

Georgetown Council on Aging FY21 Annual Report

In our fourth year at the Georgetown Senior Community Center, the President's declaration of a National Emergency, the Governor's declaration of a Statewide Emergency, and the Town's order to move to a Public Health Emergency Level 3 protocol as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the Georgetown Council on Aging's ability to provide programs and services in the community. Although the Georgetown Senior Community Center was closed to the public until the state and local emergency orders were lifted in June 2021, the Council on Aging was extremely busy with person-centered care. While the Senior Center was closed to the public, the Georgetown COA staff worked from home and in the office to make sure that our older adults were safe, connected and receiving services. Displaying the compassion and care that is a characteristic of this town, community members continue to step forward with offers of support and donations for the COA Marketplace. Unable to serve their traditional turkey dinner in November, the Kiwanis Club donated several hundred individual fruit pies that the COA delivered to older adults in town. As an alternative to the COA's annual Health Fair, community healthcare providers stepped forward to provide health information and give-aways for healthy Sunshine Bags that the COA also delivered to older adults in town. Nunan Florist and Greenhouses, Inc. provided vegetable and flower seeds for spring Sunshine Bags. From March 13, 2020 to June 17, 2021, the COA provided 2,736 Grab and Go lunches, delivered 599 Elder Brown Bags of groceries, referred and scheduled 553 COVID-19 vaccination appointments, delivered 587 Sunshine (outreach) Bags, made 2,078 telephone reassurance calls and 501 home visits, provided 216 van rides to grocery stores and essential shopping and 285 miscellaneous services including medical equipment delivered, remote SHINE appointments and income tax preparation services. The pandemic has highlighted the need for essential services and the benefit of the strong community ties between the COA and consumers in Georgetown.

In Fiscal Year 2021, 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 Members Martha Lucius and Marie Collins. Council on Aging staff members in FY21 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.

As COA staff returned to the offices in July 2020, a Grab and Go Lunch program with Elder Services of Merrimack Valley was quickly established and immediately began to resonate with consumers. While some consumers were able to drive to the Senior Center and pick up their lunch, COA staff delivered to other consumers at home. With use of plexiglass sneeze guards and other safety protocol in place, COA staff began to meet in October with individual consumers in the open reception area of the Senior Center. The in-person appointments allowed COA staff and consumers to more comfortably complete applications and discuss case management concerns. The COA Fitness Center also opened for individual use in October. Our Tai Chi instructor continued teaching Tai Chi on Zoom. Residents were able to view exercise

segments taped by our Yoga and Strength Training Instructor and broadcast on the Town's Cable TV station. Local Cable TV also broadcast some nutrition programs and cooking segments provided by our dietician with Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley along with information services taped by our Veterans Services' Director and some musical programs planned and shared by the COA network. On June 15, 2021, the Georgetown Senior Community Center and other town buildings opened to the public allowing the COA to resume in person programs and activities. While maintaining participation limits, pre-registration and other COVID-19 safety protocol, the COA has been able to resume most of the in-person programs and activities that have made the Georgetown Senior Community Center a vital and engaging community facility.

In partnership with Elder Services of Merrimack Valley-North Shore (ESMV-NS), we continued to deliver monthly 26 Elder Brown Bag food packages to elder households throughout the shut-down. ESMV 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 2021, the COA Marketplace served 62 older adults 202 times, a 94 percent increase in participation from FY20. Funded with a grant from ESMV-NS as well as community donations, the COA delivered 573 Sunshine Bags along with food pantry and Elder Brown Bag deliveries. As a result of the pandemic, the Kiwanis Club was unable to hold their community Thanksgiving Dinner in FY21. However, the Kiwanis Club donated several hundred individual fruit pies that the COA staff delivered to households across the town. As an alternative to the traditional health fair sponsored each year by the COA, local health care providers donated a wide variety of give-away health-related items that the COA delivered to households across the town.

Along with delivering monthly food packages to individual consumers, the COA Van continues to provide people with grocery shopping and other essential errands (Post Office, banks, pharmacies) twice per week and the driver cleans the van before and after the ride. The COA's SHINE Counselor and Veterans' Services Director continue to schedule telephone appointments, although individual in-person appointments can also be scheduled as needed.

As a demonstration of true community spirit during difficult times, the COA continues to receive wonderful donations to the COA Food Pantry allowing the staff to make deliveries to individuals as needed. The COA also continues to lend durable medical equipment, delivering to individual homes. The equipment is cleaned before it is delivered, then cleaned after it is returned and quarantined for three days before it is lent again. A continued partnership with the Georgetown School Department has provided the COA with additional outreach opportunities. This year, a Community Service Program at the Penn Brook Elementary School provided holiday cards for Meals and Wheels and Grab and Go consumers at different holidays. Local Girl Scout and Cub Scout Troops have also provided the COA with holiday cards on different occasions.

As a result of the pandemic and the loss of 12 months of in-person programs and activities at the Georgetown Senior Community Center, the number of duplicated individuals served by COA programs and services decreased from 10,180 in FY20 to 9,183 in FY21. However, the number of individuals served at least one time increased from 821 in FY20 to 839 in FY21. The increase

in the duplicated elder count provides evidence that the Georgetown Council on Aging has a strong connection to individuals in the community. During this past year, the COA saw a 53 percent increase in case management with 299 individuals served 765 times over the 259 individuals served 501 times in FY20. 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 often 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 four individuals with heating assistance during FY21.

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. Until the shut-down in March 2020, the group averaged 20 men per month. 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 has committed to sponsoring the program in FY22.

Although the Georgetown Senior Community Center was closed to the public during the income tax preparation season, the Association for the Advancement of Retired People (AARP) provided an innovative program during FY21 that served 117 individuals. Scheduling appointments to drop off and then pick-up income tax documents outside the building, 3 volunteer Tax Aides prepared state and federal tax returns for 113 unduplicated older individuals and served 4 unduplicated non-elders in FY21. 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 1,613 miles in FY21 providing 8 individuals with 198 weekly shopping trips.

Resuming service in October, four volunteer drivers serving through Northern Essex Elder Transportation (NEET), Inc. supplied 5 elders with 10 round-trip out-of-town medical appointments located in Newburyport, Haverhill, and Methuen. The four volunteer drivers with the NEET program donated approximately 13 hours driving a total of 197 miles to provide the 5 elders with transportation to their medical appointments during nine months of FY21. In addition to the challenge of aging volunteers, the safety concerns during the pandemic have had an impact on drivers and consumers connected with the NEET program. However, the 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 elders with information and referrals to the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority's (MVRTA) Ring and Ride transportation service. Using wheelchair lift-equipped MVRTA vehicles, the Ring and Ride 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 Market Basket. Fortunately, the MVRTA program has been able to continue service with protocols during the pandemic. The COA staff also provides clients with information and referrals to the MVRTA's Medi-Ride Medical Service as well as the Mass Health Transportation Program, if eligible.

Although the COA was unable to hold in-person fitness classes, the Town's Cable Access Television Station continued to broadcast fitness classes taped by the COA's fitness instructors along with fitness classes shared by other resources. While the Senior Center was closed to in-person classes, eight individuals used equipment in the COA's Fitness Center 168 times during FY21. Three individuals in the walking club participated 44 times in the past year. Instructors were organized and a rotating roster of pre-registered participants was planned as soon as the Senior Center reopened in mid-June. Yoga, strength training, Tai Chi and a hybrid exercise class were all scheduled to resume over the course of summer and fall. Based on the response from older adults in the community it is anticipated that the additional fitness opportunities will soon show an increase in duplicated elders participating on a weekly and monthly basis. With the resumption of in-person programs, more individual elders are already spending more time participating in programs and activities on a weekly basis. More Recreation and Socialization programs will be planned with the fitness classes in order to address need for socialization that was difficult to meet while the Senior Center was closed to the public.

Until the shut-down in March, a SHINE (Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone) Counselor met with people on a monthly basis to discuss health insurance questions and concerns. During the shut-down and continued pandemic, the SHINE Counselor has continued to provide consumers with health insurance information and support by telephone. 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. During the past year, the SHINE counselor and COA Director met with 60 unduplicated elders providing assistance with Medicare, Medigap policies, prescription drug plans and other health insurance issues. 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.

Although the program has been on hold since the emergency orders in March 2020, plans are in place for the monthly blood pressure clinics provided by the Board of Health to resume in December 2021. As an alternative to the Board of Health's annual flu clinic, the Board of Health provided in-home flu vaccines for 11 individuals. The COA Van also provided transportation for other individuals who planned flu vaccines in the community. Continuing during the pandemic's shut-down and while the Senior Center was closed to the public, the COA's Durable Medical Lending Program loaned 71 pieces of medical equipment to 37 unduplicated elders this year, a 16 percent increase FY20. Seven 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. 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 FY21, the Lock Box Program served three elders. A grant for the new fiscal year is in place and the program will continue. Now that in-person programs have been resumed, plans are in place for both the Georgetown Police and Fire Departments to present community education programs at the Senior Center. The community education programs will be televised allowing the information to reach a greater portion of the community.

Although the COA office was closed to the public until mid-June, the COA received 3,253 telephone calls and requests for information, assistance and referrals from elders this year, a 43 percent increase from the 2,271 requests for information received in FY20. 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 286 unduplicated elders and 724 duplicated elders, a 53 percent increase from the 242 duplicated individuals and 472 duplicated elders served with case management and advocacy in FY20. The 53 percent increase in the unduplicated elders served this past year supports the position that the Senior Center will continue to see more older adults in need of support, especially as the pandemic continues and post-pandemic. 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. While the Senior Center was closed to the public, home visits were and remain critical in evaluating and assessing consumer wellness. During that time, staff continued to meet one-on-one with clients either during outdoor appointments or in the office with safety protocol in place. In addition to home visits and office appointments, ongoing client support is

provided with daily reassurance calls to frail and homebound elders. In FY21, 1,055 reassurance/wellbeing calls were made to 285 elders, a wellness check that often led to the identification of other case management needs. With the assistance of several volunteers, the COA provided additional outreach within the community, by writing 165 sympathy, get well, thank you and thinking of you notes to local elders and family members.

While the Senior Center was closed to the public, a team of volunteers worked from their homes to collate, fold and label the COA's monthly newsletter so that it could be mailed to 8,576 households, an important outreach in FY21. 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 has continued to broadcast previously recorded 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.

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 was estimated in 2018 to be 1,694, a 19 percent increase from the 1,427 over 60 population in 2010. However, the 2021 local residents' age list shows that 2,168 elders over the age of 60 live in Georgetown, which represents 26 percent of the town's population. The local demographic information supports the population projections presented by the UMass Donahue Institute of Economic and Public Policy Research Institute which estimates that the elder population in Georgetown will increase to 2,158 in 2020 and 2,922 in 2030. Each month prior to the pandemic, growth was noted in the Georgetown COA statistics. Following the shut-down in March, an analysis of FY20 statistics found that the growth in COA services and programs was primarily seen in case management, outreach, Income Tax preparation, the Grab and Go Lunch program, food pantry and health education including COVID-19 information, vaccine information and vaccine scheduling, all services that reflect assistance in maintaining elder independence. 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 add more in-person programs and services, 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 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 when the Georgetown Senior Community Center is open. The COA donation account has also gratefully received several gifts from residents and participants which have been used to support COA programs and activities.

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 42 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 with more than 3,000 hours of volunteer service this past fiscal year, an estimated value of \$63,000, 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.