

Georgetown Council on Aging FY23 Annual Report

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Georgetown Council on Aging continues to evolve the with a focus on resuming and adding programs and activities at the Georgetown Senior Community Center. The COA has also continued to respond to the changes in consumer services that have become apparent as a result of the pandemic and the on-going impact on both individuals and community. Recognizing the multi-faceted affects the COVID-19 pandemic had on individuals within the community, much of the COA's work in FY23 focused on individuals' mental and physical wellbeing. Case management, health and wellness programs, food insecurity programs have all continued to increase. Programs such as SHINE and the AARP Income Tax Preparation Program have all seen increases in participation as they resumed in-person programs. The COA has continued to use pre-registration process and maintain cleanliness protocols in order to safely manage programs and activities but the resumption of in-person programs and activities has made the Georgetown Senior Community Center a vital and engaging community facility. The Grab and Go Lunch Program, which also includes several daily home deliveries, continued to see significant increases. In October, the COA and AgeSpan began to plan monthly in-person Traveling Chef programs at the Georgetown Senior Community Center. Either entertainment or educational programs often follow the monthly in-person lunches. The response from the participants has been positive with up to 35 people attending the monthly meals. At the same time, the COA was able to partner with the Georgetown School Department to schedule weekly pickle-ball games in the Perley School gym. During good weather, the pickle ball games are held outdoors at the American Legion Park. Although much less prevalent in the community, staff members continue to distribute COVID-19 home testing kits, which were provided to the COA without charge by the state. The need for essential services as well as the need for flexible and evolving programs remains apparent as the COA staff continues to respond and support consumers and their families during these developing times.

In Fiscal Year 2023, board members and their positions included: Sue Clay Chair; Vice Chair; Darcy Norton, Secretary Jill Benas; Esther Palardy; Diane Prescott, Jean Perley, Diane Klibansky, Jeanne Robertson, Martha Lucius and as well as Alternate Board Member Sue Gardiner. Council on Aging staff members in FY22 included Director Colleen Ranshaw-Fiorello, Outreach Worker Kirsten Klueber, Administrative Assistant Julie Pasquale, Van Driver David Hall, Meal Site Supervisor Michelle Muise and Meal Site Assistant Esther Palardy.

In partnership with AgeSpan, we served 129 consumers 7,115 times in our Grab and Go Program, a 55 percent increase from FY22. Some consumers drive to the Georgetown Senior Community Center to pick up their lunches while COA Staff continue to deliver lunches to some consumers at their homes. An additional partnership with AgeSpan provided 306 Elder Brown Bag monthly food packages that COA Staff deliver to 30 older adult households and other adults living with disabilities. AgeSpan also continues to deliver Home Delivered Meals (HDM) and responds quickly to referrals for additional consumers. Delivering the monthly Brown Bag food packages provides the COA with an additional opportunity to connect with consumers who utilize the COA Marketplace, often allowing the COA to deliver more food to consumers as

needed. In FY 23, the COA Marketplace served 108 older adults 347 times, a 116 percent increase in the amount of unduplicated participation from FY22. Illustrating the definition of true community spirit during difficult times, the COA continues to receive wonderful donations to the COA Marketplace (Food Pantry) allowing the staff to make deliveries to individuals as needed. Along with non-perishable food, COA Marketplace items include fresh food per individual request, paper products, cleaning supplies, toiletries and gift cards. The Kiwanis Club was able to hold their community Thanksgiving Dinner serving 150 older adults in person while COA Staff delivered 30 holiday dinners to older adults at home.

Along with delivering monthly food packages to individual consumers, the COA Van program continues to provide people with grocery shopping and other essential errands (Post Office, banks, pharmacies). This year, 11 participants were provided with 453 round trips and shopping assistance. The COA Van is available twice per week and also provides participants with an important opportunity for socialization. The SHINE Counselor saw an increase in consumers seeking health insurance counseling, serving 90 consumers 79 times in FY23, a 29 percent increase from FY22. The Veterans' Services Director also served 17 individuals at the Georgetown Senior Community Center in FY23. Other individuals were served at the Veterans' Services regional office.

The COA also continues to lend durable medical equipment, delivering to individual homes as necessary. In the past year, the COA provided 43 individuals with 71 pieces of medical equipment. The equipment is cleaned before it is delivered, and cleaned after it is returned to Senior Center.

As a result of working through the pandemic and providing people at the Georgetown Senior Community Center with flexible programs and activities, the number of duplicated individuals served by COA programs and services increased from 17,321 in FY 22 to 20,811 in FY23, representing a 20 percent increase. The increase in the duplicated elder count provides evidence that the Georgetown Council on Aging has a strong connection to individuals in the community and provided the foundation for the approval of a new full-time Program and Activities Assistant's position. During this past year, the COA saw another increase in case management noted last year with 248 individuals served 746 times, a two percent increase over last years' service. The COA continues to see unduplicated non-elders seeking services such as support and assistance with food resources, fuel assistance, and transportation as well as case management support for complex clients living with a variety of physical and psycho/social needs. The increase in services to both demographics provides evidence that COA is the only social service agency in the community and functions as a gateway to other services for both elders and non-elders.

As an example of community partnership and grass-roots effort, the Trustees of the Perley Free School again provided a fuel assistance program to local residents who experience difficulty with heating costs. In addition to the money that is used to fund scholarships for Georgetown graduates and alumnae, the Trustees oversee a small endowment to aid Georgetown residents facing financial hardships. Concerned for people who may have difficulty with heating costs, the Trustees continued the plan for a limited heating assistance program for a seventh year.

Often filling the gap for people whose income might be slightly higher than the limits required by Community Action and other programs, the Trustees provided three individuals with heating assistance during FY23, including one extreme emergency situation.

The support of Crosby's Marketplace, a local grocery store, as a sponsor for our monthly Men's Breakfast program further illustrates the strength of the COA's partnerships within the community. During the past year, the group averaged 16 men per month for a total of 174 men at 11 different breakfasts. As an important opportunity to share a nutritious meal with friends, the program also provides the COA with an opportunity to develop relationships with men in the community. Since the program was established in 2007, the COA has been able to identify and address specific needs for individual men. Along with a nutritious breakfast for the participants, speakers are planned for the monthly program. Topics range from health and wellness, Medicare, retirement, Veterans' issues, current events, town government, home and personal safety, and local history. Acknowledging and supporting the importance of the program to the men served, Crosby's Marketplace will again sponsor the program in FY24.

Continuing to follow a hybrid program during FY23, the Association for the Advancement of Retired People (AARP) served 153 individuals, a 31 percent increase from FY22. Scheduling appointments to drop off and then pick-up income tax documents in an open portion of the building, three volunteer Tax Aides prepared state and federal tax returns for 147 unduplicated older individuals and served 6 unduplicated non-elders in FY23. Along with income tax preparation, the Tax Aides provide participants with information regarding the state's Circuit Breaker Tax Credit and helped resolve individual issues with the state Department of Revenue including requests for additional verification from elders which often occurs as a result of elders filing the Circuit Breaker Tax Credit.

The Georgetown and Merrimac Councils on Aging continue to share an eight-passenger van as part of a regional transportation plan. Funded with a grant from the state Department of Transportation's Mobility Assistance Program, the van is leased from the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA) and provides a vital link to needed services for elders and disabled individuals in Georgetown and Merrimac. To support independence and the goal of aging in place, the COA van traveled 4,225 miles in FY23 providing 12 individuals with 416 weekly shopping trips.

Three volunteer drivers serving through Northern Essex Elder Transportation (NEET), Inc. supplied 4 elders with 17 round-trip out-of-town medical appointments. The three volunteer drivers with the NEET program donated approximately 16 hours driving a total of 269 miles to provide the 8 elders with transportation to their medical appointments during FY23. Although the challenge of aging volunteers and the pandemic have both had an impact on drivers and consumers, the volunteer medical transportation service continues to be meaningful to those served as well as to the volunteers who provide the service.

To further address elder transportation needs, the COA staff also provides older adults with information and referrals to the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority's (MeVa) Mini-MeVa (formerly Ring and Ride) transportation service. Using wheelchair lift-equipped MVRTA vehicles, the Mini MeVa program provides Georgetown residents with free curb-to-curb

transportation to anywhere in Amesbury, Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen, Newbury/Byfield, Newburyport, North Andover and West Newbury as well as to the Rowley Commuter Rail Station and Rowley Market Basket. The COA staff also provides clients with information and referrals to the MeVa's Medi-Ride Medical Service as well as the Mass Health Transportation Program, if consumers are eligible.

Using a pre-registration process, the COA offers weekly yoga, strength training, Tai Chi and a hybrid exercise class at the Georgetown Senior Community Center. As a partnership with the Georgetown School Department, a pickle-ball group plays in the indoors at the Senior Center during late fall, winter and early spring. Along with the two treadmills, two stationary bikes and recumbent bicycle, the COA added an elliptical machine to the Fitness Center. Some individuals continue to walk indoors at the Senior Center using the hallway and activity rooms to create a safe indoor route for exercise. With fitness opportunities ranging from classes and groups to individual fitness equipment use, 105 older adults exercised 3,241 times at the Senior Center a 35 percent increase from FY23. Following the daily exercise programs, more older adults will stay for after-class coffee and socialization often choosing to participate in other weekly programs and activities. After class coffee has provided increased opportunities for socialization and additional participation in COA programs and services.

This year also saw a 30 percent increase in SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) Counselor appointments with the SHINE Counselor providing 90 older adults with health insurance information. The SHINE Counselor and COA Director often work together to provide clients with a higher level of service, sometimes meeting together or separately to assist clients with health insurance, prescription drug insurance or to provide assistance in completing state or Federal program applications. The meetings often lead to additional outreach opportunities for the COA with the clients. The COA has continued to see an increase in the number of younger elders seeking supplementary health insurance information as they reach 65 years and plan health insurance for retirement. This trend provides evidence to support the theory that a steadily increasing elder population within the community will generate a greater demand for services within the community.

The monthly blood pressure clinics provided by the Board of Health have also seen an increase in FY23. This year, the Public Health Nurse served 15 older adults 44 times, a 66 percent increase from FY22. In partnership with the Board of Health, thirty-one individuals were served at the annual flu clinic. The COA Van also provided transportation for other individuals who planned flu vaccines in the community. The COA's Durable Medical Lending Program loaned 71 pieces of medical equipment to 43 unduplicated elders this year, an increase from the past year. Five pieces of durable medical equipment were loaned to three non-elders this past year.

Both the Georgetown Police and Fire Departments continue to provide important safety programs along with support for any potential protective service case. The Georgetown Fire Department successfully applied for a grant program that allowed the purchase and installation of a number of Lock Boxes and Smoke Detectors throughout the community. In FY23, the Lock Box Program served one older adult while the Smoke Detector Program has already served two older adults this year. A grant for the new fiscal year is in place and the program will continue. Both the Georgetown Police and Fire Departments continue to present community education

programs at the Senior Center that are televised on Cable TV allowing the information to reach a greater portion of the community.

In FY23, the COA received 3,162 telephone calls and requests for information, assistance and referrals from older adults, a 5 percent increase from calls and requests for information received last year. Responding to requests for support and assistance with food resources, fuel assistance, transportation as well as support for complex clients living with a variety of physical and psycho/social needs, the COA served 248 unduplicated elders and 746 duplicated elders with case management and advocacy in FY23, a two percent increase from the previous year. The steady increase in the unduplicated elders served these past two years supports the position that the Senior Center will continue to see an increase of older adults in need of support. In providing case management services, the COA maintains a confidential client file with emergency contact information on each elder served as well as ongoing progress notes on specific elders who receive case management services. In addition to home visits and office appointments, ongoing client support is provided with daily reassurance calls to frail and homebound elders. In FY23, 534 reassurance/wellbeing calls were made to 113 elders, a wellness check that often led to the identification of other case management needs. With the assistance of a volunteer, the COA provided additional outreach within the community, by writing 116 sympathy, get well, thank you and thinking of you notes to local elders and family members.

A team of volunteers work from their homes and in the office to collate, fold and label the COA's monthly newsletter so that it can be mailed to 8,070 households, an important outreach each year. In addition to mailing or delivering the newsletter to public locations, the newsletter is updated each month on the Town's website. To further strengthen the COA's community outreach, I continue to write press releases for local newspapers and cable television and update the Town's website and Facebook page on a frequent basis. Along with posting information on the Cable TV community bulletin board, the Cable TV station continues to tape and broadcast COA programs on the local Cable TV community access station, allowing information related to elder programs and services to reach a greater audience within the Town during the continued pandemic. This year, four local newspapers published more than 40 press releases, photographs and letters to the editor publicizing COA programs and activities.

The Friends of the Council on Aging group continue to increase community support and raise awareness for the COA's mission of serving elders and their families in the community. Along with raising "friends" for the COA, the on-going clothing and textile collection bin located at the Perley School has raised funds for Council on Aging programs and services. The group has been active in supporting and helping to facilitate programs such as the Women's Breakfast, socialization activities and special teas at the Georgetown Senior Community Center. The COA donation account has also gratefully received several gifts from residents and participants which have been used to support COA programs and activities as well as the COA Marketplace.

Based on state and local demographic information, I anticipate that the Georgetown COA and Georgetown Senior Community Center will continue to see an increase in the demand for services to support elders living in the community as a result of the increase in elder population.

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the population of elders over the age of 65 years is 1,385 while the population over 60 years is estimated in 2018 to be 1,694, a 19 percent increase from the 1,427 over 60 population in 2010. However, the 2023 local residents' age list shows that 2,307 elders over the age of 60 live in Georgetown, which represents 27 percent of the town's population. The population of people over 75 years in Georgetown now represents 28 percent of the older adult population. The local demographic information supports the population projections presented by the UMass Donahue Institute of Economic and Public Policy Research Institute which estimated that the elder population in Georgetown would be 2,158 in 2020 and 2,922 in 2030. Prior to the pandemic, the COA noted steady growth in the Georgetown COA statistics. This trend has continued post pandemic and is expected to continue into the future. An analysis of FY23 statistics found that the growth in COA services and programs was primarily seen in general information services, case management, Income Tax preparation, food shopping, food pantry, the Grab and Go Lunch program, health education and fitness programs, all services that reflect assistance in maintaining elder independence. Growth was also seen in the Senior Center's recreation and socialization programs. The analysis provides evidence to support the important role that the Council on Aging and Georgetown Senior Community Center play in supporting and enhancing the safety, wellness and independence of older adults living in the community. As the Georgetown Senior Community Center continues to evolve and adjust to the changing needs of older adults, the Georgetown COA anticipates future growth in all areas of the COA's overall program as well as the supportive services offered at the Georgetown Senior Community Center.

The COA thanks the Kiwanis, the local Boy and Girl Scout troops, the Georgetown School Department, Georgetown Cultural Council, Crosby's Marketplace, the Trustees of the Perley Free School, Nunan Florist and Greenhouses, the Friends of the Georgetown Council on Aging, as well as the Town departments including the Georgetown Housing Authority, and the Georgetown Police and Fire Department for their continued support during the past fiscal year. With deep appreciation, the COA thanks the more than 70 volunteers who serve as board members, volunteer drivers, program assistants, newsletter production crew, office support and volunteers during special events when the Georgetown Senior Community Center is open. Providing the Georgetown COA 3,000 hours of volunteer service this past fiscal year, an estimated value of \$60,000, their hours of service are a valuable asset as well as a significant savings to the town. Not only are they a valuable resource and support to the COA, but they make a real and tangible difference in the lives they touch. Their support is essential to the COA's mission of serving elders and others in the community.