

## **COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING BEST PRACTICES AWARDS 2017-2025**

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, the Council encourages the development of these innovative programs.

### **2025 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS**

#### **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:

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**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:

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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.

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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:

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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

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**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

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Phone Number: 703-204-4664

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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

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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:

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Peninsula Area Agency on Aging  
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Website: <https://paainc.org/>

## **2024 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS**

### **FIRST PLACE (\$5,500): The Opening Minds through Art (OMA) Center at The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen (CACGA).**

Developed through research at the Scripp's Gerontology Center at Miami University and reproduced across the country, Opening Minds through Art (OMA) is an award-winning, evidence-based, intergenerational art-making program for people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias (PWD). The failure-free program provides opportunities for creative self-expression and social engagement for PWD, while providing volunteers with opportunities to improve their attitudes toward aging through weekly interaction with OMA participants. Originally designed to take place in care facilities, CACGA has implemented a center-based program that also includes caregivers. CACGA's OMA Center is offered in 8-week sessions during which "Elder Artists" are paired with specially-trained volunteers who assist the Elder Artist in cart-making projects that feature the OMA methodology and key principles. Through CACGA, this program is open to any family dealing with a dementia diagnosis and is offered free-of-charge to participants. Since starting the program in 2022, CACGA has trained over 125 volunteers and has had about 50 participants complete the program.

For more information about The OMA Center, please contact:

Cindy Rinker, Education Coordinator  
The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen  
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**SECOND PLACE (\$3,500): The Art, Leisure, and Recreation Program through Richmond Aging and Engaging**

Richmond Aging and Engaging (RAE) provides intergenerational arts, leisure, and recreation activities to support the health, wellness, and quality of life of older adults living independently in low-income senior apartment buildings. Programming is provided on a weekly basis in the buildings where participants live. The programming is flexible and adaptable to meet the unique interests and needs of residents in each building served and is guided by feedback from participant advisory committees. Activities may include physical games (e.g., balloon pickleball, cornhole, bowling), crafting (e.g., crochet, weaving, clay sculpting, card-making), and social/cognitive games (e.g., charades, family feud, bingo, board games, cards). Additionally, the award-winning and evidence-based Opening Minds through Art (OMA) is implemented yearly at each site and concludes with a community art exhibition, with previous work even featured in statewide art exhibits. Local college students assist in leading the activities and engaging with participants. These intergenerational experiences foster social connectedness and promote a more vibrant and inclusive society. In a year, Richmond Aging and Engaging has served 46 residents across three buildings with the support of 49 college student volunteers. Richmond Aging and Engaging aims to expand to more buildings in 2024.

For more information about Richmond Aging and Engaging, please contact:

Jodi Winship, Executive Director  
Richmond Aging and Engaging  
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Website: [www.agingandengaging.org](http://www.agingandengaging.org)

**THIRD PLACE (\$2,500): The Audio Accessibility and Inclusion Program through Virginia Voice, Inc.**

Virginia Voice's Audio Accessibility and Inclusion Program focuses on providing access and inclusion for those with blindness and low vision to the same everyday community engagements their sighted peers enjoy. The Radio Reading Service features volunteer-led readings of print materials, such as local newspapers, national media, and topical programming on subjects such as pet care and gardening, via radio, smart speaker, and online streaming 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. The Live Audio Description (LAD) of events provide real-time audio descriptions of visual aspects that are key to the enjoyment and understanding of local arts performances, such as the theatre and ballet,

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as well as for community events. Through LAD, Virginia Voice partners with area museums to record audio descriptions of current exhibitions and with local businesses that need to provide audio described information for their employees and customers. Virginia Voice supports a community of 11,000 Central Virginians with blindness and low vision, 80% of whom are adults 65 and older with medical diagnoses that impact their vision who often experience isolation. Nearly 73% of our listeners say that Virginia Voice's services make them feel more connected to the Richmond metro community, and 81% say Virginia Voice helps to alleviate their social isolation.

For more information about Virginia Voice, please contact:

Yvonne Mastromano, Chief Executive Officer  
Virginia Voice  
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Website: <https://www.virginiavoice.org>

## 2024 HONORABLE MENTIONS

**Arlington Neighborhood Village (ANV)** helps older adults age in place safely in their own homes by providing access to friendly volunteer support and social connection. Over 285 trained and vetted volunteers provide the practical help and social support needed for successful aging in place. Volunteer-provided assistance, which includes rides, errands, friendly visits, daily check-in calls, foodbank deliveries, and technology help, make it easier for older Arlingtonians to remain in their homes. ANV's full social calendar and opportunities for connection also help keep loneliness and social isolation at bay. ANV membership is open to adults 55+ in Arlington. ANV's current membership is 393 members, ranging in age from 58 to 102. Roughly three in four members are female; 44% are over 80 years old; 16% represent diverse backgrounds; 31% have challenges with mobility, hearing, or sight; 60% live alone, and 35% are lower-income seniors who receive financial aid through ANV's Discounted Membership Program. In 2023, ANV fulfilled 97% of member requests. Of the 4,000+ volunteer services provided, ANV responded to 1,764 requests for transportation, 752 requests for errands, 664 requests for friendly visits, 510 requests for household chores, and 218 requests for technology coaching. Membership increased 20% in 2023 (from 328 to 393 members), and in the coming year, ANV projects that it will increase to 450, of which 160 will be lower income members through the Discounted Membership Program.

For more information about Arlington Neighborhood Village, please contact:

Wendy Zenker, Executive Director  
Arlington Neighborhood Village  
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Website: [www.ANVarlington.org](http://www.ANVarlington.org)

**Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging (AAA)/Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS)** developed **The AAA Rhythm Makers**, an innovative hand chime program that creates opportunities for people with cognitive impairment and their caregivers to have positive and successful interactions through music. By utilizing music to create this unique group, the program gives individuals with early to moderate stage cognitive impairment a purpose and routine, and it is open to community residents who may not normally be able to participate in other group settings. Student volunteers from local high schools are integral to the success of the program as they provide support by assisting the group leader. Since the inception of The AAA Rhythm Makers in 2022 the group has grown significantly and is at capacity (26 participants). Participants return each month and never miss the opportunity to perform. The AAA Rhythm Makers have held several live performances at senior centers and parks, which have been attended by hundreds of community members.

For more information about The AAA Rhythm Makers, please contact:

Name: Lori Stahl, Elder Resources Case Manager

Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging/PRCS

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Website: Loudoun.gov/aaa

**Southern Area Agency on Aging's (AAA) Volunteer Driver Program (VDP)** utilizes residents of Henry, Franklin, Patrick and Pittsylvania Counties as well as the cities of Danville and Martinsville who volunteer their time and use of their vehicle, to transport ambulatory older adults to out of town medical appointments. Many medical specialists and medical surgeries cannot be obtained within the West Piedmont Planning District borders. For many, care must be sought out of the region. Through the VDP, volunteer drivers are screened with a criminal/DMV background check, vehicle safety inspection, and driver safety test. Southern AAA reimburses the volunteer drivers for gas and vehicle wear and tear. In the last three years, over 1,240 clients have been served, making an ongoing impact with about 80% of clients receiving multiple trips, often on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. In Fiscal Year 2023, the VDP completed 1,076 one-way trips.

For more information about Southern AAA's Volunteer Driver Program, please contact:

Kim Mason, Mobility Manager

Southern Area Agency on Aging

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Phone Number: 276-632-6442

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### 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:

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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](mailto:mwampler@meoc.org), and Website: [www.meoc.org](http://www.meoc.org)

### **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](mailto:joyfulvoicessherman@gmail.com), and Website: [www.JoyfulVoicesChorus.org](http://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.

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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 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](mailto: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.

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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 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@nrvoa.org](mailto:tinaking@nrvoa.org), and Website: <https://nrvoa.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:

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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](mailto:jmiles@psraaa.org), and Website: [www.psraaa.org](http://www.psraaa.org)

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**2022 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS**

**FIRST PLACE (\$5,000): NV Rides**

NV Rides was founded in 2014 after data from Fairfax County revealed that seniors wished to age in place were concerned about transportation when they may no longer be able to drive. NV Rides is a network of volunteer rides programs serving seniors and persons with disabilities in the Northern Virginia region. NV Rides operates in Arlington, Loudoun, Fairfax, and Prince William counties through a partnership of 15 organizations (e.g., community centers, Shepherd's Centers, and faith-based organizations) that provide free rides to older adults via a network of volunteer drivers. Funded via a grant from the Washington Council of Governments with matching funding from Fairfax County, NV Rides supports volunteer transportation in the Northern Virginia region through coordination of rides, marketing, software, and volunteer recruitment and background checks provided to partner organizations. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, NV Rides also provides contactless deliveries from grocery stores, pharmacies, and food banks. In 2021, NV Rides partners served 926 seniors with a network of 506 drivers. Since inception, NV Rides has provided over 60,000 rides and visits, with over 20,377 rides, deliveries and visits in 2021. With its diverse coalition of organizations that serve seniors in the region and an emphasis on recruiting bilingual volunteers, NV Rides works to help seniors get where they need to go.

To contact NV Rides:

Pozez JCC of Northern Virginia  
8900 Little River Turnpike  
Fairfax, VA 22031  
Phone: 703-537-3071  
Email: [info@nvrides.org](mailto:info@nvrides.org)  
Website: [www.nvrides.org](http://www.nvrides.org)

**SECOND PLACE (\$3,000): Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology and the New River Valley Agency on Aging (NRVAOA) for COVID Companions**

Launched in 2021, COVID Companions is a program to connect older adults and community members in the Blacksburg area and New River Valley. Older adults are provided with an optional tablet and a resource guide so that they can connect over video or the phone (or in some cases, socially distanced outdoors) with their assigned community member. Connections are made on a weekly basis. While the program began with volunteers, most of whom were Virginia Tech students, it has since expanded to include some faculty and community members from the surrounding area. The program is currently serving about 50 older adults, and includes the unique aspect of serving veterans through the engagement of Virginia Tech's large Corp of Cadets.

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This program was created to curb older adults' loneliness during a time of social isolation, but surveys indicate that the younger adults' perceptions of older adults has improved due to their participation in the program as well. This program will continue post-pandemic as a way to connect community members and form intergenerational connections. The goal of the program is to create an intergenerational bridge to decrease negative stigmas and help older adults maintain or improve mental health.

To contact Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology or NRVAOA:

Pamela B. Teaster, Ph.D., M.A., M.S.

Professor and Director

Center for Gerontology (0555)

ISCE, Room 105

230 Grove Lane

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, VA 24061

Phone: 540-231-7657

Email: [pteaster@vt.edu](mailto:pteaster@vt.edu)

Website: <https://liberalarts.vt.edu/research-centers/center-for-gerontology.html>

Tina King

Executive Director

New River Valley Agency on Aging

6226 University Park Drive, Suite 3100

Fairlawn, VA 24141

Phone: 540-980-7720

Email: [nrvaoa@nrvaoa.org](mailto:nrvaoa@nrvaoa.org)

Website: <https://www.nrvaoa.org/>

### **THIRD PLACE (\$2,000): Northern Virginia Resource Center (NVRC) for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons for Deaf Seniors Stay Connected**

"NVRC Deaf Seniors Stay Connected" is a free, hosted, weekly online Zoom chat for Deaf seniors and American Sign Language (ASL) students that provides meaningful interaction for all participants. This free online chat program connects Deaf seniors and ASL college students/interpreters from several Mid-Atlantic states to converse virtually using ASL in an informal, but structured atmosphere. Each week, a Deaf facilitator introduces a new topic for discussion among the average 12-15 attendees. While initially just for seniors using ASL, the program has now welcomed hard of hearing older adults who do not sign. The goal of the program is to ensure that Deaf and hard of hearing seniors feel less isolated and more connected, especially those who are homebound and unable to access or participate in many community activities. The benefit of the virtual format has even allowed one member who moved to a different area to stay in touch with friends who sign, keeping those friendships from fading.

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NVRC believes this program reduces feelings of isolation, connects Deaf seniors with their peers, and provides meaningful language practice for ASL students.

To contact NRVC:

Eileen McCartin, Ph.D, Executive Director  
3951 Pender Drive, Suite 130  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
Phone: 703-352-9055  
Video Phone 571-207-7758  
TTY: 703-352-9056  
Email: [info@nvrc.org](mailto:info@nvrc.org)  
Website: [www.nvrc.org](http://www.nvrc.org)

## 2022 HONORABLE MENTIONS

**Arlington Agency on Aging (AAA) for Pop-Up Farmer's Markets:** To address food insecurity, eliminate barriers to access and provide meaningful connections for older adults in our community, AAA partnered with the Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and FreshFarm, a local market manager, to establish a regular pop-up farmer's markets on-site at independent living residences in Arlington. Each month between July and November, a variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables are brought to the community and setup outdoors where residents can shop for fresh produce. The market is open to all, and many of the residents in these communities participate in the Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). An average of 700 Arlington residents participate in the SFMNP but many often struggle to redeem their coupons due to transportation barriers and limited participating vendors at public farmer's markets. In 2021, each Pop-Up event had more than 50 residents attend and AAA's Registered Dietician provided nutrition education handouts and seasonal recipes in both English and Spanish to attendees. By bringing the market to older adult communities, these Pop-up markets not only enable older Arlingtonians to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, but also provide residents the opportunity to enjoy fresh air and socialize with their neighbors.

To contact AAA:

2100 Washington Boulevard, 4th Floor  
Arlington, VA 22204  
Phone: 703-228-1700  
Email: [arlaaa@arlingtonva.us](mailto:arlaaa@arlingtonva.us)  
Website: [www.arlingtonva.us/aging](http://www.arlingtonva.us/aging)

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**Insight Memory Care Center (IMCC) for Caregiving at a Glance Workshop and Caregiver Cohort:** IMCC's Caregiver Cohort series is an education class and workshop that explores common dementia caregiver concerns in weekly sessions. Each session includes an education portion, group discussion, and interactive activities focused on each chapter of IMCC's "Caregiving at a Glance" guide, which is a fingertip guide for family caregivers of loved ones with dementia. In 2018, IMCC undertook the endeavor of updating the guide to reflect current best practices and reference the growing virtual resources in memory care. During the weekly cohort sessions, guest facilitators provide expert advice on the week's topic. A one-hour consultation is included at the end of the series for families to apply course learning to their specific situations. The Caregiver Cohort series has helped prepare 80 caregivers for the tasks they face while giving them the tools they need to feel confident in their caregiving roles. In fact, 95% of caregivers at IMCC feel their stress as a caregiver has been reduced through participation with IMCC's programs. IMCC has also distributed over 1,000 copies of the "Caregiving at a Glance" guide to caregivers and organizations in the northern Virginia area.

To contact IMCC:

3953 Pender Drive, Suite 100  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
Phone: 703-204-4664  
E-mail: [imcc@insightmcc.org](mailto:imcc@insightmcc.org)  
Website: <https://www.insightmcc.org/>

**Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. (MEOC) for Leveraging Technology to Combat Isolation during a Pandemic and Beyond:** The COVID-19 pandemic decimated MEOC's congregate programming and volunteer opportunities for older persons, including the Foster Grandparents (FGPs) Program, which pairs older adults with Head Start/Pre-K/Primary School students who needed a little help in the classroom. MEOC sought to combat this isolation by enabling virtual connections. MEOC purchased Birdsong tablets, which have an easy user interface for seniors, for 100 congregate meals participants and 25 FGPs, and added internet service plans for those who did not have internet access. Through small, socially distanced trainings, MEOC trained the older adults on how to use the Birdsong tablets. From there, congregate meals participants could socialize together and access nutrition/health education, such as the Matter of Balance falls prevention program, and FGPs could access trainings and socialize with each other. Both groups were also able to take advantage of additional programming that included cooking and educational videos and museum tours, among others.

To contact MEOC:

Carrie Stallard

## COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING BEST PRACTICES AWARDS 2017-2025

Nutrition Services & SCEP Director  
Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc.  
P.O. Box 888  
Big Stone Gap, VA 24219  
Phone: 276-523-4202  
Email: [carrie.stallard@meoc.org](mailto:carrie.stallard@meoc.org)  
Website: [www.meoc.org](http://www.meoc.org)

**Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC) in Partnership with Aging Together (AT) for the Regional Transportation Collaborative (RTC):** In 2019, several federal and state funding losses and program changes were anticipated to eliminate transit routes, close multiple volunteer programs, and negatively affect mobility options for older adults. To mitigate this impact, mobility partners and stakeholders in Culpeper, Fauquier, Madison, Orange, and Rappahannock counties adopted a new innovative model called the RTC. Managed by RRRC, the RTC is designed to provide overarching support and long-term stability to the region's mobility programs through strategic planning, grant writing, and data collection, with the goal of efficiently leveraging transportation resources and increasing mobility options for older adults and those with disabilities. In 2021, the RTC's call center received over 5,000 calls and provided over 3,000 coordination calls. RTC coordinated and also documented 2,500 ride requests for volunteer transportation and 2,000 one-way volunteer driver rides. Of these, over 60% of individuals served were older adults, 40% of individuals reported a physical and/or mental disability, and 92% of rides were for medical reasons. Analysis indicates that the equivalent charitable donation to the community from volunteer driver hours and miles driven totaled over \$350,000. Most recently, RTC worked to bring in six grants totaling over \$500,000, tracked over 130 community partnership meetings, distributed \$15,000 in gas card supplements, conducted 30 outreach activities, and supported multiple innovative pilot projects.

To contact RRRC/Aging Together:

Kristin R. Lam Peraza  
Mobility Manager  
Phone: 540-219-9083  
Email: [klamperaza@rrregion.org](mailto:klamperaza@rrregion.org)  
Website: [www.regionalcollaborative.com](http://www.regionalcollaborative.com)

**Senior Services of Alexandria (SSA) for Senior Ambassadors:** In 2017, SSA and the Alexandria Commission on Aging (COA) reflected on how to connect older adult residents with access to important information and resources and expand the reach of information presented through SSA's popular monthly Senior Speaker Series. SSA's solution was the Senior Ambassadors program. To put it together, a task force with representation from the COA, SSA, faith communities, and volunteers developed a plan on how the program would look, including how to recruit volunteers from different

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economic and socially diverse areas, a training curriculum, and a communication plan to roll out the initiative. The program was launched in 2019, pivoting to virtual meetings via Zoom during the pandemic, and now has over 100-trained Ambassadors who serve as conduits for information from city agencies, local and national nonprofits, community leaders, private businesses, and other resources. Ambassadors meet virtually each week with a representative from a relevant organization, and Ambassadors are free to ask questions and give feedback. Afterwards, the Ambassadors share what they have learned with the people in their communities, which span senior living settings, faith communities, and neighborhood civic associations.

To contact SSA:

206 N Washington Street, Suite 301  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Phone: 703-836-4414  
Email: [executivedirector@seniorservicesalex.org](mailto:executivedirector@seniorservicesalex.org)  
Website: [www.seniorservicesalex.org](http://www.seniorservicesalex.org)

**Southwest Virginia Legal Aid and Southwest Virginia Elder Justice Taskforce for “SILENCE ISN’T GOLDEN”, a Public Education and Awareness Campaign about Elder Abuse:** Developed in December 2020 with the support of Southwest Virginia Legal Aid and the Southwest Virginia Elder Justice Taskforce, the Virginia Law Foundation, Anthem Healthkeepers Plus, and grants from the Virginia Supreme Court’s Local Court Improvement Project to Dickenson and Tazewell Counties, “Silence Isn’t Golden” is a public education, outreach, and awareness campaign in 17 counties and 4 small cities in southwest Virginia focused on preventing elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation (ANE). Through this initiative, the multidisciplinary Southwest Virginia Elder Justice Task Force is committed to increasing education and awareness about ANE, protecting vulnerable adults, and advocating for investigation and prosecution of abusers. Patterned after a campaign that was launched in San Diego, California by former Deputy District Attorney Paul Greenwood, the Task Force sought permission from Paul Greenwood and Buchalter Consulting, who developed the original concept and public awareness materials, to adapt the “Silence Isn’t Golden” campaign for southwest Virginia. To launch the initiative, the Southwest Virginia Elder Justice Task Force also strategically placed 26 “Silence Isn’t Golden” billboards in southwest Virginia. The campaign included social media marketing, community outreach, and creating elder abuse awareness materials, such as pens, rack cards, posters, and fans, for distribution.

To contact Southwest Virginia Legal Aid:

Sarah Angles  
Human Resources Officer  
Phone: 276-783-8300, Ext. 2009

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Email: [sangles@svlas.org](mailto:sangles@svlas.org)

Gary Cody  
Director of Development  
Phone: 276-783-8300, Ext. 2011  
Email: [gcodys@svlas.org](mailto:gcodys@svlas.org)

**The Longevity Project for a greater Richmond with The Thelma Bland Watson Person-Centered (TBWPC) Personal Care Aide (PCA) School:** The TBWPC PCA School is a program of The Longevity Project for a greater Richmond, a community-university collaborative between Virginia Commonwealth University's Department of Gerontology and Senior Connections, The Capital Area Agency on Aging. With partnership support from Family Lifeline, Charles City County, and Bremo Pharmacy, the TBWPC PCA School delivers a easily replicable hybrid (online and in person) 40-hour PCA training program with specific focus on strategies for the PCA's own personal health management and increased focus on interventions for cognitive impairment and new skills acquisition, such as certification in Basic Life Support. In an effort to overcome barriers to enrollment and graduation, the program is offered at no cost to students and with a \$300 stipend per student and computers (if needed) to support inclusion. Throughout the 2-week program, students receive individual appreciative advising sessions and one-on-one support to ensure the completion of all assignments. Graduates are also contacted at 30-, 60- and 90-day intervals to chart success. The TBWPC PCA School has enrolled 25 student learners and graduated 24, all of whom scored 100% on their final exam.

To contact The Longevity Project for a greater Richmond:

Thelma Bland Watson Personal Care Aide School  
Longevity Project for a greater Richmond  
Debbie Ward, Program Coordinator  
Phone: 804-828-1565  
Email: [wardhd@alumni.vcu.edu](mailto:wardhd@alumni.vcu.edu)  
Website: <http://www.agewellva.com/>

For general information about Longevity Project for a greater Richmond please contact:  
E. Ayn Welleford, Managing Director  
Email: [ewellefo@vcu.edu](mailto:ewellefo@vcu.edu) or [info@longevityproject.com](mailto:info@longevityproject.com)

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### 2021 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS

#### **FIRST PLACE (\$5,000): Bay Aging (BA) *Stable Foundations for Older Adults***

***Experiencing Homelessness.*** Focusing on housing as the foundation for successful outcomes of older adults, BA's housing opportunities provide safety and stability for older adults experiencing homelessness, ensuring that the plethora of support services can be maintained to increase positive outcomes.

BA has bridged the gap between Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and the homeless services' Continuum of Care (CoC) to provide diverse housing opportunities for people exiting homelessness. In 2018, BA's age- and income-restricted rental housing worked with the local homeless services' CoC, the Northern Neck Middle Peninsula Housing Coalition, to develop a homeless preference. BA was the first U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly owner/manager to be approved to implement a homeless preference in Virginia.

BA can quickly identify older adults experiencing homelessness and match the person to unique housing that meets their needs, limiting the amount of time that someone spends homeless, reducing trauma, and regaining health measures. Once transitioned into permanent housing, older adults benefit from health assessments, Meals on Wheels, employment training, assistance with mainstream resource applications, insurance counseling, and transportation. This multidisciplinary continuum is poised to make homelessness rare, brief, and nonrecurring, while supporting older adults at every stage of independence.

Since 2018, 31 new tenants have moved into BA's housing, and an additional 189 older adults have been served by BA's homeless response system. The average wait time for placement in BA rental housing currently is 59 days, a 25% decrease since 2018 when the program started. Of the 31 older adults served by BA's housing, only one has exited to an unknown location, evidence of sustained positive outcomes of tenants.

To contact Bay Aging:      5306 Old Virginia Street  
P.O. Box 610  
Urbanna, VA 23175-0610  
Toll-free: 1-866-758-2386  
<http://www.bayaging.org/>

#### **SECOND PLACE AWARD (\$3,000): Jefferson Area Board for Aging (JABA)**

***Friends in Schools Helping (FISH) Program.*** JABA has been serving the needs of seniors and their families in Charlottesville and five surrounding counties for 45 years. Since 2004, FISH has been JABA's intergenerational school-based mentoring program that provides volunteer mentors to students who need individualized attention. The FISH program recruits, screens, and trains volunteers to help students with reading, math, writing, STEM, and art, as well as often working with English learner students and

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assisting children with their emotional well-being. Students working with FISH mentors demonstrate improved academic achievement, confidence, social skills, and trust.

FISH mentors now serve all across JABA's service area, including Charlottesville City and Albemarle, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, and Nelson counties. The FISH program serves students in a variety of settings, but due to COVID-19, mentoring moved to a virtual format with one-on-one or small groups. During the 2019-2020 school year, 58 FISH volunteers provided support to over 1,370 students in 21 schools, and reported providing over 2,250 hours of individualized mentoring attention to students, a value of over \$61,000 to the local communities. Looking ahead, the FISH program is excited to welcome 22 new volunteers and several returning FISH volunteers to provide vital support to students during the pandemic.

To contact JABA: 674 Hillsdale Drive  
Suite 9  
Charlottesville, VA 22901-1799  
Phone: 434-817-5222  
<http://www.jabacares.org>

### **THIRD PLACE AWARD (\$2,000): Inova Health System *Medical House Calls (MHC) Program***

**Program.** The MHC program provides in-home primary care services to older adults above the age of 65 and who are homebound. MHC opened its doors in 2017 and has continued to expand the provision of quality in-home care services to our community ever since.

MHC's mission is to allow older adults to receive care in their most comfortable environment, their homes. This also helps to support caregivers, reduce caregiver burden, and increase the overall wellness of patients and their support system. Through an interdisciplinary model, patients receive quality medical care, including coordination of in-home diagnostic testing and wraparound services such as social work support. The MHC program currently serves approximately 700 older adults throughout most of Fairfax County, Alexandria, and areas in eastern Loudoun County.

In 2020, MHC performed just under 9,000 encounters with patients. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MHC program has seen an extensive increase in in-home care services. Between January-March 2021, the Medical House Calls program administered 1,260 doses of the COVID vaccine resulting in a total of 655 vaccinated homebound older adults and family caregivers in our community. Looking ahead, the MHC program will soon be expanding to support Medicaid patients and uninsured members in the community, building on a steadfast commitment to ensuring that all community members have access to quality healthcare regardless of their ability to pay.

To contact Inova MHC: 2700 Prosperity Ave, Suite 270  
Fairfax, VA 22301  
Phone: 703-698-2431

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<https://www.inova.org/our-services/senior-services-inova/medical-house-calls>

### 2021 HONORABLE MENTIONS

#### **Senior Services of Southeastern Virginia (SSSEVA) *The Art of Healthy Aging*:**

Hosted since 2014, The Art of Healthy Aging Forum & Expo® brings together 600+ seniors and 100+ sponsors and vendors for a five-hour period at the Virginia Beach Convention Center. The live event components traditionally includes an exhibition hall featuring 60-70+ vendors, a “Salute to Caregivers” recognition, and a series of concurrent workshops that provide older adults and caregivers in SSEVA’s coverage region information, programs, and resources to promote healthy, active aging in their own homes and communities.

Pivoting in response to the pandemic, and with the support of corporate sponsors, SSEVA turned event into a virtual three-part series, with episodes airing approximately two weeks apart between mid-August and the end of September. Each of the three virtual episodes (30-40 minutes) consisted of: A Welcome by our CEO; three to four expert speakers; one interactive movement option; and musical entertainment. The videos were shared on SSEVA’s website and multiple internet platforms, including VIMEO, YouTube, and Facebook, as well as via cable television through partnerships with multiple city public access stations throughout SSEVA’s service area, which ran each video multiple times after the initial air dates.

The impact of the live Art of Healthy Aging Forum & Expo® has grown in its first six years, from 250 persons in 2014 to 600 seniors and caregivers at the last live event in the fall of 2019. In its seventh year (2020) and its first year as a virtual event, that reach more than tripled to at least 2,204 non-duplicative households across multiple platforms including digital and public access television.

To contact SSEVA: Interstate Corporate Center, Building 5  
6350 Center Drive, Suite 101  
Norfolk, VA 23502-4101  
Phone: 757-461-9481  
<http://www.ssseva.org/>

**Fairfax County Department of Neighborhood and Community Services and ServiceSource Inc. *Virtual Center for Active Adults (VCAA)*:** When the pandemic began, the Fairfax County senior centers closed in March 2020. In an effort to combat isolation and support positive social connections during this time, the VCAA was initiated through a partnership of 20 government agencies and non-profits, led by one county agency (Neighborhood and Community Services) and one community-based organization (ServiceSource).

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The VCAA is a virtual platform that offers older adults, caregivers, and people with disabilities access to live classes, on-demand programs, and self-directed activities, and provides COVID-19 information and referral supports. The VCAA encourages older adults to join live, interactive programs and engage with other older adults while also offering prerecorded videos on demand for older adults to watch on their own schedules. Staff doing Wellness Checks call and check in on participants. Additional resources and information needed to support older adults' overall health, wellbeing, and aging in place are provided. VCCA is a free resource that allows the older adult community to stay safely and actively connected during COVID-19 and beyond.

The VCAA has had 1,509 group activities have been led since starting the virtual center and served 27,514 (duplicated count) virtual center participants, reaching an average of over 4,300 page views per month. An overwhelming majority of participants report that they felt participating in the VCAA impacted their: involvement in meaningful and healthy activities, connection to the community, and knowledge of available services in the area. Through the partnership, the VCAA team continues to enhance social and recreational opportunities for people in the community and welcomes individuals of varying abilities to join.

To contact NCS: 12011 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
Phone: 703-324-4600  
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/neighborhood-community-services/>

To contact ServiceSource Inc.: 10467 White Granite Drive  
Oakton, VA 22124  
Phone: 703-970-3636  
<https://www.servicesource.org/>

**Appalachian Area for Senior Citizens (AASC) *Home Repair Program*:** AASC's Home Repair Program performs essential repairs to homes of older adults, disabled individuals and their families to attain or maintain a safe living environment and allows them to stay in their homes as long as possible with dignity and grace. Repairs range from roofs, heat pumps, and installing ramps to showers and other bathroom improvements, repairing floors and other such renovations.

With a Class C licensed contractor on staff, AASC leverages partnerships with Clinch Independent Living Services, Rural Development, Appalachian Service Project, local departments of social services, and local churches, as well as funding from the Older Americans Act, private donations, in-kind labor, and when possible, the USDA Rural Development Program, as well as other sources to complete the projects.

Since 2018, 50 projects have been completed, including 28 ramps constructed, 18 heat pumps replaced, 10 shower installations, 10 roofs replaced, 31 bathroom modifications, 9 porch and step repairs, 9 floor repairs, 4 sewage repairs, 5 mobile home roofs sealed,

## COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING BEST PRACTICES AWARDS 2017-2025

and 6 water heaters installed. Due to high demand, the Home Repair Program maintains a waiting list of individuals needing services.

To contact AASC: 216 College Ridge Road  
Wardell Industrial Park  
P.O. Box 765  
Cedar Bluff, VA 24609-0765  
Toll-free: 1-800-656-2272  
<http://www.aasc.org/>

**Arlington Agency on Aging (AAA) *Calling Angels Friendly Caller Program*:** To help address food insecurity and isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, AAA, in partnership with Meals on Wheels Arlington, Meals on Wheels America, and Hilton Hotels, launched Calling Angels, a Friendly Caller program that provides meaningful connections to homebound and isolated older adults.

Prior to the pandemic, Meals on Wheels (MOW) delivered meals each weekday, but to help protect participants and volunteers, deliveries shifted to once per week. As many know, the MOW program is more than a meal; for many participants it is a lifeline and connection to the community. Social isolation and loneliness had been an ongoing concern for older adults prior to the pandemic, but with stay at home orders, technology needs, and limitations on travel, older adults were disproportionately impacted.

Through these invaluable partnerships, the Hilton Hotels Hospitality team was trained, and 40 Hilton staff began making calls to 90 MOW participants. For some participants, this conversation may be the only contact they receive. Volunteers help older adults remain engaged, valued and connected.

Since April 2020, volunteers and Hilton staff have made hundreds of phone calls to over 120 older adults. AAA has also engaged with area agencies on aging in Atlanta and San Diego to help them launch similar programs with their local MOW and Hilton hotels.

To contact AAA: 2100 Washington Boulevard, 4th Floor  
Arlington, VA 22204  
Phone: 703-228-1700  
[www.arlingtonva.us/aging](http://www.arlingtonva.us/aging)

**Senior Connections, The Capitol Area Agency on Aging *Benefits Enrollment Center*:** Launched in 2019, the Benefits Enrollment Center (BEC) at Senior Connections helps Medicare beneficiaries enroll in benefit programs for which they are eligible. Trained staff assist in determining eligibility and applying for benefits that include Low Income Subsidy (LIS), Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs), Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Lifeline, and more.

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Traditionally, Benefit Outreach Specialists have traveled throughout our area to assist clients rather than them having to come to us. During the quarantine period, however, Senior Connections pivoted to electronic and telephone contact. Clients can be referred to the BEC through a partner or as a self-referral. Referrals are received by phone, email, through our website and electronically through PeerPlace, a secure case management system. Upon receipt of a referral a Benefits Enrollment Specialist will reach out to a client to screen them for all possible benefits. If a client is determined to potentially be eligible for any benefit, the BEC will complete an application as well as provide support and follow-up through the determination and renewal process.

The BEC has established telephonic translation services through a language services provider to offer efficient service to individuals whose primary language is not English.

From January 1, 2019 until projected September 30, 2021, the BEC have assisted or will assist 1,150 individuals with 1,983 applications reaping more than \$3,300,000 in benefits.

To contact Senior Connections: 24 E Cary Street  
Richmond, VA 23219-3796  
Local: 804-343-3000  
Toll-free: 1-800-989-2286  
BEC intake line: 804-672-4484  
<http://www.seniorconnections-va.org>

**Volunteer Solutions' (VS) Virtual Social Visitor Program:** This program provides opportunities for volunteers to engage in social visits with older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers. The program pivoted in response to the pandemic, and since late March 2020, volunteers have been conducting virtual social visits by phone or video conference technology instead of the previous in-person visits. VS has answered a community call to address isolation in the Fairfax area, specifically among participants of senior centers and adult day health centers and residents of nursing facilities. From October 1, 2020 to January 31, 2021, the VS virtual social visits program has served 88 participants. In addition to the virtual social visits, VS incorporated a new "Caring Cards" opportunity. Volunteers, including two Girl Scout troops, write generic cards and notes to the Fairfax County's senior center participants who have only had access to virtual programming during the pandemic. Senior center staff then attach the cards and notes to the participants' meals that are delivered each week. Since inception, over 650 cards have been shared with over 160 participants.

To contact VS: 12011 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
Phone: 703-324-5406  
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/familyservices/older-adults/volunteer-solutions>

## COMMONWEALTH COUNCIL ON AGING BEST PRACTICES AWARDS 2017-2025

### 2020 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS

**First Place Award (\$5,000): Staples for Seniors and Fido's Pantry** offers food assistance to homebound seniors and their cats or dogs. Seniors in rural areas expressed difficulty with affording and accessing grocery items, and many would give their food to their pets who also needed a reliable food source. Since launching the program, New River Valley Agency on Aging (NRVAOA) served 248 seniors each month with necessary groceries throughout all of Planning District Four. Fido's Pantry provides monthly pet food assistance and supplies to 87 of the households who access the food assistance. Volunteers assisting with the delivery process provide social interaction for isolated older adults, and also help identify additional needs and services for the clients. The program has a 96% client satisfaction rate, and has also been made available to seniors not affiliated with NRVAOA, but who are in the midst of a food crisis.

**Second Place Award (\$3,000): Jimmy's PetPals** is a companion pet program developed at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital to help patients with dementia have a better hospital experience. The PetPals are Hasboro® "Joy for all Companion Pets," life-like robotic dogs and cats that exhibit animal-like behaviors. Abby Denby, Director of Patient Care Services, initially provided a robotic companion pet to her father who was struggling while hospitalized. The program was then expanded with financial support from the hospital's foundation and a grant from the Patient and Family Advisory Council. Now, any hospital staff member caring for a patient with dementia who is agitated, combative or depressed can obtain a companion pet for the patient. Jimmy's PetPals have benefited 30 patients at the hospital so far. Clinicians and hospital staff express that Jimmy's PetPals has reduced the use of patient restraints and improved patients' demeanors. Denby is beginning a study measuring patients' agitation levels, and restraint and antipsychotic use before and after receiving a PetPal, as well as analyzing feedback from clinical staff about their experiences caring for patients before and after receipt of a PetPal.

**Third Place Award, tie (\$1,000): The Arlington Agency on Aging (AAA) partnered with the Arlington's Addiction and Recovery Initiative (AARI)** to deliver drug deactivation kits for older adults in the community to safely dispose medications. While exploring potential opportunities to expand the program and provide information about medication safety and drug deactivation kits, Arlington AAA partnered with Arlington Virginia Insurance and Counseling Assistance Program (VICAP) to offer Medication Safety for Older Arlingtonians. VICAP achieves this goal through community events where older adults receive medication safety education, assistance with Medicare and Medicare Part D prescription coverage and signup, information on the safe disposal of medications, and drug deactivation kits. The Medication Safety for Older Arlingtonians program advances the Arlington County's efforts toward realizing its Age Friendly Plan.

**Third Place, tie (\$1,000): Volunteer Solutions' Helping Hands Program, a program of Fairfax County Area Agency on Aging-Volunteer Solutions.** In 2013, in honor of Older Americans Month, Volunteer Solutions created the Helping Hands Program (HH)

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to de-clutter, organize, and perform intensive yard work for older adults and adults with disabilities to allow for them to age in place safely and with dignity. The clients served by the Helping Hands Program in Fairfax are unable to perform these tasks themselves due to physical limitations and are unable to afford the service if purchased privately. Many of the clients being served are at risk of eviction or are already involved in the eviction process due to the condition of their residences. The nine Volunteer Solutions' staff members conduct assessments to identify the needs and coordinate the activities on the day of the project. The program's supplies and services are supported by donations from internal and external partnerships. To date, the Helping Hands program has created 37 partnerships with 757 volunteers giving 3,464 hours, valued at over \$88,000. The program has served 112 clients and prevented evictions for 11 clients.

### 2020 HONORABLE MENTIONS

- **Longevity Project for a greater Richmond for its Housing Stability Learning Labs**, which equips providers across the sectors of human services with increased knowledge applied to their professional roles, as well as bridge building and relationship strengthening across sectors.
- **Senior Connections, the Capital Area Agency on Aging for its Ride Connection program**, which ensures older adults and persons with disabilities have knowledge and access to transportation to age in place and live a healthy, socially connected life.
- **Central Virginia Alliance for Community Living, Inc. for its TAKE CHARGE: Care Transitions Intervention**, a partnership with Centra Foundation, supports older adults who are transitioning from hospital to home with coaching services focused on managing medical conditions and reducing hospital readmissions.

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### 2019 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS

**First Place Award (\$5,000):** **GrandInvolve** brings older adults into Fairfax County's Title I Elementary Schools to volunteer in individual classrooms, offering their skills and talents to work directly with students. GrandInvolve volunteers regularly work in their assigned schools and engage in a variety of helpful activities designed by the teachers. They work directly with students either individually or in small groups. They assist with reading and math, material preparation, library services, mentoring, kindergarten readiness and after school programs. They frequently assist with evening activities. All these activities support the goal of improving school success for Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) students. Each school which hosts the GrandInvolve program provides a staff member (usually a guidance counselor) who places each volunteer with a teacher after interviewing the volunteer, and surveying the teachers. Once placed, volunteers come at least once a week for several hours. The volunteer returns to the same classroom each time they visit and their volunteer hours are tracked by the front office. Each school has a lead volunteer – called a School Action Team Volunteer – who works within the surrounding community, recruiting volunteers and setting up partnerships which benefit school goals. GrandInvolve leadership teams have developed plans to expand to all 50 Title 1 Schools in the County by 2024. There are currently 160 GrandInvolve volunteers in 18 schools in classrooms of about 25 students.

**Second Place Award (\$3,000):** The Hampton Roads division of Senior Living Guide is excited to announce **The Legacy Sessions**, a new project designed to promote understanding and appreciation for our senior citizen population. Thirty two theater students from Salem High School met with 32 senior residents at Marian Manor Assisted Living in Virginia Beach over the period of three separate visits in November and December of last year. The high school students interviewed the seniors on their philosophies and accomplishments in life. Their observations culminated in a program at Salem High School on December 17, 2018. During this time, the students presented monologues as if they themselves were the senior speaking about their life to the audience. The participating seniors from Marian Manor were in attendance and treated to instrumental music, caroling, and holiday hors d'oeuvres all performed and prepared by instrumental, vocal and culinary students at Salem High School. A visual arts department senior student designed the logo and marketing poster.

**Third Place Award (\$2,000):** **Senior Connections** is actively involved in the effort to help prevent readmissions with a **Care Transitions Program** in many hospitals within our region with the goal of intervening while the patient is still in the hospital, and continues in the home providing needed resources and support for both the newly released patient and when present, their caregiver. The evidence-based Coleman Coaching Model – Eric Coleman, MD, MPH, and team, University of Colorado Health Services Center - is used to support discharged residents to remain in their homes, while also serving as a link to our agency's services. By using the Coleman Coaching

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Model, the coaches are able to encourage the discharged patient to reconcile medication, set a 30-day goal, start of list of questions for the physician and identify red flags to allow him/her and any caregiver assistance to react sooner to avoid another hospital stay. The Coaches also have the opportunity to help the discharged resident access other needed support services through the area agency on aging. She/he might also benefit from home delivery of meals, prescription procedures, and assistance with planning finances and budgets. In addition, Senior Connections can connect him/her to other community resources through programs such as Friendship Cafes that offer nutritional and social aspects of a long-range plan. Thus he/she remains socially connected, an additional health benefit.

### 2019 HONORABLE MENTIONS

- **Fairfax County Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS) for its Senior Center Inclusion Services**, which provides support for people of all abilities to participate in activities within 14 NCS Senior Centers. This program has become a change agent in transforming the Senior Center community in Fairfax County to operate with more inclusiveness for people with disabilities.
- **Peninsula Agency on Aging for its Memory Café**, which provides much needed socialization opportunities for individuals with dementia and their caregivers/partners. The Memory Café is currently offered twice monthly at two locations in Williamsburg and attracts approximately 15-20 individuals and their caregiver/partner each session. In 2019, the program will expand to include offerings in the Hampton/Newport News area.
- **Jefferson Area Board for Aging (JABA) for its Open Enrollment Insurance Counselling Mobile Unit**, which brings JABA's highly trained volunteer insurance counselors to community hubs in rural areas during the annual Medicare Open Enrollment period. The number of rural seniors served between 2015 (year before Mobile Unit began) and 2018 grew from 307 to 819, a 266% increase. JABA plans to continue to expand the Mobile Unit's reach in future years.
- **Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens (AASC) for its Generations Intergenerational Day Center**, which serves children as young as 6 weeks old to seniors over 90 years of age. Generations Intergenerational Day Center offers children the opportunity to take part in carefully selected, supervised activities with senior citizens.

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### 2018 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS

**First Place (\$5,000): Rebuilding Together Arlington/Fairfax/Falls Church** has developed a new delivery system called Rebuilding Together Express to make home modifications and repairs to help many more low-income seniors age in place in their homes. For the past 29 years, Rebuilding Together-AFF has mobilized scores of community partners and hundreds of volunteers each year to make health and safety repairs at no charge to low-income homeowners. But so many older homeowners' need for limited repairs and home modifications to age in place far outstripped capacity to respond. Similar to the supermarket express lane, Rebuilding Together Express offers much faster service for "fewer items." Small teams of 4-5 volunteers typically work 4-5 hours on each home and spend about \$400 - \$500 for materials to correct 30 health and safety hazards common in older homes. Fall safety is a top priority, with grab bars, double stair rails, comfort-height toilets, and brighter lighting leading the list of repairs. But Rebuilding Together Express also addresses fire safety, security, moisture and ventilation problems, and energy upgrades. Rebuilding Together Express teams completed 35 homes in 2017. Camaraderie among volunteers is steadily increasing their ranks and building capacity will be for at least 50 homes in 2018.

**Second Place (\$3,000): The Caregivers Community Network (CCN)** is a collaborative effort between Valley Program for Aging Services (VPAS) and James Madison University's Institute for Innovation in Health and Human Services (JMU-IIHHS). It is the only program in the state of Virginia which pairs college students with caregiving families to provide intergenerational care and in-home caregiver respite. Students enroll in Issues and Applications of Family Care Giving: Interprofessional Perspectives which is the elective course affiliated with CCN. They are trained to work with older adults, especially those who are frail and who have cognitive impairments. Students are paired and spend 3 hours each week in local homes where they offer respite to caregivers. They work closely with each family to determine the needs and interests of the care recipient, and they plan activities accordingly. While many of our students are nursing and health science majors, CCN's work is a non-medical model and is based on the social and emotional aspects of care.

**Third Place (\$2,000): The Dementia Care Coordination Program** is a model integrated and coordinated care system for individuals with dementia and their caregivers undertaken in partnership between the Jefferson Area Board for Aging (JABA), the University of Virginia's Memory and Aging Care Clinic (MACC), and DARS. The partners developed this program with the aim of creating a replicable best practice for dementia care coordination in Virginia. Individuals with a recent diagnosis of a neurodegenerative process causing dementia (such as Alzheimer's disease) or Mild Cognitive Impairment are eligible for the program. JABA and MACC each hired a Care Coordinator (CC) with backgrounds in health, social work or nursing, and experience in aging, medical or mental health. A comprehensive 30-hour training program was developed using existing materials available through the Commonwealth of Virginia

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(alzpossible.org) and the Alzheimer's Association and others. In addition, CCs are certified as Options Counselors under Virginia standards and utilize the statewide No Wrong Door (NWD) tool. CCs provide coordinated care including options counseling, education on dementia, behavioral symptom management training and expert consultation, and eligibility assistance. Both CCs are embedded in the MACC and work in partnership with the interdisciplinary care team.

### **2018 HONORABLE MENTIONS**

The Council gave honorable mentions to the following organizations:

- RVA Reassurance Roundtable of metro Richmond, including: Commonwealth Catholic Charities; Jewish Family Services; Senior Connections, Capital Area Agency on Aging; FeedMore; Office of the Senior Advocate – Chesterfield and Henrico counties and the City of Richmond; VCU Health's Geriatric and Continuum Services; Shepherd's Center of Richmond; Better Housing Coalition; Hanover County Resources; and Greater Richmond Age Wave
- Riverside Center for Excellence in Aging and Lifelong Health, Williamsburg, for Microlearning: Little Message with a Big Impact
- Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging, for its Caregiver Program

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**2017 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS**

**First Place Award (\$5000): Senior Services of Alexandria's (SSA) Grocery Delivery Program, "Groceries to Go",** offers grocery shopping and delivery service to seniors living in Alexandria who are unable to go to the grocery store to shop for food due to a disability or limited mobility. These clients have reached a stage in their lives of not being able to shop independently, do not have the technical capabilities or income to use an online grocery delivery service, and are not yet ready for Senior Services' Meals on Wheels program. Through this program, SSA staff partners with two local grocery stores, coordinates volunteers to shop for and/or pick up groceries from the store, and deliver the groceries with no delivery charge to seniors. At the senior's home, the volunteer helps put away groceries, checks on the well-being of the senior, and assesses whether the client could benefit from additional services from SSA, the City of Alexandria, or other community non-profit organizations. This program is allowing seniors in the community to remain in their own homes longer and with more independence.

**Second Place Award (\$3000): The Family Caregiver Lunch and Learn Program** of the Peninsula Agency on Aging, Inc. (PAA) provides family members the hands-on skills they need to provide safe, quality care for their loved one at home. Developed in partnership with Thomas Nelson Community College, Riverside Center for Excellence in Aging and Lifelong Health and others, the program, based on the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services' Certified Nursing Assistant curriculum, provides non-professional caregivers the tools they need to provide the increasingly more complex care they are required to provide such as bathing, med management and skin care to their loved one. Since 2014, the program has been offered as a monthly lunch and learn series, which better meets the time constraints of caregivers. Initially offered in the Williamsburg area, the series was so well received, that in 2016 PAA launched a second series in the Hampton/Newport News area. PAA has also designed a series for local businesses to offer onsite as a lunch and learn to their employees. Businesses have the opportunity to select from a menu of topics that best meet the unique needs of the working caregiver.

**Third Place Award (\$2000): The Seniors-In-Touch Visit Program** was developed in 1997 by the Chesterfield County Sheriff's Office to recognize the special needs of the senior citizen population living in the county and to provide a means to maintain frequent personal contact with them through phone calls and personal visits. The Chesterfield County Sheriff's Office recognizes the contributions and value of these members to our community. To qualify for weekly visits, the member must be a Chesterfield County resident age 65 or older, lack family members living near their residence (within 30 miles), lack strong support from civic or religious organizations and/or exhibit health issues or medical needs. Our senior members receive weekly phone calls from Sheriff's Office personnel to check on general health, plans for the week and any personal needs. Once a week deputies or part-time civilian employees

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visit for approximately one hour to discuss events of the day and address any needs that have arisen since the most recent phone call or visit. The deputies assist with various needs around the home. For those with limited mobility, the deputy provides physical support for necessary chores. In most cases, these seniors are aging in place and our deputies relay pertinent information to assist them in their desire to remain independent and informed.

### 2017 HONORABLE MENTIONS

- Patients recently discharged from hospitals are vulnerable to unplanned readmissions due to lack of education about their self-care, medication management, and skills of effective communication with health providers. The **Hampton Roads Care Transitions Project** (HRCTP), led by Senior Services of Southeastern Virginia (SSSEVA) is changing that scenario as it reduces preventable hospital readmissions/medication issues for high-risk patients ages 60 and older with chronic health diagnoses. Through HRCTP's coaching, of patient and caregiver, and medication management programs, seniors are empowered to advocate for themselves with physicians, pharmacists, and other providers. Patients with chronic health diagnoses better manage their conditions post-discharge and learn to recognize "red flag" symptoms requiring early intervention. This initiative program couples transitions coaching with medication management using Care Transitions® Intervention (CTI) and HomeMeds® evidence-based models for a unique approach in care transitions. SSSEVA works with care transitions teams from Sentara Healthcare, Southampton Memorial Hospital, and supervised doctoral students from Hampton University's School of Pharmacy to deliver interventions and track patient outcomes.
- **VAAACares** is the statewide expansion of the Eastern Virginia Care Transitions Partnership (EVCTP). Endorsed by the Virginia Center for Health Innovation, VAAACares is an Area Agency on Aging (AAA) collaboration to deliver services for the Commonwealth Coordinated Care Plus population, hospital systems and public and private insurers. The VAAACares program serves as a one-stop shop for comprehensive care coordination, care transitions, and a host of other home and community based services provided by AAAs that support the health and safety outcomes for Virginians with multiple chronic health conditions and disabilities. Improving the likelihood of a successful recovery process post-discharge, and including less risk of readmission requires more than the care at the hospital and doctor's office. To successfully bridge the gap between acute care and community settings, VAAACares coordinate with the patients transitioning from hospital to home or from another care facility to home. Social determinates impact our physical, mental and social well-being. Only by going to the homes and learning more about the patients can we begin to execute meaningful plans of care that lead to 1) successful recovery; 2) reduced

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readmissions; 3) lower healthcare costs; and 4) improved communication between patients and their primary care providers.

- The Regional Older Adults Facility Mental Health Support Team (RAFT) is a mental health program serving adults, aged 65 and older, in Region II (Arlington, the City of Alexandria, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William Counties). The program began in 2008 and supports the discharge of Northern Virginia individuals who are currently psychiatrically hospitalized at Piedmont State Hospital or other local or state psychiatric hospitals or who are at risk of psychiatric hospitalization due to symptoms of mental illness or dementia with challenging behaviors. The program provides intensive, wraparound multidisciplinary mental health treatment to older adults to remain safely in their community setting. The program incorporates evidenced based practices including Integrated Collaborative Care: a team approach involving the individual, psychiatric care,