

engAGED

The National Resource Center
for Engaging Older Adults

WHAT WORKS: Social Engagement Innovations and Best Practices



Highlights from the Innovations Hub

Table of Contents

Library Memory Project

Bridges Library System, Waukesha, WI 3

Memory Stimulation with Virtual Reality Rendever

MAC, Inc, Salisbury, MD..... 4

The Online Gathering Place

Aroostook Agency on Aging, Presque Isle, ME 5

Opening Minds through Art

Scripps Gerontology Center at Miami University, Oxford, OH 6

SA Amigos Memory Café

UT Health San Antonio – Caring for the Caregiver, San Antonio, TX 7

Senior Center Without Walls

Sowega Council on Aging, Albany, GA 9

Senior Learning and Technology Engagement (SLATE)

Riverside County Office on Aging, Riverside, CA 10

Social Engage Coaching

University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester, NY..... 12

Social Isolation and Loneliness Pharmacy Project

iMPROve Health, Grand Rapids, MI 13

Thrive with Pride Cafés

AgeOptions, Oak Park, IL..... 15

Weaving Wisdom

Intergenerational Leadership Institute, The Penn State University, State College, PA..... 17

Introduction

engAGED: The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults is a national effort working to expand and enhance the Aging Network's capacity to promote and offer social engagement opportunities that help older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers thrive. Administered by USAging, funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL) and guided by a Project Advisory Committee, engAGED identifies and disseminates best practices and emerging trends, and develops resources and tools that the Aging Network and partner organizations can customize to successfully engage consumers in their communities, thereby reducing the negative effects of social isolation and loneliness.

The engAGED Social Engagement Innovations Hub launched in July 2021 to showcase successful social engagement programs via a searchable clearinghouse that facilitates sharing and replication. The Innovations Hub now features more than 70 innovative social engagement programs identified through an ongoing Call for Innovations.

The 2023 What Works Social Engagement Innovations and Best Practices features a range of successful social engagement programs currently included in the Innovations Hub. These examples employ a variety of social engagement interventions and tap into an array of partners to reach older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers in rural, suburban and urban areas. The summaries in this publication reflect program status as of October 2022.

We hope this publication and the Innovations Hub will inspire your organization's efforts to combat social isolation in your communities by highlighting impactful social engagement programs across the country.

Examples featured in this publication represent only a portion of the programs included on the Innovations Hub. Please visit www.engagingolderadults.org/hub to see the entire inventory of social engagement program examples. New programs are added regularly.



Library Memory Project

Bridges Library System | Waukesha, WI

Program Description

The Library Memory Project (www.librarymemoryproject.org) is an effort of the public libraries that are part of the Bridges Library System in WI in partnership with the Alzheimer's Association of Southeastern Wisconsin. The project serves those living with memory loss, Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Monthly memory cafés are key components of the project and offer fun activities, shared experiences and social connection for those experiencing early-stage dementia, mild memory loss or mild cognitive impairment and their families, friends and care partners. Along with the memory cafés, the libraries involved also conduct educational programs on memory loss and brain health to raise awareness and connect consumers to local resources.

In 2021, the Library Memory Project launched an 18-month StoryCorps initiative to record stories of those living with memory loss. As part of the initiative, stories from individuals living with memory loss as well as their families, friends and care partners are recorded and shared with permission. Participants may also record a conversation with a family member or friend to share their stories with loved ones and future generations. A trained facilitator helps with the recording and participants have the option to have their recordings added to the StoryCorps Archive and Library of Congress.

Partners

The Bridges Library System partners with local Aging and Disability Resource Centers and the regional Alzheimer's Association to help identify participants and support programming. Other partnerships include those with local organizations such as the Humane Animal Welfare Society and professionals such as beekeepers and florists.

Outcomes

The project began in 2015 with memory cafés in four libraries. As of October 2022, 21 public libraries within the Bridges Library System operated memory cafés. Care partners report feeling a sense of community when attending memory cafés. Care partners also report that their loved ones living with memory loss often have an improved mood after attending a memory café.

"My husband and I really look forward to the fellowship and creative projects at the monthly Memory Café meetings. It is important to his health to stay engaged and the monthly meetings provide such a nurturing, supportive, friendly atmosphere for individuals with early-stage dementia."

Lessons Learned

Organizations interested in replicating this program should incorporate memory café activities that engage the five senses as much as possible, as staff have noticed participants tend to benefit even more when multiple senses are engaged. For example, "For the Senses" memory café program featured a local master gardener talking about herbs that can be grown in backyards. At this event, the master gardener passed around potted herbs, allowing participants to see, smell, touch and taste the herbs. Participants received lavender-flavored cupcakes as a snack and created a container garden located in the library entryway.

Resources Needed

Staff time is required to run memory cafés. A marketing budget is also needed to advertise the opportunity. Additional needs include name tags, fidget spinners for participants to use during the memory café and other materials for different activities.

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Memory Stimulation with Virtual Reality Rendever

MAC, Inc. | Salisbury, MD

Program Description

Life Bridges, a day program for people living with dementia that is run by MAC, Inc., an Area Agency on Aging, offers Rendever, a virtual reality program designed for people with dementia that promotes reminiscence, provides opportunities to explore the world virtually and inspires shared experiences. The virtual reality headsets transport participants to a variety of locations, helping to stimulate engagement and conversation. The headsets can also be configured to take participants to their former homes using an integration with Google Maps. The program has been used to both stimulate and calm participants, depending on their needs. Rendever also provides activity guides on a variety of topics, themes, cities and countries, which staff use to become instant tour guides, as the activity guides include information, trivia questions and details about each location.

Participants engage and socialize during these experiences. Staff report that smiles, laughter and conversation increase during sessions and that they are able to carry it forward and build on the experience throughout the day.

Partners

Program staff work closely with participants' caregivers to help ensure they understand the day's experiences. Staff inform caregivers of the areas in the program that their loved one enjoyed, enabling them to provide related activities at home.

Outcomes

Staff document the mood of the participants both before and after each Rendever experience. Self-reports from participants and caregivers have consistently shown high levels of satisfaction.

The Life Bridges program uses two scales, Zarit Burden Interview for caregivers and Dementia Quality of Life Instrument for participants, every six months. Results have shown a decrease in stress and burden for caregivers and improved quality of life for participants with dementia. Rendever as a factor is not measured separately from the rest of the Life Bridges programs.

Lessons Learned

Small groups of four to six participants work best because this group size allows conversation and a pace that accommodates all participants. If a participant finds the headsets to be uncomfortable, they may watch the activity



"Participants' engagement and attention span increases as they remember and become interested in what they are viewing!"

on a large-screen TV. Organizations should plan for each session to last at least an hour, which allows participants to complete activities at their own pace. It is helpful to plan wrap-around activities that incorporate diverse learning styles to enhance memory stimulation. Also, remind participants to share particularly meaningful recollections with loved ones so the conversations can continue at home.

Resources Needed

The 10 headsets and the tablet used as part of this program cost approximately \$10,000. An additional cost is a yearly subscription to access the various programs and Google Maps feature, which varies based on the size of the library. Staff should plan for costs for display materials if they plan to use a theme like "Visiting Italy."

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The Online Gathering Place

Aroostook Agency on Aging | Presque Isle, ME

Program Description

The Online Gathering Place, developed by the Aroostook Agency on Aging in Presque Isle, ME, is a weekly online program that brings older adults living in rural areas together for social interaction and engagement. For one hour every Wednesday morning, participants interact and engage in conversations with one another, sharing feelings and personal stories on Zoom. The program also provides respite by giving caregivers time to attend to other matters while their loved ones participate in the program. Interested participants who do not own a computer or smartphone or have an unreliable internet connection can take advantage of Aroostook Agency on Aging's iPad loaner program.

The Online Gathering Place was developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to provide the Adult Day Service program participants with remote programming when in-person programs were paused. While in-person sessions have resumed, the Online Gathering Place continues to hold weekly events with strong participation. Aroostook Agency on Aging serves a rural part of Maine, so the Online Gathering Place is a helpful participatory alternative for older adults when transportation and distance is a year-round barrier to attending in-person activities.

Partners

The Aroostook Agency on Aging Adult Day Service staff developed the program and worked with two large donors to underwrite the cost of the iPads and internet hotspots. The Online Gathering Place facilitator works with participants and other staff to gather content recommendations.

Outcomes

The Online Gathering Place program began with five participants and has since grown to 12 class members, which staff recognize as an ideal size to encourage interaction among participants. Many of the participants live alone and this program provides them with social support and connection in a welcoming environment.

Lessons Learned

Keep the group size small to create a more intimate, personal setting where participants are more likely to engage, and the facilitator can play off everyone's strengths and interests. Before the first live session, conduct practice sessions to get comfortable and familiar with the process, which can also assist any participants

"I look forward to it every week, I love the traveling and the music. It feels so good to have people to laugh with, it makes my week."

who have technology challenges. Setting up a second laptop with the camera off and audio muted can help the presenter identify any glitches or potential difficulties participants may have.

Resources Needed

Costs include the cost of a Zoom account, iPads, internet hotspot connection and staff time. Volunteers assist with helping older adults become more comfortable with technology. Tap into a staff member who has experience with dementia, teaching older adults in virtual settings and PowerPoint to ensure smooth facilitation of the program. Developing PowerPoint slides used during each session takes fewer than five hours per week. Facilitators should log on 30 minutes before the session in the event participants want to join early and visit with one another.

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Opening Minds through Art

Scripps Gerontology Center at Miami University | Oxford, OH

Program Description

Opening Minds through Art (OMA) is an intergenerational art program designed for people living with dementia that is headquartered at the Scripps Gerontology Center, an Ohio Center of Excellence, at Miami University in Oxford, OH. Grounded in person-centered care principles, the mission of the program is to build bridges across age and to reduce cognitive barriers through art. People living with dementia serve as the program's artists and are paired with volunteer students, family members or caregivers who are trained to assist in art-making sessions through relying on imagination instead of memory and focusing on strengths instead of lost skills. OMA enables people living with dementia to assume new roles as artists and teachers and leave a legacy of beautiful artwork.

With the traditional in-person program, volunteers work one-on-one with a person living with dementia over the course of 10 to 12 weeks, allowing a relationship to form through the weekly art making sessions. All the OMA art projects are failure-free, so the pairs enjoy the opportunity to participate in a positive art making experience. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, OMA expanded its programming to include virtual opportunities for older adults living with dementia as well as those who do not have dementia, enabling them to engage with students through creative expression in music, poetry, visual arts and story building.

Partners

OMA staff work with long-term care and aging service providers across the United States to implement OMA within their communities. While headquartered at Miami University, four other organizations in VA, OH, MO and Canada are designated training centers.

Outcomes

The program has been widely replicated in more than 200 communities in the United States and Canada. Several research papers have been published on the benefits of the program for both the people living with dementia and student volunteers. People living with dementia showed more social interest, engagement and pleasure during OMA sessions compared to other traditional visual art activities such as coloring books and scrapbooking.ⁱ Through weekly interactions with older adults, the attitudes of student volunteers toward people living with dementia became more positive.ⁱⁱ



"OMA has made me a more compassionate and attentive person, which improves my ability to serve others in any and every capacity."

Lessons Learned

Training volunteers on how dementia impacts the brain and how to work with someone living with dementia is essential for program success. Each community also needs designated staff to ensure the long-term success of the program.

Resources Needed

For organizations interested in bringing the OMA program to their communities, Scripps OMA offers a 20-hour facilitator training costing \$1,000 per person. Scripps OMA also provides volunteer training for students or community members interested in participating in an established OMA program. More details on training opportunities and a listing of communities that currently offer the program are available on the Scripps OMA website (scrippsoma.org).

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SA Amigos Memory Café (Texas Memory Café Network)

UT Health San Antonio – Caring for the Caregiver | San Antonio, TX

Program Description

The SA Amigos Memory Café is the first bilingual English/Spanish memory café offered in TX. Established in February 2019, the SA Amigos Memory Café provides individuals living with dementia and family caregivers the opportunity to socialize with others in a supportive environment. The memory café enables individuals of all abilities to engage in inclusive and creative activities that are designed to spur conversation, such as therapy animal visits paired with reminiscence or dementia-friendly musical performances paired with sing-alongs.

With the transition to virtual delivery following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program recognized the increased need to build capacity among participants planning to attend online and to adapt activities to promote engagement between participants, rather than just between hosts and participants. This led the program team to incorporate Spanish and English adaptations into all planned activities and encourage participants to connect with each other beyond the memory café gatherings.

The no-cost SA Amigos Memory Café meets quarterly in person and once per month online via Zoom. All staff who support the program are trained in dementia-friendly practices and volunteers are available to arrange individual learning sessions with participants to support their comfort and ability to engage online. Interpreters for the memory café are typically committed volunteers or community partners; they are often students interested in opportunities for direct experiences with families impacted by dementia.

Partners

Partners serve a critical role in connecting community members with the SA Amigos Memory Café. To reach underserved communities, UT Health San Antonio partners with Dementia Friendly San Antonio, WellMed Charitable Foundation, the Alzheimer's Association, Biggs Institute for Alzheimer's and Neurodegenerative Diseases and Meals on Wheels of San Antonio (Grace Place). Additionally, the program taps into the Texas Memory Café Network to develop and adapt dementia-friendly activities.

Outcomes

A qualitative evaluation of interviews with regular participants of memory cafés within the Texas Memory Café Network identified five key themes: (1) a sense of reprieve; (2) celebrating what is still possible; (3) connectedness to others; (4) inclusivity; and (5) other

"In my state of Alzheimer's, we are still learning. We're learning things from what we're hearing or from the interaction whatever the activity might be. It's keeping our brain functioning, and so, I think yes that this should be something that should continue."

added values (i.e., cognitive engagement).ⁱⁱⁱ Family care partners expressed appreciation for the opportunity to plan an enjoyable activity each month. Participants noted that activities remind them of what they continue to be capable of and provide opportunities to connect in new ways. Participants also reported a feeling of connectedness and noted that the bilingual component motivated them to participate.

Lessons Learned

All memory café coordinators are encouraged to remain authentic in their engagement and to build rapport with their communities. A key strength of memory cafés is their responsiveness to the unique needs and interests of guests in a particular community. No memory café looks like another, and facilitators and coordinators are responsible for cultivating relationships upon which to build a truly responsive and sincere program. This can be achieved with a flexible mentality and commitment to the core value that individuals living with dementia and their families can and deserve to live well. To ensure the needs of non-English-speakers are met, the program uses proactive strategies such as asking what language guests are most comfortable to speak in at registration (bilingual registration forms necessary), providing pay or a stipend to volunteer translators, encouraging a supportive culture among guests to make monolingual speakers feel more comfortable, translating all visual accompaniments and materials into the desired language, and investing in a bilingual facilitator when possible.

Resources Needed

The primary cost of coordinating a memory café is staff time for the coordinator and potentially additional supplies or a videoconferencing license. However, many memory cafés function solely on volunteer time, eliminating the need for an extensive budget. When possible, interpreters are periodically compensated

through stipends. The Texas Memory Café Network developed a toolkit to support coordinators in establishing their own virtual memory cafés, which is based on the evaluation findings. The toolkit can be accessed by emailing the program manager.

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Senior Center Without Walls

Sowega Council on Aging | Albany, GA

Program Description

The Senior Center Without Walls program, developed by the Sowega Council on Aging in Albany, GA, offers the same components as a traditional senior center, but in community settings rather than in a designated senior center facility. Thanks to partnerships with local YMCAs, libraries and other nonprofit organizations, the program offers activities such as water aerobics, chair yoga, bingo, crafts, pickleball and fishing trips. Participants can visit local restaurants for their meals with the option of picking up their food or eating inside to enjoy their meal in a community setting.

In addition to the in-person activities, the program offers a variety of virtual and telephonic programs via the telephone, Zoom, Facebook Live or YouTube. Hybrid programs are held in person and live streamed simultaneously. The program uses tablets to deliver evidence-based programs and other classes virtually, which helps participants interact with one another and their families and helps homebound older adults remain engaged and connected.

Partners

Sowega Council on Aging, an Area Agency on Aging, relies on a variety of partnerships to make the Senior Center Without Walls program work. Partnerships with 22 local restaurants allows the program to provide nutritious meals while partnerships with local YMCAs, libraries and other nonprofit organizations enable events to be held at no cost to participants. The program team develops a monthly calendar of events, including activities such as exercise classes, crafting, local walks, fishing, making legacy books and more.

Outcomes

By taking its senior center programming outside the typical senior center setting, this model has tripled the number of people Sowega Council on Aging has served from 500 to approximately 1,500 people with more than 680 people on a waitlist. Prior to implementing this model, Sowega Council on Aging operated five traditional senior centers that were not meeting their daily minimum of serving 20 individuals per day. With this new model, participation has significantly increased, with one center demonstrating an increase from 15 to 294 participants.



"I think the senior center without walls program is great! I love it! I stay busy with all the programs and activities offered. You would think that we know everything, at this point, but it is surprising what you can learn!"

Lessons Learned

Developing a good system and process is the key to the success of the overall program. Focusing on logistics and management helps the program run smoothly. The program is also more resilient to workforce and COVID-19 concerns.

Resources Needed

The Senior Center Without Walls program requires fewer resources than the traditional senior center as there is less staffing needed and minimal overhead expenses. The program currently includes three-to-four full-time employees overseeing a 14-county region.

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Senior Learning and Technology Engagement (SLATE)

Riverside County Office on Aging | Riverside, CA

Program Description

The Senior Learning and Technology Engagement (SLATE) program, administered by the Riverside County Office on Aging, helps older adults use technology to meet their basic living and social needs to prevent or mitigate social isolation and loneliness. The goals for SLATE are to: (1) help older adults develop life and socialization skills through the use of technology to be self-sufficient; (2) have a mode of communication to connect with family and friends on a daily basis; and (3) increase feelings of fulfillment, connection and happiness.

The SLATE pilot program began in April 2021 with each participant receiving a tablet computer. The Office on Aging staff then provided training and technical support over a three-month period. The curriculum included a step-by-step guide of basic device use and functions; skill-building assignments to conduct Zoom meetings and online purchases; education regarding resources, programs and safe streaming practices; and coaching in online fraud awareness and prevention. During the three-month program, staff conducted in-person visits to provide technical support, supplies and additional equipment (such as stylus pens, tablet cases with stands and hotspots) to ensure ease of use for each participant.

Partners

The Psychology Department at the University of California-Riverside provided guidance on depression and loneliness assessment tools, post-screening materials and research findings on growth mindset concepts. An independent living center contributed the 40 tablets, and the in-home supportive services program provided a list of potential program participants.

Outcomes

Pilot program outcomes show improvements in participant loneliness and cognitive function through the completion of the BTACTION, PERMA, TILS Loneliness Screen and PHQ-2. On average, participant cognitive and well-being scores increased while growth mindset remained stable. All participants showed a positive change in cognitive scores, with a 19-point increase on average (range of two to 40 points). Less substantial increases occurred in well-being scores, with a five-point average increase (range -35 to 18). Given these positive initial outcomes, plans for future study include establishing comparison groups and expanding the program to additional cohorts.

“What if older adults were to learn in the same kind of environment as children? Many older adults currently experience the opposite: very few resources, very few people teaching them and very high expectations about what they should already know, even though no one may be there to help them. For technology in particular, no one is ever born being tech savvy. We must practice and help each other, make space for the time to learn and foster the motivation to learn more.”

—Dr. Rachel Wu, Ph.D., Associate Professor,
Department of Psychology, UC Riverside

Lessons Learned

SLATE program personnel recognized that a key to the program’s success is the need for frequent participant contact, including telephone and face-to-face check-ins, especially at the beginning of participants’ engagement with the technology. This high-touch approach helped ensure that participants practiced with their devices and followed the growth mindset curriculum model. When staff noticed participants engaging less often, staff increased contact to re-engage participants.

Interacting face-to-face enabled participants to engage with one and other and helped reduce isolation. Participants reported enjoying the interactions with program staff and were better able to learn how to navigate their devices through personal, hands-on, step-by-step tutorials.

Finally, staff found it important to include participants’ baseline level of comfort and changes to their frequency of technology use as evaluation data elements to control for the influence of these variables on participant well-being and any improved outcomes.

Resources Needed

Staff at the Riverside County Office on Aging provided primary technical support and resources to participants and coordinated meetings with partners. SLATE relied on staff who were skilled and proficient with technology, bilingual and able to work carefully and patiently with

older adults who have little experience with technology. The importance of face-to-face contact also required significant travel time for staff. Further, to ensure accurate data collection for program evaluation and outcomes, the program utilized staff with high attention to detail. Significant staff time was also dedicated to plan, consult, collect and evaluate data and to revise existing tools with external and internal partners.

Program materials include computer tablets and support tools (internet hotspots, tablet cases with stands, stylus pens for ease of use), and the development and printing of guides and program manuals.

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Social Engage Coaching

University of Rochester Medical Center | Rochester, NY

Program Description

Social Engage Coaching is an individual coaching program with up to 10 half-hour sessions with a coach (typically a care manager) over approximately 10 weeks. Social Engage Coaching was adapted from Engage Psychotherapy, an evidence-based treatment for depression in later life, to focus on social engagement and loneliness.

Coaches educate participants on the importance of social connection for health and well-being. They also assist older adults in completing a values clarification exercise to identify the aspects of connection that are most important to them as well as barriers to increasing social connection. At each session, participants create an action plan for social engagement that involves setting and brainstorming ways to achieve goals, and selecting specific actions to take before the next session. Social Engage Coaching is a stepped intervention that includes supplemental modules for consumers who experience barriers to implementing action plans, such as challenges with negative thinking, anxiety or procrastination.

Social Engage Coaching is a flexible program that can be tailored to an older adult's particular preferences and barriers—such as anxiety, apathy, lack of awareness of resources and inertia—while also being easy to learn for coaches. The program has been adapted to meet the needs of older adults who are providing care for a loved one with dementia.

Partners

Coaches include care managers from Lifespan of Greater Rochester, a regional aging services provider in Monroe County and surrounding Finger Lakes counties, NY. Other partners include Area Agencies on Aging and senior centers.

Outcomes

This program was adapted from Engage Psychotherapy.^{iv} An evaluation of Social Engage Coaching published in 2021 in the American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry found that Social Engage Coaching was effective in reducing depressive symptoms and improving social-emotional quality of life among older adults who reported clinically significant loneliness as compared to research assessments only.^v As a result of the program, participants report having an increased insight into the importance of social connection, valuing the action plans to be proactive and intentional with social engagement, and using the 'barrier strategies' to overcome negative self-talk, low self-esteem and anxiety.

"I realized that when I was connected to others the burden of caregiving was lower and that there was hope. This not only helped me but transferred to the person I was caring for and others in my life. I also realized that my attitude matters and this program helped me feel happier. I realized that I felt isolated before and I wanted others to reach out to me and when they didn't, I felt down and wanted to be more engaged. I realized that this was a chain reaction, that I'm the one who needs to reach out if I want to feel better."

Lessons Learned

Participants appreciated information on local opportunities for social engagement to use when creating their own action plans. Many participants noted the importance of accountability for social engagement and reported plans to start psychotherapy or join support groups, so providing referrals for ongoing support after completion of the program is useful for many older adults.

Resources Needed

A manual for coaches and a participant workbook is available from the staff contact listed below. A training program for care managers is under development.

The time commitment to provide Social Engage Coaching is typically two hours per consumer served, which includes documentation, scheduling, supervision and any necessary travel time. Social Engage Coaching could be efficiently provided through existing infrastructure for programs such as the Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives (PEARLS), which supports individuals experiencing late-life depression.

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Social Isolation and Loneliness Pharmacy Project

iMPROve Health (formerly MPRO) | Grand Rapids, MI

Program Description

Through a planning grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, iMPROve Health (formerly MPRO) launched a pilot project to curb social isolation and increase social engagement of older adults by working with pharmacy staff. In part because they frequently interact with older adults, at times more often than other health care providers, pharmacists often serve as trusted health care providers. In the program, pharmacists screen older adults for social isolation and loneliness and connect them to community resources and their primary care providers. The project emphasizes practice change to help frontline pharmacy staff aid in the navigation process that improves access to community programs for older adults who are socially isolated.

Pharmacists are trained to understand social isolation and loneliness, how to screen patients age 55 years and older and receive information on how to make referrals to community services. Older adults who the screening identifies as experiencing social isolation and/or loneliness are referred to community resources and services. The program uses a Health Information Exchange electronic referral platform to share information with the individual's primary care provider, health system or Accountable Care Organization, which provides the older adult's care team with access to screening results and the resources needed to allow for a seamless hand-off and follow-through.

Partners

A Planning and Advisory Council (PAC) of multidisciplinary partners helps guide the project and provide community level coordination and input. PAC representatives include the Michigan Pharmacists Association, St. Clair County Pharmacy Association, Area Agency on Aging 1-B, St. Clair County Council on Aging, Alliance Health (Physician Health Organization), Michigan Health Information Network, Hannan Center (Senior Service Agency), Reliance ACO and community pharmacies. The PAC helps streamline the referral process, limiting duplication of efforts and increasing the success of the project by connecting individuals in need to social engagement resources.

Outcomes

Since implementation, the project has expanded to 13 pharmacies with five senior service agencies as referral sources and received continued funding through November 2023 from a Michigan Health Endowment Fund implementation grant. Pharmacists found the

"I did not know about the St. Clair County Council on Aging before I took the social isolation screening at my local pharmacy. I appreciated the nice lady that called me from there. I get calls from her every so often and it is so nice to talk with her. The last time we talked I told her I was feeling much better and looking forward to spending Christmas with my family again."

training helpful for implementation of the project and in increasing their knowledge of social isolation and loneliness, with results from the training test showing an increase in knowledge of 17 percent. As of the end of November 2022, 12 patients consented to screening, with two individuals screening positive for social isolation and loneliness and referred for follow-up with the local senior service agency. The 10 patients who did not screen positive were provided with a senior service agency informational brochure and a project brochure, with four of the patients then requesting a referral to the senior service agency to learn about available programs and services. Patients who declined to take the screening were provided with brochures as well.

Lessons Learned

Pharmacists encountered common screening issues, including hesitation around introducing a social isolation screening due to the sensitive nature of the topic and stigma. Incorporating successful screening strategies and ways to address common questions into training is important. Inviting service provider teams to review the training and offering a live session where pharmacists practice administering the screening can help ensure effective training delivery. Staff recommend working with each pharmacy team to develop monthly screening goals based on patient population.

Resources Needed

This model is adaptable to other communities at low to no cost. iMPROve Health is developing a comprehensive change package that will include marketing, education and training materials for pharmacies. Electronic referral

platform fees are \$250 per pharmacy and \$60 per nonprofit community organization. A fax referral system can be used to avoid additional costs. A stipend of \$1,500 for pharmacies and the primary referral organization to provide input regarding program implementation is an optional cost. Several hours of staff training and workflow adjustments are needed to ensure project success.

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Thrive with Pride Cafés

AgeOptions | Oak Park, IL

Program Description

AgeOptions began Thrive with Pride Cafés (www.thrivingwithpride.org) to provide an open door for LGBT+ older adults and caregivers to easily connect with and access aging services to alleviate social isolation and improve mental and physical health outcomes. National studies show that LGBT+ older adults are twice as likely to be unpartnered as their heterosexual or cisgender peers, and four times less likely to have children engaged in their lives. This puts them at a much greater risk of social isolation and contributes to poor health outcomes on a variety of measures. Additionally, LGBT+ older adults are often afraid of reaching out to traditional avenues of support and aging service providers due to a history of discrimination or harassment.

Thrive with Pride Cafés create safe gathering spaces for LGBT+ older adults and caregivers by partnering with affirming churches, LGBT+ organizations and aging services providers. AgeOptions created a network of traditional and non-traditional service partners to broaden the scope of inclusive and accessible aging services and circumvent the stigma and fear that prevents LGBT+ older adults from seeking support. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, various partners across suburban Chicago hosted monthly cafés with informational programming and educational services provided by AgeOptions to improve offerings for LGBT+ older adults.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Thrive with Pride Cafés transitioned to an all-virtual format that includes a monthly topical information session, featuring an expert or community resource, and discussions hosted by individual café sites. Diverse café partners allow participants to choose a café that suits their individual needs or interests. These small group follow-up sessions serve as a balance to the larger sessions and offer a safe space for participants to connect and access services. Online cafés provide an accessible way to participate for those with mobility or transportation issues, including speakers, and recording presentations allows AgeOptions to build an online resource library.

Thrive with Pride Cafés also host special events, like Drag Queen Bingo, during its monthly sessions and evening programs to provide additional opportunities for interaction and culturally appropriate entertainment.

Partners

AgeOptions partners with affirming churches, LGBT+ organizations and aging services providers that are

“We like to think of Thrive with Pride as a “beacon” to the LGBT+ older adults’ community, demonstrating that AgeOptions is a safe and affirming partner in aging. Our proudest moments are when we can connect program participants to each other or to aging resources they may otherwise not have known about or feared accessing. We know that Thrive with Pride has offered vital support to an often invisible segment of our older adult population.”

responsible for conducting outreach to LGBT+ older adults and hosting the small group discussions at least once per month.

Outcomes

Thrive with Pride Cafés successfully provide participants with helpful information and a sense of community. In a survey, 86 percent of respondents reported feeling more comfortable accessing older adult services. Additionally, 57 percent said they shared information they learned at a Thrive with Pride Café with a friend or family member, and 47 percent of respondents reported that the program gave them a sense of community belonging.

Lessons Learned

The AgeOptions partnership network took time and cultivation to develop, but by 2022, there were six program sites throughout its planning and service area. In order to develop better ideas for outreach and implementation, AgeOptions convened the leadership of partners/satellites at least once a quarter to share best practices. This has resulted in a working group to facilitate this brainstorming and send a monthly discussion guide, which includes icebreakers, links to programs, discussion questions and follow-up resources to guide partners and help make programs as easy as possible to lead.

Resources Needed

Grants from the Community Memorial Foundation and the Chicago Community Trust's LGBTQ Community Fund allowed AgeOptions to hire staff and provide small stipends for project sites. The program has since grown by using American Rescue Plan Act funding to offer stipends to larger site partners. Thrive with Pride was significantly boosted by designating approximately 50 percent of an employee's time to the project and adding staff time, money and office supplies dedicated to program outreach. Agencies interested in implementing this program should allocate a portion of their budgets for the online program, including a strong Wi-Fi connection, a Zoom Pro account, video editing software, social media and website resources.

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Weaving Wisdom

Intergenerational Leadership Institute, The Penn State University | State College, PA

Program Description

Weaving Wisdom is a community-based intergenerational project designed to increase social and cultural engagement. The project was developed as part of the Intergenerational Leadership Institute sponsored by the College of Agriculture, The Penn State University, University Park, PA. The project brings together grandparents, parents, teenagers and children to discuss how quilted, woven and printed fabrics convey information about the history, culture, hopes and dreams of individuals within a given culture. During these conversations, program staff encourage older and younger adults to share personal stories, ideas and feelings, which helps increase communication and understanding among generations. At the end of the discussion and sharing, there is a hands-on, simple weaving or printing project in which the older adults engage with the participating teenagers and children.

Using quilts and African fabrics such as Kente and Adinkra Cloth from Ghana helps stimulate meaningful conversations between generations and helps participants explore and understand other cultures while building connection. Conversations focus on personal and cultural values as well as historical and current events. The project also offers another opportunity to engage older adults—by inviting them to participate in the project planning and implementation.

Partners

The project works with a variety of partners including libraries, arts groups, intergenerational groups, faith-based organizations, schools, minority focused organizations, museums and cultural organizations, senior centers and more to hold workshops and recruit participants. The project has inspired other efforts throughout the community, including hands-on Weaving Wisdom workshops sponsored by the State College Regional Library involving children and their parents, in which parents and children work together to make a simple handwoven bracelet. A seminar for teachers focused on how to incorporate quilting and African cloth into their arts curriculums and a summer camp program used the concepts of Weaving Wisdom to stimulate conversation between children of various ages.

Outcomes

During the workshops, older adults and children hold easy-flowing, meaningful conversations with each other while working collaboratively. After a workshop that focused on “Meanings in African Adinkra Cloth,” the

“Using quilts and African fabrics to jumpstart discussions about values is a great way to build strong intergenerational connections, foster cultural understanding and build communities.”

participants made the following observations: “Discussing family values with others is the ultimate way to gain perspective and understanding and build connections,” and “I look at my family as more of a unit now.”

Lessons Learned

Given that many parents work during the week and children are in school, workshops should be scheduled on the weekends with careful consideration given to locations that are easily accessible for all. An effective advertising campaign is also needed to reach possible participants.

Resources Needed

If developing a similar program, staff should have examples of quilts and Kente and Adinkra Cloth from Ghana to stimulate conversation among generations. The quilts and cloth for display can usually be found within the community. The supplies for making hand-woven bracelets, which include scrap cardboard, straws and colorful yarn for weaving, will range between \$50 to \$75 for a group of 40-50 children.

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Conclusion

This publication contains a sampling of innovative social engagement programs the Aging Network can use to help older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers remain engaged and connected to their communities. engAGED: The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults can support social engagement efforts at the local level. Visit www.engagingolderadults.org or send an email to info@engagingolderadults.org. To learn more about the Innovations Hub and other programs featured in the Innovations Hub, visit www.engagingolderadults.org/hub. If your organization has social engagement programs serving older adults, people with disabilities or caregivers, submit your programs to the Innovations Hub at www.engagingolderadults.org/submit-to-hub.

Endnotes

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USAging

usaging.org

USAging is the national association representing and supporting the network of Area Agencies on Aging and advocating for Title VI Native American Aging Programs. Our members help older adults and people with disabilities throughout the United States live with optimal health, well-being, independence and dignity in their homes and communities.



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