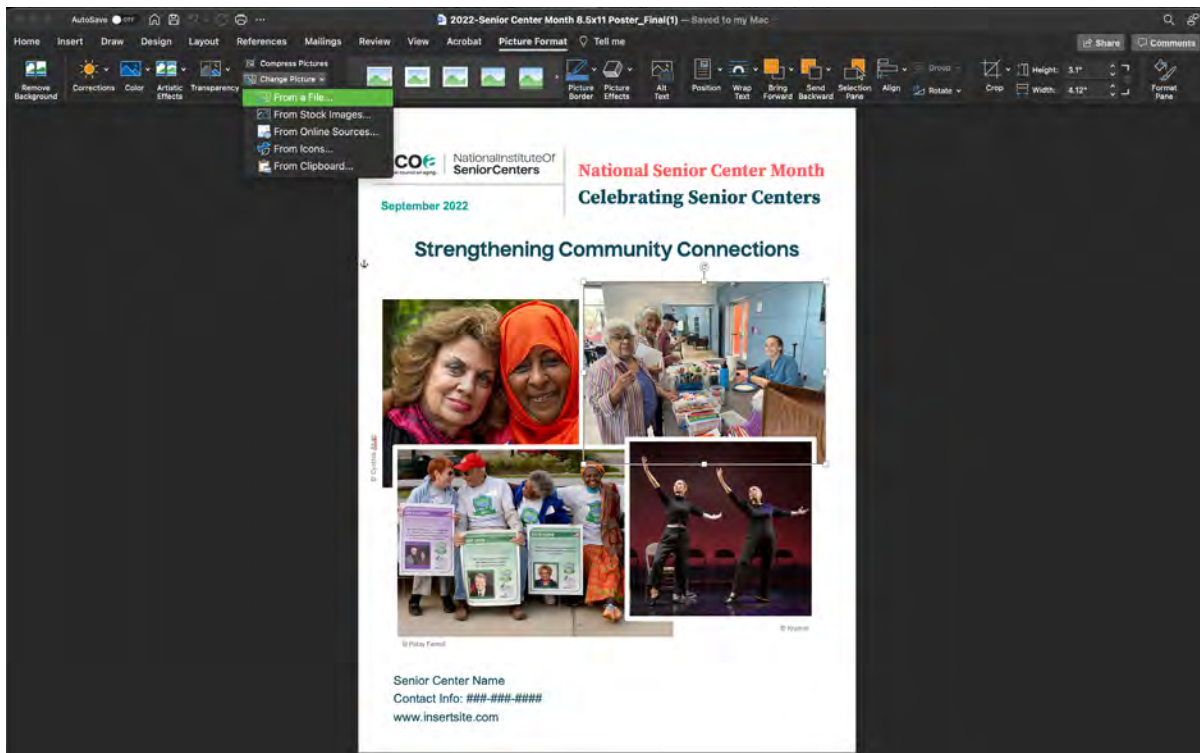
Customize the 2022 Poster

Tailor the National Senior Center Month poster to your center! Add your own photos and contact information. Here's how:



1. Visit <https://ncoa.org/page/national-senior-center-month> and save the poster to your computer.
2. Open the poster using Microsoft Word.
3. Select any of the four rectangles in the poster.
4. Select Picture Format — Click Change Picture From a File.
5. Select a photo from your computer to use. This will work best if the photo is high resolution and square shaped.
6. Click Insert.
7. If the photo does not fit the circle, select the rectangle and click Picture Format — Crop — Fill.

If you customize your poster, please save it as a PDF and share it with us at membership@ncoa.org.



Educate Elected Officials

Educate your elected officials about how public dollars support services and benefits for older adults, caregivers, family members, and the community at large. Senior center staff and participants are well-positioned to explain how limited public investment, along with growing demand, is having a domino effect on programs and services that help older adults remain healthy and independent in their own homes and communities. It's important that Congress understand how older adults and caregivers are being affected by funding and policy decisions. Some ideas:

Tell Your Stories

If your center needs more federal investments, or there are proposed policy decisions that could affect older adults' services or benefits, particularly in response to the pandemic, organize older adults to write stories about what those federal decisions could mean to them and deliver the stories to an elected official, staffer, or candidate for public office. This can help you enlist a member of Congress for support and arm them with real stories for national budget debates. Use our 10 Tips to Harness the Power of Stories at www.ncoa.org/article/10-tips-to-harness-the-power-of-stories for ways to craft message and work with NCOA to get them delivered.

Learn How to Advocate

Our Advocacy Basics resource page at www.ncoa.org/professionals/public-policy/advocacy-basics brings together information on many topics such as best practices for getting an elected official to your events and attending town halls. As you know, much more work needs to be done in response to the pandemic, and you can learn more about plans from Congress and the White House and NCOA priorities on our Public Policy page at www.ncoa.org/professionals/public-policy. Action Center at <https://www.ncoa.org/page/action-center> is a great way to lend your voice to proposed federal legislation.

Champion a National Senior Center Month Proclamation

Ask your mayor or other official to issue a proclamation in honor of National Senior Center Month and build an event around it. A sample proclamation is in the Publicity Guide on page 14 (<https://ncoa.org/page/national-senior-center-month>).

Broadcast Your Message

Invite a local TV or radio station to hold a remote broadcast to highlight your center's work. Enlist participants, community partners, and other key people for interviews about your center's resources and aging issues. Share our videos. Or create your own video to share on social media. See the Publicity Guide for more ideas and a sample media plan.



Connecting with Best Practices

Every day, senior centers across the country offer an exciting array of programs for older adults. The annual NISC Programs of Excellence Awards honor and promote these outstanding efforts. Read about them here, and join us throughout the year as winners are highlighted during webinars. Stay tuned for the call for nominations for 2022 Programs of Excellence! Share information about your own program of excellence with important stakeholders in your community during Senior Center Month.

2021 NISC Programs of Excellence Awards Winners

Marketing and Public Relations

FIRST PLACE

12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS — NORWELL COUNCIL ON AGING

A Grab & Go event designed to safely engage with older residents during the holidays. Each day, an average of 50 people received a surprise giveaway, based loosely on the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Items were put aside daily for homebound to call in to reserve for delivery. Over 12 days, 142 different people participated, for a total of 613 giveaways. Town leaders and volunteers of all ages offered to help with handouts, packaging, and deliveries. Norwell also worked with local cable TV and radio to create PSAs.

Takeaways

1. Everyone needs in-person social connections. This program gave people a purpose each day, to get out of their home and connect with others, even briefly.
2. Adults love surprises just as much as kids! Each day was a different surprise giveaway. That sense of anticipation and excitement was uplifting and appreciated by many.
3. What started out as a way to do something fun for older residents ended up providing a great mental health boost for staff and volunteers, creating a sense of purpose, connection, and excitement during a time when we were separated from our families.
4. Building relationships in the community is important. By doing so, the community will support you if you ask for something specific. Businesses, town leaders, and residents of all ages volunteered or made donations to make this program possible.
5. It's important to publicly recognize and acknowledge those who help you. Many older residents also wrote letters or visited the businesses that participated in this program.

Contact:

Susan Curtin, Norwell Council on Aging, Norwell, Massachusetts, scurtin@townofnorwell.net

HONORABLE MENTION

Caring Calabasas Club — City of Calabasas Senior Center

Community outreach program in which older adults and the community at large craft items or collect/donate goods. The goal was for individuals to contribute time and talent resulting in meaningful multigenerational social interaction and new connections in the community. As a result of media

coverage in a local paper and magazine, there was heightened awareness of the center and the community outreach the center is capable of accomplishing. Positive publicity was created for the city illustrating Calabasas is a caring and compassionate place to live. New leaders that emerged could be called upon and encouraged to take leadership positions within the senior center. Finally, the city awarded the Club funds to continue their activities.

Takeaways

1. Keeping the spirit of community and caring alive, seniors became influencers rather than bystanders even during the pandemic.
2. Engaging community members of all ages in the projects fostered intergenerational social interaction and attracted new members to the senior center.
3. Activities reflected positively on the city and Caring Calabasas Club, by accomplishing meaningful outcomes such as the significant number of items donated.
4. Partnering with 501(c)(3) organizations ensured donated and handmade goods were easily and appropriately received, and forged deeper collaboration with charitable groups.
5. Opportunities arose for participants to learn additional skills and engage in creative activities, as new leaders for each project emerged.

Contact:

Kimberley Post, City of Calabasas Senior Center, Calabasas, California, kpost@cityofcalabasas.com

Cultural Programs

FIRST PLACE

Portraits of Life: Honoring Legacies — Groton Senior Center

Presentation of portraits of local residents with a diagnosis of dementia to bring awareness to the community about the real person who is affected by this disease and reduce the stigma associated with dementia. This project provided all who attended with a more comprehensive understanding of the lives led by those with dementia/Alzheimer's with a goal of leaving attendees uplifted and inspired. The portraits show the person; you cannot see the disease. Over 100 people came to the opening event.

Takeaways

1. A person's life is so much more than the diagnosis of dementia. They have skills, families, and friends. The portraits showed the person and their history.
2. People with mild to moderate dementia are still social, enjoy life, and can be an active part of the community.
3. For the person with dementia and their families, the focus is on their life well lived and not a diagnosis of a terrible disease.
4. For the community, the event brought resources together for people to learn about and share.
5. The program was used to announce a longer-term safety program with the police called Project Lifesaver. This is a radio bracelet program for people who wander managed by the police.

Contact:

Mary Jo Riley, Groton Senior Center, Groton, Connecticut, mjriley@groton-ct.gov

HONORABLE MENTION

Historical Perspectives of Baltimore — Parkville Senior Center

Virtual history program connected a professional and enthusiastic tour guide with participants for a journey into the colorful traditions and back stories of Baltimore. Enthusiastic guide from the Baltimore Tourism Association helped develop a wide-ranging slate of programs that were fun and translatable to a virtual format and encouraged engagement from our audience. Participants increased their knowledge about Baltimore's historical figures, events, and landmarks. They developed connectivity and a sense of community while participating in programs, as many lived during the times of these significant historical events making national headlines

Takeaways

1. People love learning about the charm and history of their town.
2. That enthusiasm and love of place from the presenter is infectious and connects with the participants/residents of this city and encouraged interest and engagement.
3. People responded to the opportunity to remain connected with their city and region, maybe even more so than usual, in the midst of pandemic lockdowns, perhaps yearning to be out and about more as they could in normal times.
4. In an area like the Baltimore region that makes the news more in current times for the struggles in the city, having the opportunity to celebrate the unique history and accomplishments of the region was a draw: served as both a trip down memory lane and a reminder of the many good things in this region.
5. There is a love of learning at all ages and for sharing the memories and experiences of one's generations and those that were handed down to them from their previous generation.

Contact:

James Sloane, Parkville Senior Center, Parkville, Maryland, parkvilleesc@baltimorecountymd.gov

Health and Wellness

FIRST PLACE

Elder Day — Opal Senior Center

Virtual, all-day "Feel Good, Look Great" event organized and held in partnership with the Baltimore County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Offered on a Saturday and participants could join in at any time based on the schedule for the day. The day started with opening remarks from the Alumnae Chapter president followed by a citation by the County Executive. The programs for the day included social, health, self-care, and fitness activities. The day ended with a Silver Screen Showcase which was a talent show that our older adult could participate in as well as alumnae of the sorority. Desire to uplift spirits during the winter and in the middle of the pandemic on a cold January day. The event drew 111 people, which was three times the number for a typical event.

Takeaways

1. Advertise the schedule/program times in advance so participants can pick and choose when to join vs. attending all day.

2. Either set up as a webinar or have a designated person responsible for tech issues like folks not muting themselves.
3. Having partners who can help organize the schedule and book the program providers takes the responsibility off staff.

Contact:

Kathleen Young, Opal Senior Center, Baltimore, Maryland, kyoung@baltimorecountymd.gov

HONORABLE MENTION

Pea Pods — Duxbury Senior Center

Small group cohorts to reduce isolation and increase overall health and wellness. Recruited older adults who weren't being reached via virtual programs. The program was offered two days a week for four hours with social time, educational programming, exercise, a healthy lunch, and a conversation circle. Kept "pods" small and developed safety protocols. Of the 21 people, age 67-90, who signed up, 17 people completed the program. All said loneliness and isolation were reduced, and that there were unexpected benefits including in-depth sharing of life experiences, making new friends, and having more energy.

Takeaways

1. Strong friendships have formed. Participants gather together outside of Pea Pods: they've formed a team in the center's bocce program; they have each other over to their homes; they telephone; and some text each other on the phone between Pea Pod sessions.
2. Participants have stayed healthy and safe. No COVID cases during the course of this program.
3. We've helped reduce seniors' overall loneliness.
4. Participants increased their participation at the center and attended programs outside of Pea Pods. Pre-pandemic, only 28% of participants came to the center to participate in programming three times a week. Now, 50% of participants come to the center three times per week.

Contact:

Joanne Duxbury, Duxbury Senior Center, Duxbury, Massachusetts, joannemoore@duxbury-ma.gov

Nutrition

FIRST PLACE

Nutritional Distribution Outreach — Cheshire Senior Center

Comprehensive nutritional outreach program to meet the needs of all senior citizens within the Cheshire community. The program includes partnerships with several other agencies: New Opportunities, Brass City Harvest, Whitney Rehabilitation Care Center, New England Young at Heart, Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, Meals on Wheels, and the Cheshire Community Food Pantry. These programs combined provided over 2,400 opportunities for older Cheshire residents to access food via food deliveries, grab and go lunches, produce bags, Dash and Dine Meals, and rides to the grocery stores/pantries. They also distributed Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers and assisted with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications.

Takeaways

1. Food insecurity is a significant issue for older people.
2. A collaborative effort across organizations is needed to address food insecurity effectively.
3. In addition to nutritional outreach, this program has provided older people with the opportunity to connect and socialize, especially during the pandemic.
4. The various ways food insecurity has been addressed by this program has helped us reach the largest group of people possible. Using different marketing techniques for different facets of the program has been extremely effective.
5. The senior center has become a focal point for older people within the community for a number of services and resources, helping us recognize gaps in services and create programming to help fill these gaps.

Contact:

Stephanie Theroux, Cheshire Senior Center, Cheshire, Connecticut, stheroux@cheshirect.org

HONORABLE MENTION

Grocery Delivery — Eden Prairie Senior Center Description

Weekly grocery runs for older adults who could not get to a store and/or shop safely. Much-needed emergency interim food program center staff made calls to find out who was most in need and really could not get food for themselves. Staff would call participants on a regular basis to find out what they were lacking and what they needed. Staff would also provide other resources as needed. This reliable and personal connection allowed vulnerable seniors to stay healthy, keep connected, and not suffer from malnutrition or dehydration. Each week the staff would call on these individuals and ask the same questions to make sure all their personal needs were being met.

Takeaways

1. Vulnerable and at-risk seniors were heavily impacted by COVID-19 isolation measures, and were incredibly grateful for personal contact and the service provided.
2. The vulnerable members of our community were hesitant to ask for help, so for the grocery delivery service to come looking to them was an unexpected and valuable amenity.
3. Seeing the different members of the Eden Prairie community come together to help desperate seniors was inspirational. People across multiple agencies in the city contributed to this program.
4. It is important to have resources available for at-risk seniors, but even more important to give those seniors easy access to that information.
5. Seeing and hearing the immediate impact of this program makes it so much easier to serve older adults.

Contact:

Sue Bohnsack, Eden Prairie Senior Center Eden Prairie, Minnesota, sbohnsack@edenprairie.org

Technology

FIRST PLACE

Technology Makers Space - Woodbury Senior Center Older Adults

This project increased confidence in technology by showing how computers can help create beautiful crafts. An old computer lab was converted into an inspirational digital maker-space, equipped with all necessary equipment as well as laptops and tablets for digital learning. Seniors used a CRICUT machine and a GLOWFORGE digital laser engraver/cutter to make purposeful, useful, and beautiful items. The "carrots" in this project are the beautiful, high-quality items people can make for themselves and others. The "stick" is this: in order to create these items (ranging from decals to laser cut furniture), the participant must use a computer to create and set the design. Participants are thrilled to learn they are indeed creators, and to take home their "techy" projects. With each subsequent use, participants become more confident in computer skills ranging from using a mouse cursor and toggling between screens to actual digital design, placement, and creation.

Takeaways

1. All people are creative, but some have not embraced their creative talents. Structuring projects that allow them to modify existing designs or create something completely new was important. The "ah-ha!" moment is fun to watch and helps build confidence in computer learning and other areas.
2. Small group classes are best (5 people or less), but each person will need some 1:1 assistance to use the computer program in designing a project.
3. Safety training was not boring (as anticipated) but helped build excitement.
4. Train people early in the calendar year. Anticipate a sharp increase in participation in the fall when people start thinking about holiday gifting!
5. Significant investment for a small center, but we were fortunate to have some donated money that made it possible. The results have absolutely shown that this was a good investment on our part. We see people learning computer confidence, becoming makers, and exhibiting pride in their creations.

Contact:

Loryn Ray, Woodbury Senior Center Woodbury, Connecticut, lray@woodburyct.org

HONORABLE MENTION

TechTalks — Ateaze Senior Center

Partnership with Requinity, a group of local high school students to teach seniors technology. The program was held twice a month and taught seniors a new type of technology via Zoom. Especially needed during the pandemic with everyone at home, yearning to connect and learn new things. These talks started out as a "How to" connect via Zoom and Webex. They morphed into a step-by-step technology tutor twice a month. Seniors learned to connect to their friends and peers using the technology they already had. If they didn't have a computer, they were taught how to call in to an online meeting. As the talks went on, they began teaching seniors email, how to use smart phones, and even took questions from the seniors as to what they wanted to learn. The students made YouTube videos to send out to seniors for later use.

Takeaways

1. The topic can determine the size of the group of participants; 2-7 participants at each session seemed the right number.
2. Engaging with high school students is beneficial for all. They come with ideas that your staff may not think of or have time to do.
3. Invite your staff to join the sessions. Even the staff learned more about Zoom than we had known before.
4. Open the programs broadly to seniors even if they are not part of your center.

Contact:

Rebecca Ebert, Ateaze Senior Center, Baltimore, Maryland, rebert@baltimorecountymd.gov

Hybrid Programming

FIRST PLACE

Wellness Workshop Without Walls — Whitney Senior Center

Hybrid lifestyle/behavior change programming for an underserved senior population. It was vital to repackage our programming to address realities of social isolation and loneliness. Amazingly, we also recorded just as many virtual contacts throughout the year. 90% of programming is hybrid. In 2021, we logged 20,000 in-person contacts with Whitney's members + 20,000 virtual contacts. Collaborated with universities and health care systems. Maximized project's reach by providing Whitney's programming via 16 mobile technology carts (large TV, mini-PC, accessories) placed around our 14-county region. We provided these carts, funded with grant dollars, to deliver a wealth of hybrid programming to area churches, health facilities, and housing settings.

Takeaways

1. Offer wide-ranging, holistic programming. All offerings are focused on nine dimensions of wellness: physical, emotional, intellectual, interpersonal, cultural, spiritual, environmental, financial, occupational.
2. Form strong community partnerships. One partnership with two area trained 72 university nursing students to facilitate Diabetes Prevention Program workshops.
3. Partner with health care. We partnered with the largest health care system in our area, CentraCare for targeted recruitment of at-risk patients, filling our wellness workshops efficiently.

Contact:

Paula Woischke, Whitney Senior Center, St. Cloud, Minnesota, paula.woischke@ci.stcloud.mn.us

HONORABLE MENTION

Senior Center Without Walls — Sowega Council on Aging

Fully virtual senior center serving 14 counties in southwest Georgia. This robust program includes nutritious restaurant meals and innovative activities. A variety of activities are designed to engage seniors and reduce social isolation. Activities are held via telephone, Zoom, and in-person. Hybrid options are available for all evidence-based programs and educational sessions; many in-person

activities (held at libraries and YMCAs, for example) are livestreamed via Facebook and posted to our YouTube library. Pilot program using Claris Companion tablets. New model completely refashions what a senior center is, strengthens community partnerships, and is attractive to baby boomers. Have tripled the number of individuals served.

Takeaways

1. The senior center without walls (SCWW) program is enticing to seniors looking for a healthy meal and activities in their local communities. It resolved the issue of declining participation in our traditional senior centers, with participation tripling.
2. It encourages the development of more local partnerships and relationships.
3. It benefits local economies by using local restaurants and other non-profits to deliver services.
4. The model is more resilient to economic and health-related issues such as workforce shortages, supply chain issues, and pandemics.
5. The program is efficient to operate, using only a few full-time administrative staff vs. the nearly 100 employees and extensive logistics required for traditional centers.

Contact:

Izzie Sadler, Sowega Council on Aging, Albany, Georgia, izzie.sadler@sowegacoa.org

Reducing and Preventing Social Isolation

FIRST PLACE

CheckMates — JCC of Greater Pittsburgh

Weekly phone calls from a peer to reduce social isolation and connect older adults to resources via caring discussions. Healthy relationships are necessary at every age and perhaps even more vital for older adults who are feeling isolated, but still living independently. Twenty-two volunteers developed strong bonds over the phone with those they called. Volunteers provide information about upcoming programs and events that are available including activities around socialization, education, congregate and home delivered meals, COVID-19 vaccine information & clinics, and more. In 2021, 11,421 calls were made with an average of 219/week.

Takeaways

1. Often the phone calls turn into a phone friendship that develops over time. Volunteers benefit just as much as the recipient, sometimes in different ways.
2. Before and during the pandemic, these calls created a connection so older adults knew someone was thinking about them and could also provide caring support, with their words, and concrete support when our social worker could connect the person to needed resources in the community.
3. Volunteers benefited by having the opportunity to continue volunteering during the pandemic, unlike so many other volunteer opportunities. Our volunteers found that by calling from home, they were able to spend more time talking with their CheckMates "friends" and developed a stronger bond.
4. Although the pandemic impacted everyone in so many ways, we noticed the older adults who were already receiving phone calls seemed to be less impacted because they were already aware of available resources, staying home wasn't unusual, and they were already connected (and felt connected) to other people.

5. Many of our older adults wanted weekly phone calls after the first month or two of the pandemic (once they realized that this isolation was going to last for a long time).

Contact:

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HONORABLE MENTION

Rooted in Resilience — Overlea Fullerton Senior Center

Year-long initiative to address the challenges of social isolation as well as other hardships experienced during the pandemic via monthly, themed activities. Department staff and volunteers created monthly themes related to becoming more resilient as well as a monthly newsletter and challenge. The newsletter included a checklist of activities and recommendations of things to try that focused on that theme. There were at least 10 virtual or hybrid programs that also related to the theme that people received a chance for winning a gift card at the end of month when they attended and participated. At the end of the month, a wrap-up meeting was held so participants could share their experiences that month and the drawing for the three gift cards were made.

Takeaways

1. Attendance ranged from 75 in virtual attendance to smaller groups of five for some programs.
2. Over 125 seniors participated in the program, and many verbally expressed gratitude for the program and improvement in their own resilience during the challenge of isolation.

Contact:

Paula Skleres, Overlea Fullerton Senior Center, Baltimore, Maryland, pskleres@baltimorecountymd.gov



Connect with NCOA Initiatives

Falls Prevention Awareness Week

September 18 – 24, 2022

Falls Prevention Awareness Week raises awareness about how to prevent falls among older adults. During the week, national, state, and local partners educate the community about the impact of falls, share falls prevention strategies, and advocate for the expansion of evidence-based falls prevention programs.

Top 7 activities for senior centers

1. Develop a falls prevention awareness week campaign: Take advantage of the NCOA Falls Prevention Awareness Week Toolkit at ncoa.org/article/falls-prevention-awareness-week-toolkit to maximize your impact in raising falls prevention awareness in your community. These resources include social media graphics, resources for older adults and caregivers, and tips for talking about falls with others.
2. Falls Prevention is a Team Effort: Create new or strengthen existing connections with those in your community who are involved in falls prevention, including first responders/emergency medical technicians, pharmacists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, podiatrists, nurses, faith-based organizations, hardware stores, and others. Check out and share the interactive infographic posted on www.ncoa.org/article/falls-prevention-is-a-team-effort that shows the important role of senior centers and other community partners in reducing falls among older persons.
3. Share NCOA's Falls Free CheckUp tool: This is a no-cost online screening tool (ncoa.org/fallsfreecheckup) with 12 questions older adults can answer to understand their risk of falls. At the end of the screen, the tool will display a score, and older adults can email the results to themselves to share with their health care provider.
4. Host a virtual educational presentation or workshop Educate older adults about falls risk factors and prevention strategies.
5. Plan an in-person or remote falls prevention health fair: Share educational handouts, connect older adults with community resources and services, and/or demonstrate falls prevention workshops or classes via a webinar. Invite local partners to join the health fair and provide risk screens and other resources (<https://www.ncoa.org/article/how-to-plan-a-falls-prevention-event>).
6. Educate and Advocate: Educate your elected officials about how public dollars support evidence-based falls prevention programs for older adults, caregivers, family members, and the community at large. Join our webinar on July 27, 2022 at 1 p.m. EST to hear from your peers and learn strategies used to engage with local stakeholders and decision makers.
7. Provide falls risk screenings: Collaborate with community health specialists to host virtual falls risk screenings that include vision exams, balance and gait testing, home safety recommendations, and/or medication reviews. Explore who is part of your falls prevention team (<https://ncoa.org/article/falls-prevention-is-a-team-effort>) and them to volunteer their time. Or work with a local university to coordinate student volunteers, such as professional physical therapy, optometry, or pharmacy students.

Hunger Action Month

Senior centers can make a difference in the fight against hunger.

NCOA works with senior centers and other community organizations nationwide to enroll eligible older adults in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps).

SNAP helps seniors stretch their food budget. Yet, SNAP is highly underutilized by older adults, who participate at a much lower rate than the general population.

September is Hunger Action Month. A few ways your senior center can get involved:

1. **Learn:** Find out more about the impossible choices of hunger around your community.
2. **Commit:** Take the pledge to make food a certainty, not a choice.
3. **Speak Up:** Choose to use your voice to create change and help address the hunger issue. Inspire positive action. Send a virtual paper plate with your personal message to Congress.

Sept. 23 is Hunger Action Day

Orange is the color of hunger. This Hunger Action Day, let's stand together by wearing orange, turning our city landmarks orange, and raising our voices all across the country on behalf of the millions of people facing hunger.

Raise awareness in your community

- Adopt your local food pantry — Ask them what they need and how your senior center participants can help. Provide volunteers, hold food drives, and collect needed items.
- Invite older adults in your community to get screened to see if they are eligible for SNAP. Use our free BenefitsCheckUp® tool (benefitscheckup.org) to help seniors find out if they qualify and download their state's application.
- Use our SNAP outreach materials available at www.ncoa.org/article/snap-outreach-enrollment-tools to reach older adults in your community and encourage them to apply for SNAP.
- Download our free customizable flyers, posters, placemats, and brochure and distribute these materials in places where older adults gather.

Boost Your Budget

Public and private benefits are a lifeline to helping low-income people with Medicare age well. But research has shown that there are still many barriers to enrollment in these programs, including knowledge of benefits and how to apply. As a result, millions of older adults are likely eligible for, but not enrolled in, benefits that can save money on health care, prescriptions, food, and more.

Boost Your Budget® is a national campaign every April that unites aging and disability service providers under a common charge to:

- Educate low-income Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers about the benefits available to improve their health and economic security, and
- Connect individuals to online (like BenefitsCheckUp.org) and community resources for benefits screening and application assistance.

NCOA welcomes senior centers to use our outreach materials to assist low-income seniors and adults with disabilities to enroll in benefits. You can learn more about how your center can get involved at www.ncoa.org/article/how-senior-centers-can-help-older-adults-save-money. There is no limit on what your organization may do to draw attention to your services. For example, you may wish to:

- Share information about benefits as part of a food drive, health fair, or tax assistance event
- Sponsor a “telethon” at your local radio or TV station
- Run ads in local newspapers or on social media
- Invite media, legislators, and the public to tour your facility and learn about the importance of benefits for your community

Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day

During the National Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day Symposium, resources on older adult behavioral health were collected from federal agencies and national partners and compiled on the Partner Resources page at <https://connect.ncoa.org/oamhad2022-partner-resources>. You can watch these sessions and more on-demand by registering for free at <https://connect.ncoa.org/oamhad2022>. If you are interested in learning more about the OAMHAD Symposium, please email healthyaging@ncoa.org.

A Look at Trauma-Informed Care

Up to 90% of older adults have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. This session addressed the importance of a trauma-informed care framework to create a community environment that understands, recognizes, and responds to the effect of the experience of trauma in older adults.

Key takeaways from the session:

- Many older adults have experienced trauma, and the effects and impacts can evolve over time.
- Trauma can be triggered by a broad range of circumstances and situations, including those that may be intended to help the individual.
- There are proven strategies to provide older adults with care that promotes safety and helps resolve trauma.

Understanding and Preventing Suicide in Older Adults

Older adults comprise more than 16% of the population, but approximately 18% of suicides. This session discussed risk factors for suicide in older adults, how it varies across gender and racial/ethnic subgroups, and interventions that can help to prevent suicide.

Key session takeaways:

- Older adults are at risk for social isolation, loneliness, and suicide.
- Prevention measures include routine screening for depression, ensuring access to care for other conditions or diseases and connecting older adults to community services.
- Programs that serve older adults, such as home delivered meals, can play a vital role in identifying mental health needs in the population they serve.

A Look at Grief and Loss through a Lens of Hope

Many older adults are affected by grief and loss, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This session examined the different types of grief and highlighted forms of grief expression.

Key session takeaways:

- Grief expresses itself in many forms and does not follow one specific path or cycle.
- Prolonged grief disorder is a new diagnosis and is a form of grief that is persistent and pervasive and interferes with functioning. This is distinct from grief or depression.
- Grief expression such as through art and writing can be helpful for coping with grief and can take many forms.

During Senior Center Month, promote a program your center offers that aims to improve the mental health of older adults. This program could be one focusing on social engagement, peer support, wellness check-ins, physical activity, or a partnership you have with local mental health providers.

National Suicide and Crisis Prevention Lifeline – 988

Older Americans continue to experience the highest rates of suicide in the U.S. Help is available! The newly launched 988 Suicide and Crisis Prevention Lifeline is intended to get help to people with suicide ideation and/or those experiencing a mental health crisis. The easy-to-remember number—988—provides help 24 hours a day, 365 days per year and connects those in crisis with local resources. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has created a toolkit available at <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/partner-toolkit> that includes fact sheets, messaging, a presentation deck, and other resources you can use during Senior Center Month and throughout the year to spread the word about the new 988 Suicide and Crisis Prevention Lifeline.



September Holidays and Observances

Visit the following websites for more information around which to build programs and activities and strengthen community connections during Senior Center month.

HEALTH & FITNESS

National Food Safety Month

www.foodsafety.gov/

National Preparedness Month

<https://www.epa.gov/natural-disasters/september-preparedness-month>

National Cholesterol Awareness Month

www.cdc.gov/cholesterol/cholesterol_education_month.htm

Hunger Action Month

www.HungerActionMonth.org

Falls Prevention Awareness Week: Sept. 18-24

<https://www.ncoa.org/article/falls-prevention-awareness-week-toolkit>

National Women's Health & Fitness Day: Sept. 28

www.fitnessday.com/women/index.htm

ENRICHMENT

International Women's Friendship Month

www.kappadelta.org/international-womens-friendship-month/

International Literacy Day: September 8

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/literacy-day>

American Red Cross Home Fire Campaign: Sound the Alarm Save a Life

www.redcross.org/sound-the-alarm.html

National Employ Older Workers Week: Sept. 26-30

www.doleta.gov/Seniors/html_docs/NatEmplOldWkr.cfm

National Voter Registration Day: Sept. 30

www.nationalvoterregistrationday.org/about

FUN ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES

Grandparents Day: Sept. 11

<https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2018/06/Intergenerational-Report-Grandparents-Day-Take-Action-Guide.pdf>

<https://ncoa.org/article/make-every-day-grandparents-day-try-these-wellness-focused-activities-with-your-grandkids>



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