

COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING 2023 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 sponsorship from Dominion Energy and AARP Virginia, the Council encourages the development of these innovative programs.

2023 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS

FIRST PLACE (\$5,500): Mountain Empire Older Citizens (MEOC) for its METGo! Program

Launched in June 2021 by MEOC, METGo! has successfully implemented ride-hailing service in a rural area previously unserved by same-day transportation options. Becoming the “Uber” of public transit in southwestern Virginia, METGo! explores how ride-hailing technology improves service efficiency and rider experiences in rural areas. Initial funding for METGo! was provided through the Federal Transit Administration Integrated Mobility Innovation Demonstration Research Program Grant with oversight provided by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT).

Riders in rural, remote areas have long faced the barrier of having to provide 24-hour notice when booking “demand-response” trips. This prevents rural residents from obtaining same-day service to meet daily needs for healthcare, food, services, socialization, shopping, education and employment. METGo! addresses this challenge by providing real-time service to riders. Through the Via Mobility technology, METGo! makes it simple and easy for rural riders, such as older adults and individuals with disabilities, to schedule safe, reliable, on-demand transportation at their convenience. Each METGo! van accommodates seven ambulatory passengers and one passenger in a wheelchair. Using the Via Mobility smartphone app, riders in METGo! service area can schedule a ride and track their van in real time.

In its first full year, METGo! provided 39% of MEOC trips within its 1,390-square-mile service area and completed over 40,000 trips for more than 8,000 unique riders. Over 26,000 of these trips were provided to older adults or individuals with disabilities. METGo! averages close to 200 rides per day. METGo! has been featured in local, state and national news stories as cost-effective, technology-based, life-changing model of microtransit in a rural setting.

To learn more about METGo! contact:

Michael Wampler, Executive Director, Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc., PO Box 888, Big Stone Gap, VA 24219, Phone: 276-523-4202, Email: mwampler@meoc.org, and Website: www.meoc.org

**COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING
2023 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS**

SECOND PLACE (\$3,500): Joyful Voices Chorus

Joyful Voices Chorus is a community chorus for singers with Alzheimer's or other dementias and their caregivers. At Joyful Voices, members sing together to stimulate the mind, energize the body, and elevate the spirit, defying dementia one song at a time.

Joyful Voices provides a true choral experience for the singers and caregivers in a unique, positive, and accepting setting. Music is powerful, and people with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia can enjoy and excel at singing even when unable to do other things.

The musical learning, teambuilding, movement, and weekly socialization together in rehearsals, provide an uplifting experience for all involved. Volunteer singers contribute an essential underlying carpet of sound which assists our singers in learning the repertoire. They deliver one-on-one assistance to participants when needed and contribute to the loving, welcoming atmosphere that participants enjoy. The culmination of these efforts is both spring and fall [concerts](#) each season.

In its five years of existence, Joyful Voices has touched more than 40 singers with Alzheimer's and other dementias and their caregivers. Extended family members of the singers have been strengthened by witnessing their loved ones performing in a concert with abject joy on their faces. Volunteers often share that the highlight of their week is the time spent singing, sharing, laughing, and dancing at Joyful Voices.

To learn more about Joyful Voices Chorus contact:

Joanne Sherman, Artistic Director, 13621 W. Salisbury Rd., Midlothian, VA 23113, Phone: 804-794-5311 x128, Email: joyfulvoicessherman@gmail.com, and Website: www.JoyfulVoicesChorus.org

THIRD PLACE (\$2,500): The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) for its Live Active, Live Healthy, Live Modern Senior Retreat ("LIVE")

DBVI's LIVE Program is a one-week retreat for older adults experiencing vision loss affecting their ability to read, get around independently, take care of their home, and enjoy hobbies. Instruction and services are provided to participants in the areas of coping with vision loss, daily living skills, independent travel skills, access technology skills, diabetes education, nutritional consultation, and recreational/wellness activities.

As the only program of its kind for blind older adults (aged 55 and older) in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the LIVE Program is held each year for up to 14 participants, each with an accompanying plus one (for a maximum of 28 total attendees). The LIVE Program is held on the campus of the Virginia Rehabilitation

COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING 2023 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS

Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI) in Richmond, Virginia. At the conclusion of the program, DBVI sends a individualized program report to each participant's DBVI Rehabilitation Teacher. The report contains a summary of training classes and program activities the individual participated in and reports from instructors about the participant's accomplishments, strengths, challenges, and the instructors' recommendations in a variety of subject areas (Access Technology, Braille, Computer/Keyboarding, Orientation and Mobility (Cane Travel), and Personal and Home Management).

Beginning in 2023, the LIVE Program will be expanded to two-weeks to allow participants a longer immersive experience at VRCBVI. The LIVE Program fills up quickly and always has a waitlist due to high demand. Over the past five years, the LIVE Program has served over 90 older Virginians.

To learn more about the LIVE Program contact:

Brooke H. Rogers, Assistant Director for Administration, Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired/Virginia Department for the Blind & Vision Impaired, 401 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227, Phone: 804-371-3323, Email: Brooke.Rogers@dbvi.virginia.gov, and Website: <https://www.vrcbvi.virginia.gov/>

2023 HONORABLE MENTIONS

Aging in Community (AiC) Leadership Team

The AiC Leadership Team is a striking example of an effective interagency collaboration to address the needs of older adults. The AiC Team was created to implement recommendations from the 2011 Livability Initiative, a five-year planning effort coordinated by the Regional Commission of the New River Valley (NRV). The team is composed of 15 members with a wide variety of expertise from town and county government, health and social service agencies, regional nonprofits, and higher education. A decade of effort has demonstrated the benefit of collaboration and reflects a best practice worthy of emulation.

According to the AARP, nearly 90% of adults over 65 want to remain in their current homes as they grow older. The AiC Team has focused on helping adults and the organizations that serve them to make plans that will allow them to age successfully and safely in their communities.

Among the AiC Team's successes are a suite of widely used publications about aging in the community, numerous workshops and training sessions, and the development of an Aging in Place website to encourage broad dissemination of the AiC Team's free

COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING 2023 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS

materials. The [Aging in Place](#) website reflects the growing interest in the work of this Team and has recorded 2,300 visitors since 2020. The Town of Blacksburg was recently awarded the Virginia Municipal League (VML) Innovation Award for its use of the Aging in Place workbook materials developed by the AiC Team.

To learn more about the AiC Leadership Team contact:

Tina King, Executive Director, New River Valley Agency on Aging, 6226 University Park Drive, Suite 3100, Fairlawn, VA 24141, Phone: 540-980-7720, Email: tinaking@nrvaoa.org, and Website: <https://nrvaoa.org/>.

*Also, please note that the New River Valley Agency on Aging will have a different physical address beginning mid-April: 44 Third St., NW, Pulaski, VA 24301.

Fairfax Area Agency on Aging (FAAA) for its Fairfax Caregiver Alert Notifications Program (FCANP)

The journey of caregiving can be challenging and overwhelming. FAAA's FCANP offers family caregivers of older adults and adults with a disability a convenient way to remain informed, obtain education, and easily access programs and services offered by the FAAA and other Fairfax County departments. This free, subscription-based program leverages technology to share information with caregivers via text messages, emails, and/or voice communication methods.

The Fairfax Alerts System is a free service offered by the Fairfax Office of Emergency Management (FOEM) to inform residents of emergencies and other news. In 2019, FAAA approached FOEM to collaborate and use the Alerts System as an educational tool to support family caregivers. After a partnership was established, FOEM created an additional subscription on their Alert Systems titled FAAA/Caregiving and offered one-hour training to FAAA staff on how to use the System. Upon subscription to the FCANP, family caregivers receive weekly notifications with new and customized information about caregiver educational programs, health and wellness workshops, webinars, support groups, and other supportive services. The program positively contributes to family caregivers' quality of life and wellbeing by promoting meaningful community engagement, connection, and awareness about caregiver resources.

Since 2019, the FCANP has sent out 360 notifications through texts, emails, and voice communication messages to 1,150 people on educational programs, support calls, consultations, and other resources. Currently, there are 1,150 subscribers to the FCANP.

To learn more about FCANP contact:

Giuliana L. Valencia, Supervisor-Caregiving & Supportive Services Unit, Fairfax Area Agency on Aging, 12011 Government Center Parkway Suite 708, Fairfax, VA 22035,

**COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING
2023 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS**

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Piedmont Senior Resources Area Agency on Aging Inc. (PSR) for its Non-Emergency Medical Transportation

Using a mix of public and private funding, PSR serves the Planning District 14 with non-emergency transportation to and from medical appointments inside and outside the region. As a grant-funded program that serves older adults in Amelia, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, Lunenburg, Nottoway, and Prince Edward counties, PSR currently provides non-emergency medical transportation with three PSR-owned passenger vans (equipped with accessibility for people with special mobility needs) as well as through a VolMed program, which includes volunteers using non-PSR vehicles to transport older adults to and from their non-emergency medical appointments.

With no large-scale mass transit or no rapid response transportation that is accessible and affordable in the region, this program stays booked a month and a half to two months in advance. In the last fiscal year, PSR provided more than more than 940 one-way trips for older adults with three vans, used more volunteers and paid staff, and traveled more than 58,000 miles. According to survey results, 49% of clients said their overall health was good before using PSR's NEMT services, while 11% said their health was poor. After having had access to PSR's NEMT transportation services, 22% rated their health as excellent and the rate of those in poor health decreased by 3%. Almost 95% of clients reported that the program had a positive impact on their health outcomes. In 2021, PSR received a nationwide US Aging's Aging Achievement Award for Innovation in Transportation for this program.

To learn more about PSR's NEMT contact:

Thomas Jordan Miles III, Director of Transportation and Nutrition, Piedmont Senior Resources Area Agency on Aging, 1413 S. Main St., Farmville, VA 23901, Phone: 434-767-5588, Email: jmiles@psraaa.org, and Website: www.psraaa.org