

engAGED

The National Resource Center
for Engaging Older Adults

engAGING Practices: Best Practices for Helping Older Adults Stay Socially Engaged



www.engagingolderadults.org

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Introduction

engAGED: The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults is a national effort to increase social engagement among older adults. Administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) with funding from the U.S. Administration for Community Living—and in collaboration with Generations United, Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) and Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes—engAGED identifies and disseminates information about emerging trends, resources and replication strategies that the Aging Network can customize to engage older adults in their communities.

Social isolation and loneliness have increasingly been recognized as critical and growing public health issues impacting the lives of millions of older adults and their caregivers. With 43 percent of older adults reporting that they feel lonely and 27 percent reporting that they feel isolated from others,^{1,2} social isolation and loneliness can have a profound effect on the lives of older adults. In addition to reducing quality of life, loneliness increases the risk of health problems, loss of function in terms of self-care and mobility activities and shorter life expectancy.³ Having fewer social connections has also been linked to an increased risk of dementia.⁴ Older adults who are socially engaged in their communities can counter these negative health effects by sharing their knowledge, talent, skills, experience and wisdom—having a positive and powerful impact on their communities and experiencing better health outcomes themselves.

As part of its work, engAGED launched a search to identify and showcase programs and services that can serve as best practices to encourage social engagement and help address social isolation in communities across the country. This publication, **engAGING Practices: Best Practices for Helping Older Adults Stay Socially Engaged**, provides an overview of best practices highlighted by 11 programs identified by engAGED to help others within the Aging Network enhance social engagement among older adults in their communities. Programs were selected based on criteria that included innovation, replicability and sustainability.

While each engAGED Best Practices program focuses on social connections, the programs offer a range of tactics to promote social engagement, combat social isolation, reduce loneliness and improve the quality of life of older adults through participation in the arts, lifelong learning, technology and intergenerational activities. Additionally, these initiatives promote engagement among older adults from diverse backgrounds and/or build partnerships involving community stakeholders to promote social engagement.



First place winner (tie) in the engAGED Photo Contest
Missoula Aging Services (Missoula, MT)

Building intergenerational connections can help create valuable moments of learning and understanding.



First place winner (tie) in the engAGED Photo Contest
Missoula Aging Services (Missoula, MT)

Connectedness across generations can help make meaningful impact in classrooms.

In spring 2020, the COVID-19 crisis brought to light the dire effects social isolation has on all of us, but particularly on older adults. Given the fact that older adults are most severely impacted by COVID-19, opportunities to gather in person and in the community, where many social engagement programs are offered, were temporarily put on hold to protect the health and safety of the older adults who participate in them. Following these temporary pauses, Aging Network organizations worked quickly to adapt and revamp existing programming and launch new programs to mitigate the impact of social isolation on older adults.

As the nominations process for the engAGED Best Practices was launched at the start of the COVID-19 crisis, many of the programs included as engAGED Best Practices were implemented prior to the crisis. After identification of the 2020 engAGED Best Practices, follow up was conducted with each program to determine how the program was adapted to COVID-19 realities. The engAGED Best Practices summaries contain details on how each program has or will be adapted to continue to safely socially engage older adults throughout the crisis.

Also in spring 2020, engAGED launched a photo contest to recognize visual depictions of social engagement initiatives offered by Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and community-based organizations around the country. The award-winning photos are highlighted in this section of the report.

We hope that the engAGED Best Practices will inspire your efforts to promote social engagement and address social isolation among older adults within your community.

engAGED

The National Resource Center
for Engaging Older Adults



advocacy | action | answers on aging



Administration for Community Living



Second place winner in the engAGED Photo Contest
Generations for Garfield (Garfield, NJ)

Social engagement is as easy as a cup of coffee.



Third place winner in the engAGED Photo Contest
Intergenerational Orchestra of Omaha (Omaha, NE)

An intergenerational orchestra provides both artistic engagement and connection across generations!

AASC Feeds the Pets

Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens | Cedar Bluff, VA

Program Description

For many older adults, pets are an emotional lifeline. When **Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens** (AASC) discovered that some of the older adults participating in the agency's home-delivered meals program were sharing food with their pets, AASC took action. The agency created the AASC Feeds the Pets program in 2015 to help ease the financial burden associated with purchasing pet food and to help alleviate the need among clients to share food with their pets. The program operates through AASC's Nutrition Department in tandem with its home-delivered meals program, with meal drivers delivering pet food for program participants who cannot otherwise afford it.

AASC staff purchase pet food at a local store that offers a discount for this project. Staff also raise community awareness and funds for the program through various strategies, including holding fundraisers and developing partnerships with local animal shelters, veterinarians and pet groomers.

Because pet food is just one of many costs associated with pet care, the AASC Feeds the Pets program also funds emergency medical care for pets and provides boarding assistance for pets if a participant is hospitalized. In 2019, 170 older adults and approximately 400 pets participated in the program. The program has had an impact. A recent survey of program participants found that 65 percent indicated the program allowed them to maintain ownership of their pets.

Promoting Social Engagement

Recognizing the link between pet ownership and improved health—and the associated reduction in loneliness among older adults—the AASC Feeds the Pets program helps ensure older adults are able to adequately care for their pets, improving their happiness and quality of life.

COVID-19 Response

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the AASC Feeds the Pets program expanded its efforts to provide pet food to individuals receiving emergency food deliveries and picking up food at community distribution events during the COVID-19 pandemic. At drive-through community events in May and June 2020, food was provided to more than 1,000 older adults and approximately 700 pets, a tremendous increase over the number of participants the program had served in all of 2019.



"Clients say that the pet food is such a big help because they don't have to make decisions between caring for themselves and caring for their pets. Being able to keep their pets has helped curb loneliness and provided company during COVID-19, since most of them haven't been able to get out."

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Art at Your Own PACE

Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens | Cedar Bluff, VA

Program Description

Art has long been a way to bring people together through creative expression. Created by the **Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens** (AASC) for individuals living with dementia who participate in the agency's Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) program, Art at Your Own PACE provides older adults with art therapy and activities to help them express themselves creatively. AASC's Occupational Therapist Assistant uses art techniques, activities and projects to engage participants and strengthen their cognitive, visual and sensory skills.

Following the program's 2018 launch, Art at Your Own PACE has since evolved into an intergenerational program that serves AASC's older adult and child day care center program participants. Art projects include painting flowerpots, canvases and murals; decorating award-winning holiday floats for parades; creating live murals using sidewalk chalk; and crafting a Christmas ornament to adorn the Governor's tree at the Executive Mansion. Clients who do not have the motor skills necessary to complete traditional art projects are provided with an iPad that allows them to participate in the program using art apps.

A grant from the Alzheimer's Foundation allowed AASC to purchase art supplies, including a sewing machine and electronic die cutter, aprons with clients' names and furnishings for a dedicated art room. Since the start of the program, AASC has seen improvements in participants' activities of daily living, fine and gross motor skills, and cognitive skills.

Promoting Social Engagement

Almost all of the Art at Your Own PACE art projects are implemented in group settings, offering opportunities for intergenerational social engagement between older adults and children who participate in the program. Participants also go on regular outings to a variety of local art centers where they enjoy art activities and lunch together. The program helps curb depression among older adult participants who especially enjoy working on art projects with children.

COVID-19 Response

While in-person activities for Art at Your Own PACE temporarily ceased for older adults due to COVID-19, AASC staff have continued to serve Art at Your Own PACE participants in their homes. When AASC nursing staff, physical therapists and occupational therapists visit clients in their home to provide health-related services, they



"Never in my career has my job been so rewarding. The excitement the participants express has been overwhelming."

also engage the clients in different art projects. Activity packets are also left with clients to provide them with opportunities to continue to engage creatively between staff visits.

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Boston's Senior Civic Academy

Age Strong Commission | Boston, MA

Program Description

Older adults can be powerful advocates. Inspired by responses to a local needs assessment indicating that older adults wanted more of a voice in their local government, the **Age Strong Commission**, the City of Boston's Area Agency on Aging, launched the Senior Civic Academy in 2018. The annual six-week, 30-hour program is aimed at familiarizing adults age 50 and older with the structure, functions and activities of the city, state and federal governments. The program also helps participants develop skills including public speaking, information gathering and networking to enhance their ability to effectively communicate and advocate with elected officials. Since 2018, the Senior Civic Academy has hosted two classes of older adults.

The Age Strong Commission worked with partners at the University of Massachusetts Boston's Gerontology Institute to develop a curriculum focused on local government education, skill-building activities and networking with elected officials. The agency also developed partnerships with government departments, local nonprofits and advocacy organizations to further support content development. Staff developed an outreach plan and process to ensure older adults from different neighborhoods and diverse backgrounds applied to participate in the program. To ensure the Senior Civic Academy curriculum reflects the unique needs and interests of each cohort, participants are asked prior to the start to identify topics of interest. At graduation, each participant makes a two-minute advocacy pitch on a policy issue of their choice.

The program has generated community support and received donations to provide meeting space and daily lunches for participants. Evaluation results indicate that Academy participants gain familiarity and confidence with advocating at different levels of government as a result of their participation in the program. After completing the program, graduates have continued to be civically engaged and have gone on to advocate for the development of a village model, which are neighborhood-based community efforts to support aging in place, in their community and for bills at the Massachusetts State House.

Promoting Social Engagement

The Senior Civic Academy promotes social engagement by facilitating new friendships and connecting older adults to events and activities offered by the AAA and other partner organizations.



"This was a fabulous introduction to see how the state and city work together. I learned a lot and am becoming politically active, which I have not been before."

COVID-19 Response

In response to COVID-19, the Age Strong Commission postponed the spring 2020 in-person program. However, the agency is currently exploring the possibility of adapting the Senior Civic Academy to a virtual platform in order to address health concerns around in-person gatherings.

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Helping Neighbors Initiative

Bay Aging | Urbanna, VA

Program Description

Food is not only a critical human need; it has long been a means to bring people together. With many older adults self-isolating at home due to the COVID-19 crisis, **Bay Aging** worked to quickly address the increased food insecurity and need for food among older adults in its community by launching its Helping Neighbors initiative. This initiative provides meals and social engagement to at-risk older adults within Bay Aging's community, thereby helping older adults and those with underlying health conditions stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Helping Neighbors connects volunteers to clients through brief, physically distanced conversations during twice-weekly hot dinner deliveries and supplemental phone calls between deliveries.

Launched in April 2020, Helping Neighbors has delivered more than 1,300 home-cooked meals per week to older adults throughout the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula in Virginia.

Inspired by the World Central Kitchen's partnership with restaurants to prepare meals, Bay Aging partnered with 17 area restaurants to prepare meals for older adults. In addition to helping to address the nutritional needs of older residents, this partnership also has helped to invest in the local economy and support local businesses during the crisis. Bay Aging negotiated a price of \$9 per meal with the participating restaurants. An existing Bay Aging staff member oversees Helping Neighbors and Bay Aging volunteers deliver all meals.

Promoting Social Engagement

Clients involved in Helping Neighbors have shared that knowing that the program's volunteers care enough to deliver a meal and talk for a few minutes has kept them going throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Volunteers use the additional check-in calls to ensure clients have everything they need and have shared how much they care for the clients, with some bringing baked goods and personal care items to clients when they drop off the meals.

COVID-19 Response

Helping Neighbors was launched directly in response to the COVID-19 crisis with the intent of addressing increased food insecurity, social isolation and economic hardships among older adults in Bay Aging's service area. To raise awareness about the program, Bay Aging conducted interviews with area radio stations and ran



"I am so glad for the people. Some situations are very sad. One man is very lonely and he cannot really cook; many are not able to walk much, or have poor health, poor living conditions. One man said 'Oh, I am so happy, I have been waiting to eat.'"

advertisements in local newspapers to reach older adults who are sheltering in place.

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Living Connected: Key to Combatting Social Isolation and No Senior Eats Alone Day

Baltimore County Department of Aging | Towson, MD

Program Description

Research has shown that social isolation can have negative physical and mental health impacts on older adults. In response, the **Baltimore County Department of Aging** (BCDA) launched the Living Connected Initiative to create regional awareness about social isolation and to offer engagement activities and education to help older adults and caregivers combat social isolation. Over the course of 2019, BCDA created a public service announcement, video and webpage on the Living Connected Initiative; created promotional social media content; participated in television segments; developed resources and shared information in local newspapers and press releases; held a conference; and organized community activities and events to educate residents on ways to address social isolation.

As part of the community activities and events organized in conjunction with the Living Connected Initiative campaign, BCDA developed No Senior Eats Alone Day to encourage community members to invite an older adult out to share a meal. In 2019, more than 5,000 people and 60 partner organizations participated. The 20 BCDA senior centers offered meals on No Senior Eats Alone Day, with senior center participants encouraged to bring neighbors, family and friends. Some senior centers received business sponsorships to provide additional meals and the dining clubs affiliated with the senior centers also held meals in the community where anyone could join. All BCDA programs worked to ensure homebound older adults or those living in long-term care facilities were still able to participate. BCDA worked with local partners, including restaurants, places of worship, libraries, schools, fitness centers, senior housing and community associations, to offer a meal on No Senior Eats Alone Day or promote the senior center meals. BCDA also offered opportunities for other county employees to participate by volunteering to serve meals, taking an older adult out for a meal or visiting with homebound clients. The No Senior Eats Alone Day webpage provided information for members of the community and offered an online registration program for partners to register and access tools for their promotional efforts.

Partnerships established between BCDA and other county agencies, private companies and nonprofits covered most of the costs of the Living Connected Initiative and No Senior Eats Alone Day. BCDA covered the cost of the Living Connected Initiative public service announcement and employee time.



"I lost my husband of 56 years in April during the pandemic. The calls from my senior center are a lifeline. I felt so alone...[as I don't have] a big family. Having the senior center call me once a week and talking to a person is so comforting. I know they are out there and care so much."


Promoting Social Engagement

The Living Connected Initiative and No Senior Eats Alone Day offer a multifaceted approach that promotes social engagement and combats social isolation by elevating awareness of the impact of social isolation on older adults through the sharing of health research/statistics and personal stories across different communications and media platforms, providing opportunities for social connection, and developing opportunities for community partners to participate, enhancing the impact throughout the region. The 2019 No Senior Eats Alone Day introduced 276 new older adults to BCDA senior centers, connecting them to additional social engagement opportunities.

COVID-19 Response

In response to COVID-19, BCDA has continued its Living Connected Initiative efforts to combat social isolation among older adults across the region. Given the safety concerns with in-person gatherings due to COVID-19,





BCDA was not able to hold large gatherings on the 2020 No Senior Eats Alone Day. Instead, the 20 BCDA senior centers held virtual events that allowed older adults to participate in educational activities, games and listen to music while eating a meal at home. BCDA hosted a Virtual Connected Town Hall on that day, where partners encouraged older adults affiliated with their groups to connect with others for an afternoon of entertainment. The BCDA Ombudsman program planned activities for residents of long-term care facilities and encouraged volunteers to write notes to homebound older adults and nursing home residents. BCDA created partnerships with more than 20 local restaurants that offered meal specials to anyone who mentioned No Senior Eats Alone Day, allowing family and friends to bring a meal to an older adult to share on their patio or porch.

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My Meal–My Way Senior Dining

Area Agency on Aging of Dane County | Madison, WI

Program Description

The purpose of congregate meals has always been two-fold: to provide critical nutrition and social engagement opportunities to older adults. So when the number of older adults dining at **Area Agency on Aging of Dane County** senior dining sites declined 18 percent from 2009 to 2014, staff began exploring new options.

The My Meal–My Way model, a public-private partnership between the AAA of Dane County's congregate nutrition sites and seven local restaurants, was launched in the spring of 2015 after the AAA of Dane County recruited restaurants, negotiated meal costs and pilot tested the model. The model offers a choice of breakfast and lunch menu options at restaurants featuring a variety of cuisines and with locations in rural, suburban and urban settings across the AAA's planning and service area. The meals are provided during two-to-four-hour windows, which allows participants to choose what, when, where and with whom they will dine. The model offers choice, intergenerational dining and flexibility, as no reservations are required.

Each My Meal–My Way site has a nutrition program site manager, either staff or a trained volunteer, who greets participants, completes all paperwork and receives any meal donations. The AAA of Dane County provides transportation to each site. Restaurants are paid \$5 or \$6 per meal, which includes gratuity, with the restaurants assuming the costs associated with the facility, equipment, meal prep and labor. From the program's 2015 launch to 2019, participation in the program grew by 22 percent. The model has inspired replication in nine other counties throughout the state.

Promoting Social Engagement

The My Meal–My Way model provides social engagement for older adults by structuring dining with and among others at the restaurants, allowing them to naturally socialize within a community setting. Reconnections with old acquaintances and new friendships are a common occurrence among participants. When dining at these locations, participants are provided with information about the activities and services available to them through the senior centers, helping them engage in other activities of interest they may not have been aware existed.

COVID-19 Response

Following the March stay-at-home order due to COVID-19, My Meal–My Way locations were closed to the public. Within one week of closure, the My Meal–My



"It is so nice to see smiling people we know in the other cars and especially staff—even if they are wearing masks. THANK YOU for offering this service for us—words literally cannot do justice in saying thank you for this."

Way dining locations adapted their operations to provide several takeout meals per day in each location. One location also began preparing more than 300 meals for a food pantry, where older adults can pick up the meals along with a weekly food box. Additionally, My Meal–My Way staff provide essential safety and hygiene supplies to participants, including masks, sanitizers and toilet paper, as well as activity bags with coloring supplies, craft kits and information on online exercise activities to help combat social isolation. Participants have expressed how much they appreciate seeing familiar faces and receiving great, nutritional food while following physical distancing guidelines. During May 2020, 18,463 meals were provided through My Meal–My Way, which also helped the local restaurants that were closed due to COVID-19 receive income and remain viable.

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PEARLS Connect

Area Agency on Aging of Tarrant County | Fort Worth, TX

Program Description

While the incidence of depression among older adults was once hidden, research is now shining a spotlight on the increase of late-life depression among older adults. Recognizing this growing need in homebound older adults in their region, the **Area Agency on Aging of Tarrant County** (AAATC) worked with The Women's Center to launch the Program to Encourage Active and Rewarding Lives (PEARLS) Connect. The PEARLS program is a national evidence-based depression management program for older adults and their caregivers that uses problem solving treatment and activity planning as its foundation of intervention. Clients who complete the PEARLS program are enrolled in PEARLS Connect, a peer-to-peer continued care model. PEARLS Connect provides older adults who are socially isolated and/or depressed with social support and opportunities to utilize the PEARLS methodology, helping older adults maintain the improvements in mental health they achieved through their participation in the core PEARLS program.

PEARLS Connect is part of The Women's Center overall PEARLS program delivery, which is funded by AAATC. The Women's Center developed PEARLS Connect and launched the full-scale model in October 2018. PEARLS Connect offers a monthly newsletter sent to enrolled clients that includes opportunities to connect on social media, opportunities to give back to the community—such as making treat bags for children—and information on a series of events focused on older adults, including social engagement, mindfulness and self-care, holiday-themed gatherings and technology classes.

Since launching PEARLS Connect in October 2018, 25 clients have enrolled, receiving 193 hours of service at PEARLS Connect events. As of October 2019, 83 percent of PEARLS Connect clients who attended two or more PEARLS Connect events maintained their improved score on the Patient Health Questionnaire-9, a depression screening tool that measures client progress, for at least three months after completing the PEARLS program.

Promoting Social Engagement

The PEARLS program offers activity planning, which helps combat social isolation, a psychological indicator of depression in older adults. PEARLS Connect offers ongoing social engagement opportunities by providing ways for older adults to connect with peers, increase social connections, maintain behavioral health improvements, practice new skills and build networks after the completion of PEARLS. The program also offers a low-cost way for



"After Mr. H started attending PEARLS Connect on a regular basis, it was inspiring to see the change in him. He would clean himself up and dress up for the events. He gained confidence and socialized more each time."

AAATC to stay engaged with the participants and track long-term outcomes.

COVID-19 Response

After PEARLS Connect in-person events were cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis, AAATC began calling PEARLS Connect clients monthly and continued outreach with its monthly newsletter. To further promote engagement, AAATC developed a Zoom Bingo (ZINGO) game, with the PEARLS Connect case manager mailing hundreds of ZINGO cards and markers to all interested participants as a means to keep participants engaged. AAATC will also be working with its Junior League volunteers to convert other games and activities to a virtual format so the agency will be able to continue offering virtual social events and gatherings during the COVID-19 crisis.

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Repair Café

SOMA Two Towns For All Ages, An Age-Friendly Initiative | Maplewood and South Orange, NJ

Program Description

Older adults come together for a variety of reasons—sometimes it may be over a broken clock or radio. After learning about the Repair Café model from a local older resident, the **SOMA Two Towns For All Ages**, an age-friendly program created through a joint initiative between South Orange and Maplewood to promote healthy aging in the two towns, and its Senior Advisory Committees decided to start a Repair Café in its community. Many older adults grew up repairing items and the Repair Café provides a social engagement opportunity that allows older residents to contribute to the community.

The Repair Café is organized by older adults who serve as the program's repairers, customers and volunteers. Since launching in 2017, the SOMA Two Towns For All Ages Repair Café has brought people of all ages together through events to meet, share, eat and repair broken items together. In addition to repairing more than 300 items to date, the Repair Café has saved residents money and allowed them to keep beloved heirloom items. In addition, SOMA Two Towns For All Ages has helped four other towns in New Jersey start their own Repair Cafés.

SOMA Two Towns For All Ages bought the initial manual from Repair Café International, but all other costs are covered by donations, including the Repair Café space, which is donated by a local church.

Promoting Social Engagement

The Repair Café provides a social gathering and place to congregate where older adults bring cookies, have a cup of coffee, play music or entertain children with arts and crafts while their parents wait in line for repairs. SOMA reports that it has become one of the most feel-good places in the town.

COVID-19 Response

In response to COVID-19, the Repair Café is moving online. SOMA Two Towns For All Ages will be offering a lamp repair workshop over Zoom and the option for older adults to drop off items for expert fixers to repair.

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"It's not just about repairs. It's about community, a chance to meet people, have a cup of coffee and, by the way, get your favorite lamp fixed. It is just good fun and very social."

Technology and Connections at Home

San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services | San Francisco, CA

Program Description

Technology can be a successful means to bring older adults together. Following a successful pilot program, the **San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services** (DAS) and Curry Senior Center, a local DAS provider, implemented Technology and Connections at Home to help older adults manage their chronic conditions through the adoption of technology and health coaching. Launched in January 2018, Technology and Connections at Home loans older adults iPads, Fitbits and digital scales as part of the program's 48-week curriculum, which involves group and one-on-one instruction. The program offers weekly technology classes, instruction on different technology applications, one-on-one technical support, tutoring and health coaching, all of which help older adults manage their health and enhance their well-being through increased social interaction.

The high-touch program, which is offered in English, Chinese and Russian, engages a new cohort of approximately 15 older adults each quarter. After completion of the year-long program, participants also have access to a maintenance program. At the end of each year, participants who meet specific eligibility criteria are offered their own personal device, with expenses for the devices covered through fundraising efforts. Financial assistance is also offered to participants who do not have in-home internet access for up to one year.

Past cohort participants report a decrease in loneliness after participating in the program for a full year, an increase in confidence using the iPad and the internet, and an increase in self-efficacy in managing their health.

Promoting Social Engagement

The Technology and Connections at Home program offers opportunities for social engagement and shared learning through in-person group technology training classes and personalized tutoring and health coach sessions that allow participants to develop relationships with the instructor, program staff and their peers. Through the program, older adults build confidence, expand their access to information and resources, receive support in making lifestyle changes that have a positive impact on their health, and learn how to use technology to connect with family and friends, helping to reduce feelings of loneliness.

COVID-19 Response

With in-person activities paused due to COVID-19, the Technology and Connections at Home health coaching



"During this quarantine it really saved my life to have this iPad to keep me company. The isolation was unbearable but knowing I could FaceTime and now Zoom, I visited with my grandchild and talked to my niece in different cities. I exercise with the help of YouTube, participate in a Zoom art group at UCSF and my [AAA direct care] worker FaceTimes me so I actually take my meds on time."

moved to phone calls and Zoom with the curriculum taught by videos uploaded to a YouTube channel. The YouTube channel is promoted to all participants through tech support and tutoring calls, emails and iMessage chats. To increase engagement, the program sends participants weekly emails containing exercise options, ways to reduce stress and healthy eating tips. The program also holds weekly Zoom hangouts and has created group iMessages to continue to socially engage with program participants. If needed, in-person tech support is offered with staff and clients following physical distancing guidelines.

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Weaving Hearts Intergenerational Program

San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services | San Francisco, CA

Program Description

Intergenerational programs provide critical links to engage both the young and the old. The **San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services (DAS)** worked with Mission Neighborhood Centers, Inc. (MNC), a local DAS provider, to launch Weaving Hearts in January 2019. Weaving Hearts is an intergenerational program that celebrates Latino(x) culture. It was developed to address the elevated barriers older adults who are immigrants or who have limited English proficiency face when accessing services, the increased risk for social isolation, and the demonstrated gap in technology usage, access and skills among older adults, especially among older adult minority populations.

Weaving Hearts facilitates the sharing of talents and resources between older adults and youth to build relationships that are mutually beneficial by offering three separate intergenerational components. Tech-Pals, a monthly youth-led technology training, helps bridge the digital divide for older adults. Each One Teach One, a weekly music course, teaches older adults songs and musical skills during the first half of the course, which they then share with children ages three-to-five and their parents during the second half of the class. La Vida Comida, a monthly cooking course, brings older adults and elementary and junior high students together to create culturally significant, healthy meals with recipes that have been selected by the older adults. These three components empower older adults and offer socialization to mitigate feelings of loneliness.

Of the 40 participants who completed a survey after participating in the program in 2019, 100 percent of respondents reported that the program helped them develop new relationships and friendships and that the program reinforced their feelings of being a valued community member.

Promoting Social Engagement

The intergenerational activities of Weaving Hearts foster the transmission of ideas, culture, traditions, skills, creativity, experiences and values while helping to improve the health and well-being of older adults by reducing social isolation, providing social engagement, promoting mental alertness and building confidence for independent living.

COVID-19 Response

In response to COVID-19, Weaving Hearts was adapted to provide virtual social engagement activities via Zoom,



"I am attending these nutrition classes with joy and happiness. I love sharing with the youth. Cooking is beautiful and eating healthy is what our body needs. Thank you."

allowing continued connectivity with the program's participants while safeguarding their health and safety. DAS and MNC distributed tablets and hotspots to program participants and provided computer training to ensure older adults could access and knew how to use the technology needed to participate in the program's online classes. The impact of the program's virtual activities has extended beyond the participants to reach family members and friends who live with the participating older adults. The program has also reinforced family ties as loved ones help the older adults connect to Zoom and join them in the daily music, dancing and cooking classes. The opportunity for virtual connectivity has served as a lifeline for the participants in avoiding social isolation throughout the COVID-19 crisis and has helped foster a sense of community and connectedness among the older adults.

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Weber-Morgan Senior Art Gallery

Weber Human Services Area Agency on Aging | Ogden, UT

Program Description

Art can be the impetus for social engagement. When a senior center art instructor expressed a desire to find a place that could allow older adult art students to share their artwork with the community, the **Weber Human Services Area Agency on Aging** joined forces with six local senior centers and five senior center art instructors to create the Weber-Morgan Senior Art Gallery (www.wmseniorart.net). Launched in January 2019, the Weber-Morgan Senior Art Gallery is an artwork website that showcases the incredible talent of older adult artists who produce artwork in senior center art classes in Weber and Morgan counties. The online gallery helps connect older adult artists to their community, motivates the participating artists to continue to produce artwork to be shared, and serves as a class promotion tool that inspires and encourages other older adults to join the art classes and engage with participants.

Any older adult who participates in senior center art classes in Weber or Morgan counties can contribute artwork created in the classes to the gallery. Participants complete an artwork release form to allow their artwork to be displayed and can choose to use their own names or an artist pseudonym on the gallery. The gallery is simply a place for older adults and artwork, with no profits collected for either the website or the participants. Weber Human Services AAA uploads all images of the artwork to the gallery.

An annual website builder service and domain registration are fixed costs associated with the Weber-Morgan Senior Art Gallery. Personnel costs for the senior center staff, art instructors and the Weber Human Services Area Agency on Aging director, who developed and manages the website, are covered through voluntary or in-kind donations. From January 2019 to February 2020, 73 older adult artists have participated with approximately 400 pieces of art displayed in the gallery. New art classes, including woodcarving and watercolor, have also been offered in response to interest from the community. The gallery, which has approximately 500 visitors per month, has received a very positive response from participating older adults and art class instructors, who say the gallery has increased the popularity of art classes.

Promoting Social Engagement

The Weber-Morgan Senior Art Gallery demonstrates the power of art as a tool to address social isolation. The gallery helps make each older adult artist feel special by offering them an opportunity to share their artwork. The



"Our seniors who have shared their artwork on the website have found a new sense of pride, many of them have voiced that at this stage in life it feels amazing to see their work being appreciated and viewed! This site has done many things for the community and for the individuals who have been honored by outsiders' pure appreciation."

gallery also helps inspire other senior center participants to engage in the art classes.

COVID-19 Response

With senior centers in Weber and Morgan counties temporarily closing at the start of the COVID-19 crisis, the Weber Human Services Area Agency on Aging, art instructors and senior centers decided to display all artwork created at the homes of registered older adult artists to ensure artwork can continue to be shared on the virtual gallery throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

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Additional Resources

For more information on the work of engAGED: The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults, visit www.engagingolderadults.org. The engAGED website provides information about emerging trends, resources and replication strategies that the Aging Network can customize for use within their communities. Resources on COVID-19, including examples from the field of how Aging Network organizations have modified approaches to social engagement programming to help older adults continue to stay safely engaged, are also available at www.engagingolderadults.org/covid19.

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About n4a

The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) is a 501(c)(3) membership association representing America's national network of 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and providing a voice in the nation's capital for the more than 250 Title VI Native American aging programs. n4a's primary mission is to build the capacity of our members so they can help older adults and people with disabilities live with dignity and choices in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Learn more at www.n4a.org.



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Endnotes

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