2013 Programs of Excellence Awards

February 2014

NISC Senior Center Programming Award Winners
2013 Programs of Excellence Awards

The National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) Programs of Excellence Awards are designed to honor and promote outstanding efforts made by senior centers throughout the nation to offer innovative, creative, and replicable programs for older adults.

A seven-member NISC Committee selected the award winners from 101 nominations. Six award winners were chosen, along with seven honorable mentions (one tie). The 13 top programs are included in this booklet. Each program is proof of the important work happening at senior centers today.

In this booklet, you’ll find a slice of senior center programming life found across the country. An adventure book club that includes support to experience the activity that was just enjoyed in the featured book. Intergenerational programming from building a community garden, sharing stories with skills, and “Buddy Bingo.” Plus the Go! Arts Program, where a professional arts nonprofit worked with a center; a fundraising opportunity run by a local church; and an intergenerational community prom.

You’ll also find some “tried and true” senior center programming examples. But be sure to take a close look, you may find subtle differences that you can incorporate as you plan your programming. You might want to try a “Simple Solutions Expo” with the focus on “living more comfortably in your own home.” Or organize a day of craftsmen and artists to inspire your participants like the “Active Minds, Busy Hands Hobby Fair.” Or pair health programs together to form a comprehensive program that challenges and engages your participants, like the Senior Champion’s Passport Program and the Senior Wellness Program. The ideas are endless.

Entries were accepted in the following six categories:

1. **Educational**: Programs designed to educate seniors. Examples may include new and unique classes, technology, legislative, or literary programs. Nutrition and health promotion activities were not considered in this category.

2. **Expressive & Creative Arts**: New classes or activities such as drama, dance, music, or visual arts.

3. **Fundraising**: Programs designed to generate revenue for the senior center.

4. **Leadership, Civic Engagement, & Community Development**: Efforts to increase community involvement through partnerships with colleges, businesses, and schools and creative programs instituted to develop strong leaders and volunteers within centers.

5. **Nutrition, Fitness, & Health Promotion**: Programs designed to improve the physical well-being of seniors and/or the general health of seniors through health-related programs, lectures, and screenings.

6. **Special Events**: Programs designed as one-time events that promote the social well-being of seniors (intergenerational, musical, artistic, thematic, seasonal, and patriotic events).
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In April 2013, the Wayland Council on Aging sponsored a “Simple Solutions Expo—Tips, Tools and Strategies for Independent Living.” The expo included presentations, vendor exhibits/demonstrations, and free raffles all targeted at “living more comfortably in your own home.” Topics covered included home safety and evaluation, home modification and funding options, in-home services, medical supplies and equipment, transportation, housing, grocery delivery, and meal preparation. It was held in a time slot (late afternoon/early evening) to attract retired seniors, working seniors, and non-seniors confronted with the challenge of aging issues. Speakers included the executive director of our Area Agency on Aging, an organization expert, and a builder discussing home modification considerations who partnered with a representative from the Massachusetts Rehab Commission to discuss funding options for those modifications. In addition, the Wayland Fire Department discussed lock boxes, smoke detectors, and safe use of generators, and an Occupational Therapist demonstrated useful gadgets that could ease individual challenges when living independently. A breakout presentation was also offered on walk-in bath tubs, stair lifts, and ramps. Transportation was offered to and from the event. Complimentary refreshments were served.

With our mission to educate the community so as to provide seniors and their advocates the tools to make informed decisions, the Simple Solutions event helped us to reach over 200 people. It was extremely well attended. Vendors provided very positive feedback; speakers enjoyed full capacity crowds and remained after to respond to specific questions. We continue to receive feedback from attendees expressing appreciation for the contacts they made and the information received that has helped shape their decisions. The Solutions Series II will return in fall 2014 with a slightly different emphasis, but continuing to promote "living comfortably in your own home."

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 5 staff, 5 volunteers

**Revenue:** $0 (neither attendees nor vendors were charged); **Expense:** $400 venue rental, $100 color coding balloons; **Net:** $0 (venue rental and service code balloons were fully covered by a grant from the Friends of the Wayland Council On Aging, Inc.)

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Nature, Novels, & Non-Fiction is an innovative approach to encouraging active and literary engagement for persons aged 55 and over. It’s an adventure book club where participants meet monthly to read on the subject of a specific leisure interest or activity and then are supported to participate in that activity. An example would be if a person had always wanted to try canoeing, but didn’t have the means to pursue it, this program would enable that person to first learn about the activity and then experience it.

The goal of this program is to leverage community collaboration to provide seniors with life enhancing opportunities. There are three collaborative partners: Minnetonka Senior Services, Ridgedale Library, and Three Rivers Park District. Each partner provides a unique feature to the program. Minnetonka Senior Services secured grant funding and provides the meeting space for the book club, Ridegedale Library provides the books and the group leader for the discussions, and Three Rivers Park District provides the activities that directly reflect that month’s book. A sampling of books and activities include:

- **June:** Book - A Walk in the Woods by Bill Bryson; Activity - Hiking
- **July:** Book - The Rider by Tim Krabbe; Activity - Bike Ride
- **August:** Book - Canoeing with the Cree by Eric Sevareid; Activity - Canoeing

The collaboration of these providers combines the strengths of each partner organization to provide a unique opportunity for seniors to participate in activities that better meet the needs of the whole person. This program was designed to reinforce the significance of community beyond the walls of the community center and to provide opportunities for seniors seeking to explore the range of outdoor experiences available to them, to develop new skills, and to strengthen their connections to community. With the rising number of young seniors, access to educational and active alternatives is important to meet the growing need.

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 3

**Revenue:** $0; **Expense:** $800;

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Expressive & Creative Arts Award Winner

GO! Arts Program

Alicia Trevino Lopez Senior One-Stop, San Antonio, TX

When the WellMed Charitable Foundation opened the Alicia Trevino Lopez Senior One-Stop in partnership with the City of San Antonio in 2011, it invited the nonprofit Bihl Haus Arts (BHA) to decorate the center with artwork made by seniors enrolled in its GO! Arts Program. The artwork immediately changed the atmosphere and conversation at the center. Seniors use the art to talk about their health, to frame their life experiences, and to share who they are with others. The center partnered with BHA to offer the GO! Arts Program to its 250 seniors. GO! Arts brings professional artists/teachers into the classroom at the center, which serves a predominantly low-income, minority senior population, a group often ignored by the professional art world. The program is an especially important voice for seniors and women of color. This is an important program in so many ways, and the independent research conducted on the GO! Arts Program by the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio (UTHSCSA), published in the June 2012 issue of Arts & Health, validates the program. The study showed that 100% of the Goldens who participated in the GO! Arts Program at BHA experienced positive changes in their health—emotional, physical, mental, spiritual—and maintained or increased their level of independence, which may therefore reduce risk factors that drive the need for long-term care. Part II of the UTHSCSA Study is now being conducted at the Lopez Center, and the results will be available in summer 2014.

All GO! Arts teachers have MFA or MA degrees in the Arts, possess extensive teaching experience, and are professional practicing artists. BHA publishes a full-color, biannual 50-page catalog of visual and literary artworks by and testimonials from every Golden. BHA installs a professionally designed semiannual exhibit at the center of artworks combined with testimonials and photos of each participant. The results of the UTHSCSA study demonstrate that participation in the GO! Arts program improves and transforms lives by helping participants become healthier and more self-reliant. Due to the high quality of the program, classes are consistently at capacity.

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: 7

Revenue: $42,000; Expense: $35,200; Net: $6,800

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Expressive & Creative Arts Honorable Mention

Active Minds, Busy Hands Hobby Fair

Barnstable Senior Center, Hyannis, MA

The Active Minds, Busy Hands Hobby Fair was developed by Outreach Coordinator Claudia Borden as a way to reach out to seniors and educate them about the physical and emotional benefits of creative expression and having a hobby. We invited a diverse array of local artists and artisans, many of whom are senior center participants, to share their creative passions and speak to attendees about how their hobby/hobbies contribute to their positive aging goals and keep them active and engaged. Hobbyists included musicians, jewelers, quilters, knitters, rug hookers, woodcarvers, beer brewers, and even someone who raises chickens in their backyard! The event was a great success with over 20 hobbyists and 100+ participants. The event also provided an opportunity to promote the many programs and clubs offered at the Barnstable Senior Center that allow seniors to seek creative engagement and inform them about how taking up a new hobby can offer the additional benefit of social interaction and lead to new friendships, thereby further reducing the risk of loneliness and depression. We received grant funding for the event from the Cape Cod Consortium for At-Risk Older Adults.

Social isolation, loneliness, and depression are issues of major concern for the senior population. The Active Minds, Busy Hands Hobby Fair was designed to engage and gather seniors in a fun and social setting and provide them with an opportunity to learn how having a hobby can help stave off the symptoms of isolation and loneliness and keep their minds stimulated and their hands busy. There is well-documented research and evidence that creative pursuits contribute to healthy aging, and we felt that offering this event was a wonderful way to demonstrate this firsthand to our senior population, as well as a perfect opportunity to promote the Barnstable Senior Center and the many activities we offer for creative expression. It was especially meaningful that the majority of hobbyists are active members of the senior center and many of them only took up their hobby of choice upon their retirement. We felt that hearing the benefits of hobbies from their peers would serve as an inspiration to the participants that regardless of age or ability, it is never too late to take up a new hobby!

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: 1 staff, 4 volunteers

Revenue: $400—grant funded through local Mental Health Consortium; Expense: N/A; Net: N/A

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Many of our volunteer delivery drivers and on-site participants are members of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. They asked me about doing a fundraiser for our program. I was very excited, since no one had ever offered to do a fundraiser “for us” before. This evolved into an event on Sept. 14, 2013. Posters were put all over town saying, “Help Support Meals on Wheels” Garage/Bake Sale & Barbecue. I would call it very successful, since it raised $2,500 and the Thrivent Financial for Lutherans Foundation contributed another $500, making the overall income $3,000. This was a very easy event that could be done in any community, especially a small community such as ours. Publicity was free, since the announcement went out over the local radio station, newspaper, and posters all over town. It was not work intensive for myself or our staff, since the church members did all of the work. All I did was donate items. Best of all, it is slated to become an annual event.

This is especially significant, because it can be done anywhere, by any church who supports our programs, and I don’t know of any who don’t. It can be done with a little or a lot of support from Meals on Wheels staff. In this case, the staff baked cakes, donated items for sale, and purchased the barbecue lunches.

Number of Staff/Volunteers required: 3 Meals on Wheels staff, 32 church volunteers

Revenue: $3,500; Expense: $0; Net: $3,500

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The Woodlawn Senior Center (WSC) Legacy Tree project was initiated to provide historical record to acknowledge support and provide a mechanism to encourage future purchases of leaves on the tree. Purchasers were permitted to provide the information for their leaves. Prior to installation, 50 members and friends purchased leaves in advance to sufficiently cover the cost of the tree. The tree can accommodate 200 leaves. The Legacy Tree was unveiled at a special luncheon event, attended by Baltimore County officials and most state and county elected officials. We have received about 20 requests for leaves following the unveiling of the Legacy Tree at a special event last month. The Woodlawn Senior Center members and friends filled the room. The Legacy Tree can be expanded to accommodate more than 300 leaves.

The WSC Council thought that the Legacy Tree would be a wonderful long-term fundraiser for the center. Purchasers will be able to see their names on the tree and take pride in the advancements and enhancement that the funds provide. We hope to purchase an electronic sign, new computer equipment, and other items as the needs are identified. The funds will help us continue to offer reduced price snacks and meals to our members. The center stands to benefit from this project for years to come.

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: Completely managed by volunteers

Revenue: $6,000; Expense: $5,500; Net: $500 (as of November 2013)

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Fundraising Honorable Mention

25 Days of Christmas

Lewis County Senior Center
Weston, WV

Staff, board members, and volunteers solicited businesses in the community for prizes. Over $9,000 in prizes were collected. They then campaigned throughout the months of August through November and sold over 2,083 tickets at $10 each. The center netted over $19,730. While a great fundraiser, this event helped promote the Lewis County Senior Center to the local and surrounding communities and actively engaged everyone in the event. Facebook and the local weekly newspaper were used heavily to announce the fundraiser, each daily drawing's winners, and contributors. The phones at the center were busy daily requesting to know who won the day's drawing. Attendance grew for the lunchtime meal due to the excitement of the day's drawing. We also scheduled politicians and business leaders to conduct each day's drawing.

The 25 Days of Christmas proved to be a financial success with very little overhead costs involved. The fundraiser provided an opportunity for seniors, staff, volunteers, and board members to take ownership by fully engaging in the event. Finally, it promoted the senior center's programs and activities to a larger and more diverse audience.

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: 200

Revenue: $20,830; Expense: $1,100; Net: $19,730

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Leadership,
Civic Engagement, &
Community Development
Award Winner

A Seniors & Seniors in Service Project:
An Intergenerational Garden

Lynnwood Senior Center, Lynnwood, WA

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 20 volunteers aged 18 and younger worked side-by-side with 17 Lynnwood Senior Center volunteers building raised beds for a community garden. Participants aged 4 to 90 years old constructed 30 garden boxes intended to offer opportunities for intergenerational pairs of gardeners to grow food together. Twenty-five garden boxes built four feet square and 36 inches tall are set up in a large rectangle with five one-foot high raised beds in the middle. The outer boxes are waist-high, allowing access for people with knee problems or personal scooters, while also offering an easy arm's length reach to the middle of the garden box. The inner boxes’ assignments are currently to a preschool and a Boy Scout troop growing food for the local food bank. The goal of this project, located adjacent to the Lynnwood Senior Center, is to improve wellness, foster intergenerational interaction, increase access to fresh produce for older adults, and provide a much needed service to the larger community. It is Lynnwood's first community garden.

I saw an 80 year-old man show a 16 year-old girl how to use a power tool and knew this was the “why” of the project. Our youth have so much to learn from older adults—and older adults have so much to give. My Grannie taught me how to garden. Many older adults lose their gardens through downsizing or stop working in them due to health issues, so it was important to make the community garden fit the users. This summer, an abundance of beautiful organic food was grown by senior gardeners, in partnership with people of all ages.

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: 37 volunteers to construct boxes, 4 event volunteers for food and support, 2 staff members to prepare materials and supervise the project

Revenue: $0; Expense: $5,500; Net: $0

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Leadership, Civic Engagement, & Community Development Honorable Mention

Project GO: Grandparents Organized
South Washington Senior Center, Cottage Grove, MN

Project GO, or Grandparents Organized, is an intergenerational project through District 833 Community Education with volunteer seniors who are grandparents to children in the third grade. All 58 third grade classrooms welcome seniors from the South Washington Senior Center and their own grandparents if they are available to join them in the classroom. The grandparents are paired off with a student and they introduce themselves and talk about what their similarities and differences are in school, families, and lifestyles. Every child brings a t-shirt, and the grandparent and child work together to make a pillow. They sew the bottom and sleeves first with a chain stitch. They turn the shirt outside right and fill it with polyfill. They sew the neck shut with a whipstitch and create a cozy, soft keepsake of their time together. Over 1,500 in District 833 look forward to this special day with their natural or adopted grandparent. Many children keep their pillows for years and remember the day with a smile. Later that day, the children create and write a thank you card to their grandparent and thank them for teaching them how to sew and for their time together. The Project GO thank you cards are delivered through inter-building mail to the senior center and then given to the volunteer. The project involves over 800 volunteer hours every year.

Community Education brought Project GO into schools when a teacher realized that many children did not have an older adult or grandparent in their lives. Without the Intergenerational connection, children were missing the wisdom and experiences that make up traditions and lifestyles. Project GO bridges the generation gap with conversation, curiosity, and teaching a life skill of hand sewing. The conversations are lively and the children enjoy the project every bit as much as the senior. Writing and creating a thank you card brings the skill of hand writing and showing the gratitude for volunteers working in the schools.

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: 15

Revenue: $3,500; Expense: $3,500; Net: $0 (supported by District 833 Community Education)

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In conjunction with the city’s FIT/PHX program, the Human Services Department initiated the Senior Champion’s Passport program at all 15 senior centers. The goal of the program is to increase health and fitness center based programs, allowing senior center members added opportunities to become involved, educated, and active. Participants were challenged with completing up to 72 health and fitness based activities over the four-month period. Each participant was issued a “passport” to track individual participation in four subject areas; nutrition, health awareness, physical activity, and mental fitness. Participants earned a sticker for each FIT/PHX program they completed. When the first FIT/PHX Passport was completed with the 24 required stickers, the participant earned bronze medal status. Participants who completed a second FIT/PHX passport achieved silver medal status. When a third passport was completed, a gold medal status was achieved. Seniors enjoyed healthy cooking classes, learned new games, and attended health based workshops. Phoenix seniors are truly on their way to being fit and healthy! Approximately 600 seniors participated, and over 360 will receive medals for their participation in the FIT/PHX program—151 bronze, 95 silver, and 116 gold medals. Each center will hold an awards/medal celebration. In addition to seniors being recognized on a center level, each center will delegate a Senior Center Champion to represent their center at the 2013 Senior Services Volunteer Recognition Lunch on Dec. 11, 2013.

The Senior Champion's Passport program not only recognized the importance of physical activity, but equally important was nutrition, health awareness, and mental fitness. By creating a competition and providing recognition, the city created motivation to participate. One member recently cited the program as being the catalyst for losing weight, which led to decrease in medication and accolades from his physician. In a recent Human Services Advisory Committee meeting, he stated, "The program literally changed my life!" With this kind of results, the city senior centers should be commended for their effort and hard work!

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** There are 15 senior centers in the City of Phoenix with 3 staff in each center.

**Revenue:** $0; **Expense:** $1,000; **Net:** ($1,000)

**Contact:** Moises Gallegos, City of Phoenix
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The Plaza program is designed for older adults and offers instruction in movement to maintain and increase range of motion, build muscular strength, and enhance coordination and balance. The program provides exercise and nutrition education that contributes to sound physical, mental, and emotional well-being. We serve 170 residents in our residential community center. The program is divided into three components: (1) exercise two times per week for two hours, (2) brain health workshop one day per week for two hours and (3) yoga/meditation one hour per week. We have collaborated with our local adult school to provide our center with certified instructors and have built a strong volunteer base. The program is offered to our residents and the surrounding community and has been running since 2007.

Our program is successful because we target the populations’ health issues. The program is implemented based on the current complications observed in our population. The following figures come from complications documented from our assessments given to our residents: 78% have arthritis, 52% have hypertension, 31% have heart disease, and 21% have diabetes. Additionally, 79% of our population is between the ages of 63-80 and 19% are between the ages of 81-95. The average life span in the U.S. is 78. We are exceeding our goal in that department. Our residents are aging in place longer and living healthier lives. They are happier and look forward to the program every week.

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 1 staff, 2 volunteers

**Revenue:** $0; **Expense:** $0; **Net:** $0

**Contact:**
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The "Senior Buddy Bingo Crew" was created for the first time at the Penacook Community Center Senior Program in April 2013. Senior program members and the preschool program gathered for a game of Intergenerational Bingo. Senior Buddies matched up with the children and assisted them in learning their numbers through playing number Bingo with Bingo slide cards. A senior calls the numbers, and the children get excited looking to cover their numbers. The Bingo winner (child) yells out "BINGO" when a full row is covered. The winner gets to pick out a prize from the prize basket and at the end of the event, every child received a small prize (mini bubbles, create your own airplane, mini puzzles, etc.).

"Buddy Bingo" is a simple, easily played game that is enjoyed by multiple generations. The seniors enjoy time spent with the young children, who remind them of their children or grandchildren when they were young. This game keeps their brain and motor skills challenged by assisting the children in manipulating their Bingo boards, as well as helping them to read and identify their numbers. The children have the opportunity to experience interaction with a grandparent role model, while learning and having fun. It's a win-win activity and event. It has been so well liked that our "Senior Buddy Bingo Crew" gets together with the preschoolers monthly.

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 1 staff

**Revenue:** $0; **Expense:** $0 (we utilize our Bingo cards & prize donations); **Net:** $0

**Contact:**
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The Zeta Center Intergenerational Community Prom was designed to bridge the gap between the youth and seniors of the Park Heights Community. This event is free for all, with the understanding that connecting and engaging the youth and senior citizens of the Park Heights Community is one of the most important factors in securing the growth and revitalization of the community. This event has been designed to provide an opportunity for young and older adults of the Park Heights Community to interact in a social and non-threatening manner.

Through this program, we look to increase the understanding between youth and senior members of the Park Heights Community in a fun-filled way. Our Intergenerational Prom goal is to promote intergenerational tolerance and respect with the hope that these concepts will be maintained and spread throughout the community. Our objective is that through hands-on activities, volunteer service at the center, and social events, youth volunteers and senior members of the community are able to bridge the generational gap and learn from each other while working together. This is the fourth year we have held this event. We have between 100-150 seniors and youth attend the event.

Through this program, we are able to connect and engage the youth and senior citizens of the Park Heights Community, which is one of the most important factors in securing the positive growth and revitalization of the community. It is unique as we strive to be one of the community centers geared to bridging the gap between the youth and seniors of the Park Heights Community in a very different, yet positive way. Through this program, we strive to increase the understanding between youth and senior members of the Park Heights Community.

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 12

**Revenue:** $2,658; **Expense:** $2,658; **Net:** $0

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Thank You

Thank you to the following National Institute of Senior Centers Best Practices Work Group members who served as judges for the 2013 NISC Programs of Excellence Awards:

**Mary Flood**, Director, Portland Senior Center, Portland, CT

**Donna Smith**, Chief, Communications, Maryland Department of Aging, Baltimore, MD

**Judy Bunnell**, Social Services Coordinator, Portsmouth Housing Authority, Portsmouth, NH

**Kellie Brace**, Senior Center Manager, Living Well in Wabash County COA, Inc., Wabash, IN

**Darryl Blackwell**, Facility Coordinator, Lou Walker Senior Center, Lithonia, GA

**Shirley Buchanan**, Director, Kingsport Senior Center, Kingsport, TN

And a big thank you also to **Jill Hall**, Chief, Senior Centers and Community Services Division, Baltimore County Department of Aging, Baltimore, MD, for chairing the Program Awards Committee.