

SOCIAL ISOLATION FORUM

PRESENTED BY

Thanks Mom & Dad Fund and
CVS Health
June 21, 2022
9:30 - 3:30
at
Maggiano's Buckhead
3368 Peachtree Rd., Atlanta,
GA 30326

FEATURED SPEAKER

Emily Allen, AARP Foundation

♥ CVSHealth.

♥ aetna





In 2021, Thanks Mom & Dad Fund was awarded a generous grant from CVS Health to test new approaches to mitigate the effects of social isolation among older Georgians. This grant was particularly timely due to the increased number of older adults suddenly sheltered at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Social isolation has always been a threat to older adults; however, the pandemic imposed this threat to all seniors and for much longer than anticipated due to the lingering virus.

Aging services had to be quickly modified to ensure that existing homebound clients could continue to receive vital supports such as home-delivered meals and myriad in-home services. Equally important, it presented problems for the seniors who typically attend congregate programs at senior centers that include daily meals as well as other gathering centers offering senior programs. Tremendous pressures existed on supply chains and shortages of personal protective equipment as seniors lost access to social connections, centers closed, and people were given strict shelter at home guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to respond to this public health crisis.

The CVS Health grant allowed Thanks Mom & Dad Fund to work with nine (9) agencies to test various interventions addressing social isolation and to host today's forum. We are grateful and proud to present the findings from this experience and continue to seek innovative approaches. With these findings and the information from featured speaker, Emily Allen, AARP Foundation, we can continue to work together and share what we have learned and what we seek to learn today and learn in the future to better serve older adults.

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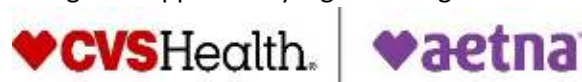
9:30 – 3:30

Maggianno's Buckhead

AGENDA

9:30	Welcome	Maureen Kelly	Thanks Mom & Dad Fund
10:00	Panel	Christi Heidt Katie McCreery-Scarbor Elizabeth Molina	Peachtree Christian Health John W. Looper Jr. Speech & Hearing Clinic Mercy Care Rome
	Q&A	JoAnna Freeman Jacquelyn Thornton	National Church Residences Foundation SageNavigator
	Q&A	Pamela Elfenbein Courtney Fleming Leslie Jones Dan Wooten	University of No. Georgia Research Foundation Forsyth County Senior Services Sowega Council on Aging Troup Council on Aging
	Q&A		
11:45	Lunch/Break		
1:00	Introduction	Debra Tyler-Horton	AARP Georgia
	Featured Speaker	Emily Allen	AARP Foundation
	Q&A		
2:30	CVS Health Zones	Cindy Follmer	Aetna, a CVS Health Company
3:00	Wrap/Adjourn	Maureen Kelly	

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Thanks Mom & Dad Fund wishes to thank the nine (9) partner organizations who tested interventions to mitigate the effects of social isolation on older adults in various settings across Georgia. Because of their ongoing work, we continue to learn how to address this threat.

Forsyth County Senior Services

John W. Looper Jr. Speech and Hearing Clinic, Inc.

Mercy Care, Rome

National Church Residences Foundation

Peachtree Christian Health, Inc.

SageNavigator, Inc.

SOWEGA Council on Aging

Troup Council on Aging

University of North Georgia Research Foundation

Special thanks to LeadingAge Georgia for making it possible to offer 3.15 hours Continuing Education Credits (CEUs) in Social Work for today's Social Isolation Forum.



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KOREAN PILOT PROGRAM TO COMBAT ISOLATION IN CAREGIVERS AND THOSE LIVING WITH ALZHEIMER'S OR OTHER RELATED DEMENTIA

Program Summary:

The Korean Pilot Program was designed to test how Adult Day Health (ADH) programs could be used as an intervention to combat isolation in Limited English Proficiency communities. The program aimed to measure impact in both caregivers and their loved ones requiring assistance and supervision in a safe environment. The pilot program implemented an adult day health respite program two days per week for caregivers seeking a culturally sensitive program in Korean for their loved one living with cognitive decline (in particular, Alzheimer's or other related dementia.) The efficacy of the program impact on ameliorating feelings of loneliness and social isolation were tested using the Lubben Social Network and UCLA Loneliness scales pre-and-post intervention.

Target population:

Caregivers and their loved one living with Alzheimer's or other related dementia within the Korean community.

Program Outcomes:

Nine families enrolled their loved one into the program. Overall, post-test scores indicated increased social engagement for individuals living with Alzheimer's and related dementia particularly in the areas related to friendships. Formal assessment of caregivers was unable to be completed since once they were comfortable that their loved one was safe and in an engaging environment, they no longer came to the program and instead had other family or friends transport them to the program. Qualitative evaluation through interviews with family members indicated the primary caregiver instead was using the time for seeing friends, taking care of themselves, and running errands – all of which would imply positive impacts on loneliness and isolation even if it was unable to be quantified.

Program Challenges:

There were four major challenges encountered with accurately assessing outcomes with our families.

1. Caregiver Attrition. As mentioned above, once caregivers were comfortable with the program they stopped attending with their loved ones and delegated transportation to other family members so they could take care of other business, self-care, and/or appointments.

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2. Trust and Stigma. There were many privacy concerns with answering questions particularly in a community where cognitive decline is highly stigmatized and often not shared with family or very close friends.
3. Family Expectations. An unexpected cultural barrier to receiving feedback was the obligation of spouses/eldest children (particularly sons) to provide care. As one secondary caregiver (eldest son) shared, there is concern that speaking of the isolation/hardships that are part of the caregiver-care recipient relationship may indicate disloyalty.
4. Cognitive Factor. Accurately assessing our enrolled participants was difficult due to cognitive decline that included lack of understanding or ability to answer the questions.

Funding:

The funding for this program was made possible through the Thanks Mom & Dad Fund in partnership with CVS Health and another generous grant from the Alzheimer's Foundation of America.

Sustainability:

There is a great need for services to combat isolation in our older adult populations, in particular our non-English speaking communities. Families caring for loved ones living with Alzheimer's or other related dementias are at particular risk due to lack of services and community support systems. Peachtree Christian Health is committed to developing diverse collaborative partnerships to promote aging in place but not in isolation. This project has been instrumental in planning real solutions with the Center for Pan Asian Services (CPACS) to reach the Pan Asian Community. This project planted the seed that has grown a full-time Korean program and offering many other services and programs for older adults, caregivers, and their loved ones living with cognitive, physical, and/or emotional decline in the Korean, Chinese, and other Pan Asian communities.

For more information, contact:

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COMMUNITY HEARING PROGRAM

Looper Speech and Hearing Center

Program Summary:

Looper Speech and Hearing Center's Community Hearing Funds helped individuals access hearing evaluation and hearing aid services that they otherwise would not be able to afford. The program did so by providing these services at a reduced cost depending on the individual's degree of financial need. In an effort to reduce the isolating effects of hearing loss in the older adult population—many of whom reported increased struggles with communication due to the Covid-19 pandemic—individuals with hearing loss were fit with hearing aids according to best-practice protocols. Success was measured using multiple validated measures. These included the Lubben scale, which was administered pre- and post-fitting to determine change in the number of familial/friendly contacts the individual interacted with on at least a monthly basis. In addition, the Hearing Handicap Inventory for the Elderly (HHIE) was administered to assess the individual's self-perceived hearing handicap before and after the hearing aid fitting, allowing for the assessment of the quality of the participant's social interactions. Finally, the International Outcome Inventory – Hearing Aids (IOI-HA) was administered post-fitting. This questionnaire assesses the individual's success with hearing aids based on published norms.

Target population:

Older adults diagnosed with clinically significant (30 dB or greater) hearing loss who received new hearing aids between February and November of 2021.

Program Outcomes:

Complete data was obtained from 27 individuals.

Of these, 67% of them saw an increase in their Lubben score, with the average change in Lubben score being -1.8, indicating reduced isolation. Something that surprised us was that initial Lubben scores were in general fairly high, with few individuals categorized as "at risk." Discussion with individuals suggested that this was because the majority of them continued to attend church during the pandemic and counted all of their "church friends" among their monthly contacts. However, despite the number of interactions being high, it became clear that before these individuals were fit with hearing aids, the quality of these interactions left much to be desired. Before hearing aids were fit, the average HHIE score was 27.5, consistent with a severe self-perceived hearing handicap as well as hearing-loss related loneliness and isolation. Following hearing aid fitting, self-perceived hearing handicap was reduced by an average of 23 points (out of 40), with an average post-fit HHIE score of 4.3 (a score of 8 or less is considered "no hearing handicap"). In addition to reduced hearing-related handicap, all of these 27 individuals could be considered "successful" hearing aid users as measured by the IOI-HA, with 10 scoring within published norms and 17 scoring above published norms—a success considering how often we hear of individuals trying hearing aids only to relegate them to the nightstand drawer due to lack of perceived benefit. This suggests improved quality of life, improved social interactions, and reduced participation restrictions in social settings.

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The impact of these hearing aid fittings was not limited to the individuals being fit with the aids. Family, friends, and caregivers also benefitted from improved communication with the individuals, with almost all caregivers mentioning reduced frustration and improved quality of communication both on their own and the patient's behalf. More specifically, they noted things like "the TV is now down to a normal volume," "I don't feel like I have to scream at him," and "I don't have to repeat myself." One patient mentioned being able to converse more easily with grandchildren on the phone that they hadn't been able to see in person since the start of the pandemic. With this in mind, the indirect impact of these Community Hearing Funds is extensive.

Program Challenges:

While patient care during a pandemic is always challenging, there were no unexpected challenges that complicated the program's success. Compared to the initial proposal, the only change made to our protocols was this addition of using the HHIE both pre-and post-intervention to assess hearing handicap (to which loneliness is a contributing factor). This was added in within the first two weeks of program operation in order to obtain a more in-depth view of our patients' self-perceived limitations. We did not just want to look at the number of individuals our patients were interacting with; we wanted to assess the quality of these interactions.

Funding:

Community Hearing Funds are funded through a combination of grant funding, United Way support, fundraising events, and private and corporate donations. We have been privileged enough to receive grant funding from Thanks Mom and Dad for two years, and we like to communicate this in our grant applications to other potential funders, as this indicates a tradition of support for our programs. The Thanks Mom and Dad/CVS Health grant was mentioned in all of our proposal letters in 2021 requesting funding for Community Funds. This is likely one of the reasons why 2021 was one of our most successful grant funding years to date.

Sustainability:

Looper Speech and Hearing Center has a 50+ year tradition of providing financially assisted speech and hearing services to individuals with financial need. We plan to continue doing so through our multi-faceted approach to fundraising, and we will continue implementing best practices to support exceptional patient outcomes.

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Mercy Care Rome

Program Summary: When Covid started impacting the programming at Mercy Care Rome and closing was the only solution, the staff felt a strong desire to continue serving. All programs were re-designed to meet the needs of this vulnerable population. Grocery shopping began along with delivery of not only groceries but activity and hygiene kits. Nursing visits were also implemented to check blood sugars of diabetics, screen for Covid-19 and educate the clients and caregivers. Depression screenings were started along with elder abuse assessments. The question arose about coping resources and how the clients were coping with increased isolation and lack of family contact. A virtual spirituality group was formed using community church leaders. At the beginning of the proposal year, Mercy Care Rome remained closed and isolation for the clients continued. The Lubben Social Network Scale was used to assess the levels of isolation and support and to measure the amount of friend and family interventions that were possible. The PHQ-9 was also used to assess depression and questions were asked about home environments to assess any indicators of elder abuse. It was administered by a Behavioral Health Specialist. When Mercy Care re-opened, it was apparent how much the group had impacted the clients' lives. The group continued to meet in person and different formats were implemented. With funding from the Thanks Mom and Dad Foundation, resources were added to the group, prayer journals, and Bible word search books. Since Mercy Care Rome is a certified Music and Memory center, hymns were added. This addition engaged the clients with some cognitive impairment, and they participated actively singing the hymns.

Target population(s) The target population was the existing Adult Day Health clients, along with a few from the Senior Employment program and Grands Who Care program . The population was mostly female with an average age of 78. Most were raised in the south and church was a large part of their history. Most participants were of the Baptist faith and relied on their religion for support. During the pandemic they found comfort turning to religion.

Challenge : When the project started, several formats were researched for client access to weekly spiritual discussions. Internet availability, computer access and knowledge of the computer were all deterrents to the internet as the avenue. Cell phones were identified and a specific call-in number was established using Webex. Phone minute limits were not a problem. Agendas were distributed to all clients with the grocery deliveries. Staff calls ,as a reminder, also took place. Technological challenges were minimized,after the format was identified. The call-in process remained current until the re-opening of the center on April 18, 2021. Face to face discussions started and other challenges were addressed. The challenges of meeting the pandemic guidelines of social distancing and masks were first and foremost. Other challenges were engaging the clients with a cognitive deficit. Knowing the positive effect of music, singing hymns became part of the agenda.

Successes: Many successes were experienced in conjunction with the spirituality group. The group increased in attendance, use of the Lubben Social Network Scale and its results gave indicators for further screening for depression, addition of a grief counselor gave clients opportunities to discuss their losses, clients increased knowledge of cell phone usage, a newsletter was developed as an additional communication tool. Client comments such as, "With it being so stressful with the Covid-19 virus and having to stay inside all the time, the group comforts me and makes me not so tense about what is going on," " The group offers encouragement and frees my mind from concentrating on what's going on in the world," "I enjoy the group very much. I feel the Spirit and I feel God. It makes a difference to me" were all shared by the clients.

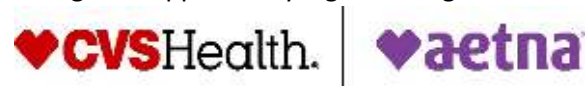
One insight that was noted was," because we all were isolated, some of us experienced what the aging population experience from day to day, isolation>"

Program Modifications: Once the center closed and all programs morphed into virtual formats, the decisions centered on how Mercy Care Rome could deliver programs. Internet was not widely available in the more rural areas and knowledge and accessibility were also cited as barriers. Cell phones were chosen as the delivery model. Minutes incurred as an expense were reimbursed. Contacting the organization's IT department to develop a call-in number through Webex was also necessary. The virtual spirituality discussions took place once a week, until April 18, 2021 when Mercy Care Rome re-opened. Further modifications took place after the re-opening with the addition of social distancing and masks. Face to face spirituality groups were also enhanced with light refreshments, prayer journals, bible word search books and hymns.

Funding: The funding from the Thanks Mom and Dad Foundation enabled Mercy Care Rome to cement the format of the program and allowed it to grow in size and content. The group started with 4-6 participants and currently has 10-12 participants weekly. The content now includes a check-in with each client at the beginning of the group, using the prayer journals purchased with the funding. The discussions are enhanced using bible study word search puzzles and hymns.

Sustainability: The program will most definitely continue. The ability to use volunteers to offer clients a special forum to share has definitely added to the quality of their lives. The ability to discuss losses with a grief counselor has made a huge difference in the quality of the discussions. The group answers a need for those who can no longer participate in their own church as well.

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National Church Residences Foundation / Betmar Village

Senior Housing Social Engagement Program

Program Summary:

The Senior Housing Social Engagement Program at Betmar Village took a three-pronged approach to decreasing the depressive feelings caused by social isolation. The first step involved the purchase of several new computers for the property and training the residents on how to use them. The second step involved providing entertainment for the residents in the form of concert lunches. These concerts were conducted outside so that residents could enjoy their time together without the worry of COVID-19. In the final step, a wellness program was instituted that included tai chi and yoga classes to help calm the residents' minds and provide balance and stability to their bodies. The combination of these three program areas helped make a real difference in the lives of the residents and improve their overall wellness.

Target population:

Our target population was the low-income senior residents living in the Betmar Village residential community in the Atlanta, GA, area.

Program Outcomes:

Betmar Village was very privileged to be able to partner with Sage Navigator*, a grass roots group that "strengthens communities by empowering elders and individuals living with disabilities toward the goal of aging in place." The Sage Navigator team was brought in to help administer and analyze the seniors using the Lubben Social Network Scale. Twenty-one of the forty-eight senior residents participated in this first round of surveys. Of those, 13 were identified as moderate to high-risk in terms of being social isolated. Once identified, our Service Coordinator was able to engage these residents and work with them to find ways to improve the mental health and well-being.

In addition to the Sage Navigator surveys, the Service Coordinator was also able to connect with the seniors and administer follow-up surveys to see what their progress was in terms of feelings of isolation. Over 50% of the residents showed a marked improvement of their scores. More importantly, the residents reported feeling less stressed and more comfortable in their home environment.

Although the residents were the ones being directly affected by this programming, others in the community also felt its affects. For example, doctors were easily able to communicate with their patients (our residents) through telehealth visits. The residents' families were also touched because their family members now had access to video chatting.

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National Church Residences Foundation / Betmar Village

Program Challenges:

The biggest issue faced was getting past the reluctance of some residents to attend events because of their concern over COVID-19. In order to combat these concerns, our Service Coordinator planned a number of the events to take place outdoors. While this helped alleviate fears about the virus, it still posed issues given the hotter temperatures in Atlanta in the summertime. To counteract that issue, some of the events were held indoors with smaller crowds.

In addition to the challenges faced with the COVID-19 virus and the Atlanta heat, the next biggest issue faced was the reluctance of some residents to participate in the Lubben Scale survey process. Many felt that the surveys were too personal and they were not comfortable sharing that kind of information. In order to alleviate their concerns, our Service Coordinator explained that although she would know their identity, the results were delivered to our funders anonymously. This did help a few of them feel more comfortable and at ease. Additionally, from the perspective of reporting results, we faced a challenge with the data not necessarily matching the feedback from the seniors. Based on what they conveyed to the Service Coordinator, the programs were helping them. Because of the low return rate on the follow-up surveys, it was difficult to convey that feeling using just the numbers.

Funding:

National Church Residences continues to seek out funding to support the initiative at Betmar Village and other residential communities like it. We have been fortunate to have a strong donor program and to have been the recipient of multiple grants like that from the Thanks Mom & Dad Fund that help us continue this programming.

Sustainability:

National Church Residences is very fortunate to have an excellent team of Service Coordinators. These coordinators work with our community partners to continue the type of programming that helps prevent social isolation and keep residents happy and healthy.

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SageNavigator Program Summary

SageNavigator addressed social isolation amid the 2020-2021 COVID pandemic by introducing HoPE (Helping our Participants Engage) through an Intentional Mindfulness Initiative for older adults 55+. Engagement is critically important for brain health and emotional wellbeing.

Goal: To enable 100 African American/Black older adults to access virtual and self-help programming using intentional mindfulness through illustrated journaling techniques.

Objectives:

1. To introduce the concept of mindfulness practice as a tool to reduce stress and promote health and wellness
2. To invite elders to experience journaling in a different way—using artistic expression rather than relying solely on the written word; and
3. To offer unique, interactive opportunities for older adults to engage with other elders to combat social isolation during challenging times of social distancing.

Target population(s)

Target populations were African American/Black older adults and underrepresented elders living in affordable housing in Metro Atlanta. Many senior living property managers and staff in underrepresented populations noticed a rise in aggressive behaviors, loneliness, and signs of depression among their residents once the pandemic emerged. Amid the pandemic, protocols to physically isolate remained in place for over 18 months. Mindfulness is a strategy to overcome loneliness and social isolation behaviors. SageNavigator, implemented a person centered/directed approach to minimize the disparate impact of social isolation by bringing the HoPE initiative to these populations:

- 129 older adults (ages 55 +) were offered the Intentional Mindfulness Journal used for the HoPE Initiative
- Of those, 44 participants completed the seminars and subsequent Lubben assessment during the HoPE initiative

The HoPE Initiative directly impacted 44 older adults ages 55+ living in affordable housing:

- 52% (23) of those who participated in the full program increased their Lubben Score and lowered their risk for social isolation,
- 43% (19) of participants decreased their Lubben Score and increased their risk, and
- 5% (2) had no change in their Lubben Scores.

In addition, 85 older adults were indirectly impacted by the HoPE initiative after receiving the Intentional Mindfulness journal and packet without participating in the full HoPE Intentional Mindfulness seminars/virtual sessions.

Wins and Challenges

A major win is that 52% (23) of those who fully participated in the HoPE initiative improved and reduced their social isolation risk score.

Some of the challenges we encountered are listed below:

Older adults have tremendous hesitancy and difficulty in participating in and joining virtual seminars due to:

- Low technology literacy skills or they often communicated that they were averse to learning how to use Smart Technology
- Averse to being on video (having others see their living environments and images while participating in videoconferencing)
- Cost prohibitive even when plans like Comcast/Infinity senior discount programs are available. We learned that if older adults already had a Comcast Cable plan, they couldn't leverage the \$10 per mo. WiFi discount plans.
- Many elders in affordable housing are paying \$90-\$160 per month for cable TV and are priced out for the WiFi feature if it wasn't already a part of their plans. Many were locked into their rates for 12-24 months. Consequently, we decided to host the sessions on-site in small groups--indoors and moderate sized groups--outdoors, when weather permitted. Older adults prefer face-to-face engagement over virtual engagement--even when they possess the technology.

Other challenges included Social Service Coordinator turnover by two of the target communities selected to partner in the delivery of the HoPE initiative. Therefore, access to those participants was challenging. Building trust took time as we had many to decline responding to subsequent Lubben assessments given the nature of the highly personal information requested in the tool.

Program Modifications

Once the delivery approach was modified, we pivoted to work with Resident Council leaders and Property Management staff to create a gateway to continue the HoPE initiative in-person vs. virtual seminars to increase participation while honoring CDC guidelines for small and large group meetings. We offered the program indoors for up to 10 participants and outdoors for groups larger than 10 in size.

To build relations with the older adult target populations, we offered cookouts and ice cream socials to build rapport for those communities who no longer had social service coordinators in their communities. Also, this allowed for additional opportunities for social engagement to address social/emotional wellbeing among participants.

Anecdotally, we believe the interventions delivered were successful since 52% (23) participants completed the full initiative showed less risk for social isolation after implementation of the HoPE Mindfulness activities.

Funding

- Anthem and JenCare provided an additional \$1,750 to cover the cost of Intentional Mindfulness materials and other contract services outside of the TMD grant in 2021.
- SageNavigator plans to continue the HoPE Intentional Mindfulness Initiative if awarded adequate funding in 2022 to continue following those who are still at risk (21 participants). We wish to explore why these individuals who received the input of the Intentional mindfulness journal and activities--yet did not maintain the motivation to continue the practices taught to make the behavioral changes expected per their Lubben Pre vs. Post assessments.

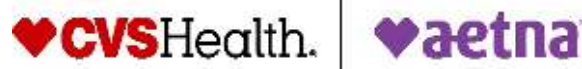
Below are some perceptions from our team which need further evaluation for the 21 aforementioned participants:

- For those who showed no change or had an adverse lower Lubben scores following their involvement in the HoPE, we want to further explore what were the underlying causes (i.e.):
 - In nearly 15 cases, scores declined when the participant skipped one or more of the questions on the survey. We need to know why they decided not to answer certain questions (was it an error or intentional)?
 - Had their network of family and/or friends decreased due to loss of loved ones due to COVID-19 or other illnesses? The majority of the participants in the HoPE Initiative identified as African American/Black. Data reveals that the AA/B communities were hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic and experienced greater losses of life due to contracting COVID-19 and variants of the virus.
 - Were family and friends displaced/moved away (due to COVID-19 or other factors)?
 - Were the participants with declining Lubben scores more honest with their responses on the post assessment and if so, dig deeper to understand why?
 - Did participants become more self-aware and/or more thoughtful regarding their responses to the Lubben question set post the HoPE Mindfulness Initiative?
 - Did the closing of social, faith, and area engagement venues in their communities or buildings disrupt the opportunity to engage over longer periods of times and consequently impacted their Lubben score?

Sustainability

SageNavigator would like to explore bringing the HoPE Mindfulness Initiative and practices to a new SageVillage group of 19 older African American adults to ascertain if our curriculum works now that elders are less restricted by social isolation requirements. Also, SageNavigator plans to seek additional funding to explore what some of the disparate impacts were for those 21 participants (48%) who did not experience positive or any change in their Lubben Pre vs. Post assessments.

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University of North Georgia Research Foundation / Institute for Healthy Aging

Generation-to-Generation Oral Histories

Program Summary:

The Generation-to-Generation program virtually paired university students with older adults in an effort to reduce social isolation and loneliness during the Covid-19 pandemic and its' sequelae. Students were tasked with building a supportive relationship with an older-adult partner (mentor) and with assessing the mentor's community resource needs; if appropriate, service referrals were made. Students then worked with their mentor to document oral histories. The efficacy of the program impact on ameliorating feelings of loneliness and social isolation were tested using the Lubben Social Network and UCLA Loneliness scales pre-and-post intervention.

Target population:

The Generation-to-Generation target population is older adults isolated at home. The physical location of older adults varied as referrals from senior centers and other community partners across a wide geographical area were accepted.

Program Outcomes:

Fifty-one older adults and 17 students participated in the program during the funded period.

For the mentors participating in the pre-post research protocol and exhibiting change in their Lubben Scale score, the most common change item was positive - LUB5:

- ***How many friends do you feel at ease with that you can talk about private matters?***

Equally important, for those participating in the research protocol, the UCLA Social Isolation Scale showed positive program outcomes as well. The following 5 survey items were correlated with positive change for older adults participating in the Generation-to-Generation project:

- ***How often do you feel that you lack companionship?***
- ***How often do you feel alone?***
- ***How often do you feel isolated from others?***
- ***How often do you feel you can find companionship when you want it?***
- ***How often do you feel shy?***

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University of North Georgia Research Foundation / Institute for Healthy Aging

Program Challenges:

All mentors participating in the Generation to Generation project were contacted by our Research Associate at the beginning of each semester, informed of our research protocols and asked to participate in the research protocol “Can Social Isolation and Loneliness be ameliorated through participation in an oral history project.” Choosing to participate or choosing not to participate in the research component had no effect on the mentor’s participation in the Generation to Generation project itself. The two instruments that were utilized for this research were the Lubben Social Network Scale (LSNS-6) and the UCLA Loneliness Scale. Very few of our participants agreed to participate in both the pre-and post-intervention survey.

An additional challenge was that during the course of the program the university allowed students to resume in-person field experiences and the number of students, and therefore mentors, decreased substantially.

Funding:

The University of North Georgia Institute for Healthy Aging has been seeking funding to continue the research protocol portion of the Generation-to-Generation program as the pilot data offers the opportunity for the program to become a Best Practice Evidence-Based Model for ameliorating feelings of isolation and loneliness among home-bound older adults. The number of participant and non-participant ‘control’ cohorts required for the statistical power for findings to be generalizable to larger populations requires resources beyond the university’s ability to self-fund.

Sustainability:

The grant provided us with the opportunity to gather data and the preliminary evidence to continue to seek external funding.

Equally as important (but more important for our potential participants) the CVS/Thanks Mom and Dad Funding provided us with the evidence needed to continue offering this program as a virtual field service option for our students and the university and the Institute for Healthy Aging have committed the funding to do so.

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Forsyth County Senior Services

Program Summary:

Forsyth County Senior Services implemented the **Tools for Connection – Life Stories** program to help elders narrate and publish their life stories. Writing one's memoirs is a common activity for older adults, but our program is unique as it's based on reducing social isolation with guided staff interventions. Implemented during the pandemic, it helped improve social wellness for participants, offered a mental health professional resource and encouraged reminiscing with family and friends for greater interpersonal connection.

Staff and volunteers received professional training to help facilitate cultural sensitivity, patience, understanding and communication skills for assisting older adults to tell their life stories. We structured interviews to no more than six, to keep participants focused and not require too much time from participants. After each interview, participants were encouraged to reach out to friends, family or look through pictures to reminisce. The life story questions, focusing on tales of childhood and adventures of adulthood, served as a guide and there were no required answers; we wanted to keep the life story in the voice of the participant. A life story could be told through words or pictures; photos were an option used by some that had language barriers or communication challenges.

Those who completed the program received a quality, hard-bound printed copy of their published life stories. Many participants expressed gratitude that they were given the chance to share their memories and accomplishment of a life long-lived.

Target population:

First phase of program – 400 Older adults in our Congregate Nutrition program and home delivered meals program, ages 60+

Second phase of program – 800 older adults in all of our programming, ages 50+

Program Outcomes:

Approximately 50 older adults participated in the program. There were some participants that did not continue due to health and cognitive limitations. It was concluded that most of our participants improved their social connections based on the life story intervention, thus increasing social connectivity. Most of the participants increased their social connections with friends or family, at least by one person. This was most likely influenced by the staff prompts designed in the program to encourage social connection as part of filling in parts of their life stories. We believe that some of the results were skewed as the post-test scores could also have been influenced by the world opening up and our program participants were no longer as isolated.

Program supported by a generous grant from





SOCIAL ISOLATION FORUM

June 21, 2022

Forsyth County Senior Services

Program Challenges:

Our senior centers re-opened shortly after the implementation of the program. Suddenly, isolation was not a huge concern, so fewer felt compelled to sign up for a lengthy project. Staff, originally involved in the facilitation of life story interviews, had to shift their focus from this project to maintaining the day-to-day interactions in our centers with programming. Volunteer responses were low as many of our volunteers wanted to interact with program participants face-to-face instead of the necessary COVID-19 precautions over the phone. As people began to get back to some normality with vaccine availability, volunteers were no longer interested in spending this amount of time with an elder participant.

We decided to pivot the program and make some modifications. We no longer met one-on-one but offered in-person group sessions for participants. The group method was highly successful and expedited the written life story product in comparison to the question-and-answer individual format. An graduate-level intern, with excellent writing skills, was brought on board to get many of the life stories to completion in the second phase of the program.

Funding:

The funding provided by this grant contributed to staff training from a licensed professional, program materials and professional bound copies of life stories. We were able to leverage an additional \$2,500 from Walmart for this project. This additional funding allows us to expand this project to continue for an additional year.

Sustainability:

We continue to offer the program, adjusting it as we go along and reflect on ways to improve social connection for program participants. These redesigns allow us to market the program differently each time. A great way to sustain this promising practice is to incorporate the use of social service interns to assist with the project. Their interest in the field of gerontology combined with the need to develop writing skills to supplement their course requirements makes an excellent addition to the Tools for Connection program. The presence of a younger student interviewer also gives the older adult program participants a sense of generativity, the need for passing on their words of wisdom and life lessons to a younger generation.



Program supported by a generous grant from





SOCIAL ISOLATION FORUM

June 21, 2022

Sowega Council on Aging

Program Summary

The senior center without walls program in southwest Georgia has transformed the delivery of services to seniors. The program began in April 2020, early into the COVID-19 pandemic, initially as a solution for the continuation of services during a time in which seniors were advised not to participate in group and congregate activities. The senior center without walls model provided a warm nutritious meal in a restaurant setting, virtual and distanced activities for all participants were communicated through monthly newsletters, a YouTube channel was created with a video library of health and wellness tips, exercise classes, devotions, scam avoidance advise, and more. Our social isolation innovation study followed participants in our seven evidence-based programs offered at the Sowega Council on Aging. These classes offer good evidence that they have a positive impact on the outcomes that they are designed to change. For example, our fall prevention classes teach clients how to protect themselves from falling and if they fall how to prevent major injury. Due to the pandemic, we created diverse ways for our clients to participate. Many of the classes were offered via telephone or zoom and we are piloting several classes that clients participate in using a Claris Companion tablet.

Target population(s)

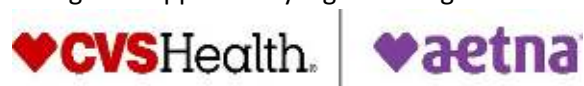
Senior citizens age 60+ throughout our 14 county region (Baker, Calhoun, Colquitt, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Lee, Miller, Mitchell, Seminole, Terrell, Thomas and Worth).

Wins and Challenges

Communication was an early challenge we encountered. Without the facilities as central communication hubs, we had to rethink how to get the word out about the virtual and distanced classes that were being offered. In addition to the innovations listed above, the agency's Facebook page was updated to be more appealing to seniors and lists information about all our classes being offered. We launched a new senior-friendly website to make it easier to navigate and more appealing to current and potential participants. We initiated a branding campaign that included a new logo and agency imaging, and through that campaign, we developed flyers, mailers, and a quarterly magazine that is distributed to 4500 people per month in digital and print formats. We also have access to a communication system that can create robo calls to clients, telephoning them with information and reminders.

A win for Sowega Council on Aging, due to this study there was an increase in the quality of interactions with our participants which focused more on engagement in the evidence-based program classes. The agency developed a tablet program that is growing and serving more people in their homes, reducing social isolation.

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SOCIAL ISOLATION FORUM

June 21, 2022

Program Modifications

The senior center without walls model has been a great fit for the social isolation intervention. We now coordinate activities that help reduce social isolation in our seniors with various local entities providing more options for seniors to engage in local programming. Partnerships include the YMCA, local libraries, community collaboratives, churches, and family connections. Classes offered include water aerobics, making legacy books, bingo, crafts, exercise classes, etc.

Funding

We are grateful that funding received through the Thanks Mom & Dad Fund in partnership with CVS Health provided the opportunity to leverage CARES Act funds to benefit these activities and classes for seniors.

Sustainability

The Senior Center Without Walls models has been a game changer for the Sowega Council on Aging. Two years after its implementation, the agency peaked at serving 1500 individuals in the program with 790 on the wait list. In order to sustain this program, we plan to continue our work with the Division of Aging Services, increase our partnerships and leverage resources with local providers, in addition to seeking grant funding through private and public foundations and donors. As people and businesses learn about this project, they are eager to help in many ways.

Program supported by a generous grant from





SOCIAL ISOLATION FORUM

June 21, 2022

Troup Council on Aging / The Active Life Recreation Centers

“Connecting Our Seniors”

Program Summary:

The “Connecting Our Seniors” program identified participants who had not returned to the Active Life Recreation Center during our soft opening. Through the use of 10 “Connection Volunteers” we contacted 124 participants that had not returned, identifying their specific needs. The goal was to reconnect older adults to the Senior Center.

With additional community support, we were able to hire an intern from LaGrange College (Psychology major) to oversee the start of this program.

Target population:

Older adults (55+) isolated at home who were once regular participants at the Active Life.

Program Outcomes:

The Lubben Scale (LSNS-6) Worksheet was administered both at in-person visits (22) and by phone (102). During this first intervention we discovered 60 people who were considered “at risk.” After initial contacts, these discoveries were made: unawareness of items/services available; vaccination hesitancy or lack of access (appointments, transportation); reluctance to learn/use technology (zoom appointments, classes at center, visiting with family/friends); and general resistance to returning to outside world being resolved that this is their life now. To address these issues, frozen meals (5 to a bag) and shelf stable meal boxes (5 to a box) were distributed to participants in need via drive-thru service or delivery with Troup Transit partnering in this endeavor.

Approximately 2175 meals were distributed. The program provided computer tablets (15), tablet cases (15) and (10) Mobile Hot Spots to address the issue of family/friend isolation, and provide the ability to attend zoom doctor appointments and participate in classes live-streamed from the center which included exercise classes, healthy living classes, and craft classes. This provided an opportunity for participants to be a part of a familiar environment while still at home.

The intern trained 2 volunteers on computer tablets and participants could “check out” a tablet and/or hot spot from the technology “library” to schedule appointments for home visits. Participants could also come to the center to check out the tablet for use on campus. As more participants came back to center, the intern organized and taught classes (once a week, 8 per class for 4 weeks, 32 participated) on how to use of tablets and familiarize them with the many apps that are available.

Program supported by a generous grant from





SOCIAL ISOLATION FORUM

June 21, 2022

Troup Council on Aging / The Active Life Recreation Centers

The game and puzzle apps are excellent for memory and hand/eye coordination for seniors. At this time, they are being used daily.

Through “Cares Act” funding, we partnered with Three Rivers and Troup County Parks and Recreation to provide 60 Survivor boxes to our “at risk” participants filled with essential/personal items, provided 30 Box fans per client request, provided transportation (Troup Transit for 6 to obtain vaccination)

Diverse Power provided a small grant to obtain 124 Storm Lights as an incentive gift for participating in this program.

372 Newsletters (1 per month) were sent out to isolated and HDM participants.

Program Challenges:

The main challenge we experienced was a reluctance to have someone visit their home, general resistance to returning to outside world (fear), and embarrassed to ask for help/admitting they needed help. There was lack of trust in some situations, especially the use of technology (iPads and Hotspots).

Funding:

The CVS/Thanks Mom and Dad Fund grant attracted additional community supports, namely ACCG (Association of County Commissioners of Georgia) provided funding to hire a College Intern, Three Rivers Area Agency on Aging provided meals, Troup County Parks & Recreation provided funding for staff, Troup Transit provided food delivery and transportation for vaccines, and Diverse Power funded incentive gifts.

Sustainability:

The grant provided us with the opportunity to gather data. 124 participants were surveyed/tested, Pre intervention 60 scored “at risk” or 48.4%. Post intervention 15 remain which is 12% “at risk”. 7 were moved to nursing homes or have caregivers. 8 are inactive. We served a total of 124, impacted directly (60 Home Visits made by Intern and volunteers) indirectly (64).

The intervention was definitely successful, our goal was to reconnect seniors with the center and we are now totally open, with transportation being offered (5x a week) , meal service every day, classes are all open, and day & multi-day trips are open to fully vaccinated. We have recruited several technology teaching volunteers to continue helping participants to communicate via smart device. We have also received two additional grants to provide food assistance to homebound participants. Regular contact with isolated participants is provided by staff members.

Program supported by a generous grant from





SOCIAL ISOLATION FORUM

June 21, 2022

Speaker Bios in order of appearance

Christi Heidt, Peachtree Christian Health

Christi Heidt is the Program Director for the Peachtree Christian Health (PCH) adult day health center in Duluth, Georgia. Christi has a diverse background in education and management. As a Horticultural County Extension Agent with the University of Georgia, she developed curriculum and training programs for youth and adults. After transitioning to Director of Landscape Management with a professional landscaping firm, her interest in using horticulture for therapeutic purposes began to flourish. She studied Horticultural Therapy at the University of Kansas before opening her own business bringing therapeutic horticultural activities to older adults living in assisted living, memory care, and in-patient hospice residences. As Program Director of Peachtree Christian Health, she is able to synthesize her diverse backgrounds of curriculum development, program management, and love for serving older adults into a meaningful and sustainable part of the daily program. Her most recent effort to create an environment of hope is in the development of a 3,600 square foot Wandering International Sensory Habitat (W.I.S.H.) Garden made possible when PCH was selected as the 2021 National Recipient of the Alzheimer's Foundation of America Brodsky Innovation Grant.

Kathryn "Katie" McCreery-Scarbor, John W. Looper Jr. Speech & Hearing Clinic

Katie McCreery-Scarbor, Au.D. is the audiologist at Looper Speech and Hearing Center, Northwest Georgia's only not-for-profit speech and hearing center. As an American Speech-Language-Hearing Association certified audiologist, her passion is removing barriers to hearing healthcare access for all individuals struggling with hearing loss. Katie received a B.S.Ed. in Communication Sciences and Disorders from the University of Georgia and went on to receive her Doctor of Audiology degree from East Tennessee State University in 2017 before moving back to her home state of Georgia. When she is not in the clinic, she enjoys creative writing and exploring the North Georgia mountains.

Elizabeth Molina, Mercy Care Rome

Elizabeth Molina is the Executive Director of Mercy Care Rome. Mercy Care Rome focuses on the geriatric population through four programs Adult Day Health, Caregiver Support group, Grands Who Care and a Senior Employment program. Elizabeth Molina's academic background is in Nursing with a Master's degree in Gerontology, along with a Legal Nurse Consultant Certificate from the University of Georgia and a certification as a Dementia Practitioner. Elizabeth has been involved with aging for 30 years. It is a passion and a mission to provide the best quality of life to the aging population. She likes research and program development for this population and is dedicated to her profession and her professional role. In her spare time, Elizabeth likes to read, likes antiques, and likes to run/walk.

JoAnna Freeman, National Church Residences Foundation

After receiving her B.G.S. in General Studies, Business/Accounting Concentration at West Texas A&M University, JoAnna Freeman started her career in the non-profit accounting sector. Using the skills learned while at the United Way, she transitioned into the corporate world. She began the next phase of her career with Masonite International in Texas. As Sales Manager, she grew her territory by 120% leading to a promotion and move to Tampa, Florida managing large-scale projects for the company in Home Depot and Lowes stores across the U.S. After leaving Masonite, JoAnna worked in the Learning and Development department of PricewaterhouseCoopers. There she managed special projects that helped internal teams educate staff. Although she loved her work there, JoAnna felt the draw to be closer to family and made the move to the Columbus, Ohio area. In Columbus, she returned to her non-profit roots and joined the team at National Church Residences as a Service Coordinator. Within the year, JoAnna transitioned to the corporate office and joined the Foundations team as their new Grants Manager. She oversees the full lifecycle of grants, from research to the final report.

In her spare time, JoAnna enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, volunteering with the youth at her church, and numerous outdoor activities, like hiking and kayaking.

Jacquelyn B. Thornton, MSA, CEHA, SageNavigator

Jacque received her B.S. in Community Health Education at Clark-Atlanta University and Master of Science in Administration at Central Michigan University. She currently serves as the Executive Director for Two Sparrows Village and SageNavigator, respectively. She has served as a change agent for 25 years in association management and population health with her focus in the field of aging services, as well as 13 years in the public health arena as an analyst.

In her recent positions, Thornton was Senior Vice President of LeadingAge Georgia, the Georgia Institute on Aging, and the Population Health Director at National Church Residences Georgia. In addition, Jacque's career and volunteer activities have been devoted primarily to working with governmental and nonprofit organizations such as LeadingAge National's Professional Development Network, Co-founder and Board Chair

of SageNavigator, Clark Atlanta University Guild Member & Chair Elect, BridgeBuilders of DeKalb & East Point, Center for Positive Aging, and many others.

Pamela Elfenbein, University of North Georgia Research Foundation

Pamela Elfenbein, MSW, PhD, is the Director of the University of North Georgia (UNG) Institute for Healthy Aging where she develops and oversees academic programming and community initiatives designed to enhance quality of life for older adults in the northeast Georgia mountains region. She employs a holistic multidisciplinary and intergenerational approach to healthy aging, health promotion, and disease prevention and seeks new and creative ways to engage students with our community.

Dr. Elfenbein has been awarded almost \$2 million in federal, state, and foundation funding for her applied program and research initiatives with older adults and our communities, with funding sources that include USHUD, USAID, Hospice Foundation of America, and other public and private entities including the Thanks Mom and Dad Fund.

Courtney Fleming, Forsyth County Senior Services

Courtney Fleming has a social services background and is passionate about making life better for special populations. She oversees communications and program planning for three senior center locations. Courtney is part of the tech team that created the award-winning online programming for older adults in Forsyth County, GA.

Leslie Jones, Sowega Council on Aging

Leslie Jones is the Administrative Manager for the SOWEGA Council on Aging (SCOA) and has worked with the organization for 3 years. Her responsibilities include grant writing and she has written numerous proposals which have secured grants awarded to SCOA for supporting senior service across the board. Her work exemplifies her passion for helping senior citizens in her community. In addition to her grant writing role, Leslie is also responsible for all office administration including agency correspondence and coordination.

Dan Wooten, Troup Council on Aging, Active Life Recreation Centers

Dan Wooten is Director of Aging Services for Troup County, Georgia. He oversees the three Active Life Recreation Centers for adults 55+. Dan earned a BA in Communication from Georgia State University and a Master's from Dallas Theological Seminary. He has served on many local boards over the twenty-four years he has worked with older adults (including Leadership Troup, Lions Club, Georgia Recreation and Parks Association, Relay for Life and Heart of West Georgia).

Dan has been married to his wife Linda for thirty-three years and they have one adult daughter. They are also the proud owners of two rescued dogs.

Emily Allen, AARP Foundation, Senior Vice President, Programs

Throughout her career, Ms. Allen's primary passion has been on serving the needs of those most at risk in our communities. She has served in a number of capacities in the non-profit, education and workforce development arenas both internationally and in the U.S. and has worked across the generations to ensure vulnerable and at-risk individuals have access to the resources and services they need to thrive.

Beginning her career as a special education teacher and school administrator on Andros Island, Bahamas, Ms. Allen later held positions with the AARP enterprise including Director, Economic Security and Workforce Programs and Vice President, Income Security before being named Senior Vice President for Programs for AARP Foundation in 2016.

In her current role, Ms. Allen is responsible for overseeing AARP Foundation's programmatic portfolio that focuses on equity in increasing economic opportunity and social connections for low-income older adults. Through innovation and the development and implementation of programs and interventions, the Foundation's collective work focuses on ensuring that low-income older adults are able to secure the essentials in life.

Ms. Allen holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Westminster College and a Master's Degree in Human and Organizational Learning from The George Washington University.

Cindy Follmer, Aetna, President - Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama & Mississippi

Cindy joined Aetna in 2006 and was appointed as President in December 2020. As President, she is responsible for leading local markets in Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi overseeing sales and operations for Medicare, commercial group, individual and government businesses.

Prior to her current role, Cindy most recently served in the dual roles of VP/Chief Medicare Officer for Georgia and the Gulf States market and Chief Medicare Officer Coach for the Southeast Region. Before her experience at Aetna, she spent 4 years as Executive Director & Chief Operating Officer of UnitedHealthcare of Georgia. Cindy also served as Vice President of Network Management for WellPoint from 1997-2002 in the Mid-Atlantic region. Cindy's career began in hospital administration in the Mid-Atlantic region where she spent 15 years working for Adventist Healthcare in risk management and managed care contracting roles.

Cindy holds a Master of Administrative Sciences degree from The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. She is also a Registered Health Underwriter and is licensed and appointed as a Life & Health agent in the State of Georgia.

Save the Date

*Thanks A Million
Gala*

November 10, 2022

Georgia Aquarium

6:00 Cocktails, Silent Auction & Dinner

Supporting

