



Innovation at Work 2015

Promising Practices Winners
That Are Reshaping the
Aging Services Industry





Institute on Aging

Each year, through the Promising Practices Awards, Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging recognizes organizations that are serving older adults in original and exciting ways. These awards highlight organizations working with older adults in a variety of settings that are moving away from conventional practices by developing and implementing innovative approaches.

Winners were selected based on their innovation, the outcomes presented, and the replicability of the practice.

Sharing these promising practices reinforces our commitment to encouraging innovation that improves programs and services for older adults. We hope these innovations will benefit the senior living industry, as other organizations adapt the ideas and help transform them into best practices.

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Offering Older Adults a Breath of Fresh Air

A PLUS HEALTH CARE

Kallispell, Montana

www.aplushc.com

This for-profit, statewide home care organization based in Montana has successfully adapted a European program called Green Care Farms, and has introduced a healthy breath of fresh air for the older adults it serves.

“Our organization serves approximately 750 clients in their homes on a weekly basis,” says Maarten Fischer, program manager at A Plus Health Care. “Most of those clients hardly ever get out [of their homes], and suffer from isolation, physical inactivity, and a lack of purpose—all leading to additional physical and mental health issues.”

In an effort to offer these older adults opportunities to expand their horizons, A Plus Health Care brings them to local farms and ranches approximately once a week, so that they can do light chores such as feeding chickens, harvesting vegetables (which they are welcome to take home), helping with lunch preparations, or simply enjoy socializing and a healthy group meal. “By taking older adults out to farms, we give them a sense of purpose and ‘lure’ them into healthy physical and social activities,” explains Fischer. “Researchers call us a hidden program.”

“Lifeside Farms” is intergenerational; A Plus Health Care also serves developmentally disabled youth, and Fischer estimates that of the approximately 70 participants in the Care Farm program, half are older adults and half young adults.

A Plus Health Care has built partnerships with 11 farms, which are paid to clear their schedule for program days—and farmers are trained as caregivers, so that



Interacting with animals is a big draw for many Lifeside Farms participants.



Working together—or simply sitting and socializing—provides a valuable change of pace for homebound adults.



Performing simple chores gives participants a sense of purpose.

they can anticipate and meet the needs of participants. “This introduces a unique and very natural approach to care,” says Fischer.

Fischer believes Lifeside Farms is the first program in the United States based on the European Care Farm model. “We adapted it from the Netherlands, where there about 1,500 care farms and 20 matching organizations like ours,” he explains.

“Once we place our clients with depression, dementia, weight issues, etc., on the farms, they turn from patients into participants, from receivers into givers,” says Fischer. “And the effects spill over into their lives and truly improve health, quality of life, and community inclusion. It feels like magic, and we love it!”

For details on all the programs offered within Lifeside Farms, visit <https://flatheadcarefarming.wordpress.com>.

Plant the Seeds for Your Own Lifeside Farms Program

Lay the groundwork:

You may not have 11 farms within driving distance—but this program could work with a greenhouse, community garden, or even municipal park district. Ascertain that your population of older adults is interested and able to participate in a “green care program,” then build necessary partnerships with businesses.



Fischer says Lifeside Farms relied on staff time plus help from partners, and used no external funding.

Create the program:

- Start with a smaller pilot program for manageability; you can use this to recruit more partners, volunteers, and funders.
- Develop your models, training, and procedures for intakes, monitoring, billing, and farmer/partner recruitment.
- Use in-house expertise to create onsite programming to engage participants.

Monitor it:

A Plus Health Care measures outcomes of Lifeside Farms participants via interviews with clients, family members, farmers, and case managers. Measures focus on at least five goals per client, and include factors such as empowerment and mood. 🌱

Building Up Balance with No-Pedal Bicycles



Photo courtesy of Westhills Village Retirement Community

Eager residents try out the novel no-pedal bicycles in an introductory class.

**WESTHILLS VILLAGE
RETIREMENT COMMUNITY**
Rapid City, South Dakota
www.westhillsvillage.com

Residents at this Continuing Care Retirement Community are riding bicycles again, thanks to a new program involving balance-enhancing no-pedal bikes. Older adults who have balance problems, as well as those who never learned to ride a bike, are now wheeling around the community on special bikes designed for people with balance issues. The no-pedal bikes used are a larger model of those designed for small children, with 20" wheels to accommodate

adult height. The rider sits on the bike seat, holds the handle bars, and walks or pushes off rather than pedals. Not only are residents having fun, but this is a safe way to challenge their balance.

"Some of our residents were never afforded the opportunity to ride a bike until age 90!" says Erin Smith, the wellness director at Westhills Village Retirement Community. "Others gave up on their bike-riding days after a fall. These innovative [no-pedal bicycles] have given these residents the confidence to get back on their bikes."

The community selected Strider Bicycles, a local manufacturer, which sent a specialist in teaching



Photo courtesy of Westhills Village Retirement Community

Riding these bikes is a popular way to work on improving balance in older adults.

people with special needs to ride their bikes. The representative, who was able to “roll over” her knowledge of balance issues to the older adults, gave two demonstrations to independent living residents. This generated a lot of interest among residents, and the Westhills Village Foundation purchased multiple bikes to use in classes.

“We’ve held six classes so far, and each has been full of eager riders wanting to play with these new bicycles,” says Smith.

Biannual fitness surveys of residents showed major improvements in balance for some who participated in the no-pedal bike program. The surveys showed some residents improved their balance by as much as 292%. “The only thing that they changed was the addition of the [bike program],” says Smith. “And other bike-riding residents have said that their balance is better when they walk around the community.”

An additional benefit of the no-pedal bikes: some residents use it to stay connected with their families. “One resident received photos of his young great-grandson riding his no-pedal bike, and responded by sending back a picture of himself on his own model!” says Smith. “This has been more than a balance class; it’s an intergenerational opportunity for residents.”

Gear Up Your Own Bike Program

Lay the groundwork:

Begin by gauging interest in no-pedal bikes from residents. As with Westhills Village Retirement Community, invite a manufacturer’s representative in to give a demonstration. If interest is strong enough, then secure funding, a plan for training residents, and policies on bike-sharing.

Roll it out:

- Hold classes to train residents on the bikes. You’ll need to convey simple information, like how to sit on these special bicycles without hurting yourself.
- Create a plan for how many bikes you will purchase, where they will be stored, how they will be distributed/checked out, etc.
- Consider all safety issues—do you need designated bike areas? Helmets?

Monitor it:

To verify the effectiveness of your bike program, first survey participating residents before they begin biking. Ask about their level of physical activity, balance, strength, etc. Then administer the same survey six months later to see which if any areas show improvement. 🌱

Serving Community Needs with a Unique Business Model

BENEVILLA
Surprise, Arizona
www.benevilla.org

Benevilla, a nonprofit social services agency, found a single solution for the three main challenges that they wanted to meet: to provide higher quality products to community members who currently used their day center; to meet the demand for an inviting community gathering space; and to offer Group Supported Employment (GSE) to intellectually and developmentally disabled adults.

That solution: Birt's Bistro, adapted from the award-winning Café Plus concept from Mather LifeWays. What makes Birt's Bistro unique is that Benevilla chose to set it up as a for-profit Social Enterprise Bistro, because this business model provided the organization with unique opportunities. The model is able to support the organization's mission and address the challenges, but without basing decisions primarily on financial considerations as a traditional for-profit business does. Birt's is also unique in that it employs onsite social workers, who are available to help community members with advice and resource recommendations. In addition,

- An onsite Memory Arts Bistro provides a free monthly interactive art experience for those with



Unique programming at Birt's Bistro challenges older adults to try something new.

dementia and their caregivers run by specially trained artists.

- A Meals on Wheels program offers homebound clientele the opportunity to have a hot, freshly prepared meal daily.
- Local musicians of all ages perform at Birt's After Hours, an entertainment program that also serves food, wine, beer, and cocktails.
- A used bookstore and artist boutique give back a percentage of all sales to Benevilla to use for human service programs.
- Local artist receptions are held every six weeks.

Birt's revenue has ended up being a significant part of the Benevilla annual budget; in 2013 it accounted for 20% of agency revenue. Finally, Birt's has ended up being an excellent marketing tool, introducing customers to Benevilla and resulting in an increase in volunteers, clients, and donors.

Serve Up Your Own Social Enterprise Bistro

If your organization is planning to add a community outreach program—or has one already—Benevilla offers a unique model to consider. Their leadership shared these tips on starting a program:

- Perform a thorough analysis of what type of community outreach program is appropriate, based on community need, organizational need, and mission.
- Create a strong business plan for the program.
- Consult appropriate legal and financial experts to set up a Social Enterprise model (or other model).
- Be open to new ideas: additional revenue streams that also support community building like the bookstore and boutique were not a part of the original plan.
- Involve community partners for success. Birt's works with local theater and art groups, high schools and universities, and other nonprofits to provide services.
- Prepare for challenges, which may include finding a location for a for-profit enterprise; setting prices to serve limited-income customers yet remain profitable; and fundraising. 🌱

Building Bridges between Care Levels

CASA DORINDA
Montecito, California
www.casadorinda.org

In Life Plan Communities (formerly known as Continuing Care Retirement Communities), there are often separations between levels of care that are never bridged. For example, a resident in independent living who moves to assisted living will transition to a separate area with different staff, different residents, and different activities.

At Casa Dorinda, a nonprofit Life Plan Community, a new continuity of care program has successfully blurred those divisions. Casa Dorinda's Activities Department focused on the organization's core mission of creating an active lifestyle for all residents, and took creative steps to make the campus more inclusive and better bring together residents in all levels of care to participate in activities together. This established more cohesive programming that has brought residents together with each other and with staff, creating stronger social bonds campus-wide, and in all care levels. Now, independent living residents who move to a different level of care know they will still see their current friends during these activities. This helps alleviate some of the fear of changing care levels.



Residents from different levels of care add their unique creative skills to art projects.

In addition, Activities staff assigned to specific care levels began regularly switching places for programs, so that they could get acquainted with residents in other areas, or reconnect with residents they used to work with.

"The continuity of care program has been a rousing success, eased transitions, and brought the entire community together," says Melissa Gill Hausz, director of activities for Casa Dorinda. "It took relatively simple changes—with no additional budget—to enhance resident quality of life and implement an innovative, practical solution to a problem that is shared among Life Plan Communities."

Bridge Your Own Care Level Gaps

Any Life Plan Community or organization providing multiple levels of care can adapt this model with little or no cost. Keep these tips in mind as you plan your program:

- Get buy-in from leadership and staff. This program will require changes in communication, in day-to-day work duties, and perhaps even in policies.
- Enlist the help of frontline staff in collaborating to create a more inclusive structure for programs and relevant areas.
- Be prepared for reluctance on the part of some residents; encourage a culture of inclusiveness and camaraderie.
- Look for new areas where it makes sense to remove or ease divisions between levels of care.
- Keep the program "front and center" for staff, so that it continues to be supported as they work on activity programming. 🌱



Interested in Submitting for the 2016 Promising Practices Awards?

Nominations will open in July, with a submission deadline in September 2016.

For details, visit www.matherlifewaysinstituteonaging.com/promising.

Staffed by nationally recognized researchers, Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging is an award-winning resource for research and information about wellness, aging, trends in senior living, and successful industry innovations. In order to support senior living communities and others that serve older adults, the Institute shares its cutting-edge research in areas including effective approaches to brain health, ways to enhance resilience, and successful employee wellness programs. Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging is part of Mather LifeWays, a 75-year-old, not-for-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of older adults by creating Ways to Age Well.SM

Learn about previous Promising Practice Award winners—from a hugging campaign to boost resident well-being to a groundbreaking overnight respite care program. You can download the 2014 *Innovations at Work* report at www.matherlifewaysinstituteonaging.com/promising2014.

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