



# INNOVATION AT WORK 2020

Promising Practices Award Recipients That Are Reshaping the Aging Services Industry



Each year, through the Promising Practices Awards, Mather Institute recognizes organizations working with older adults in a variety of settings that are moving away from conventional practices by developing and implementing innovative approaches.

When the Institute opened the call for Promising Practices submissions for 2020, the world was in the grip of the Coronavirus pandemic, and organizations that serve older adults had to focus on the health and safety of residents and customers. As a result, some new initiatives may have been paused, while others sprang up to meet new needs.

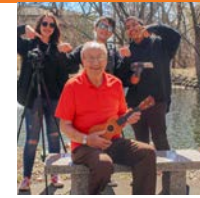
Challenging times can lead to innovation and invention. We received 35 submissions from organizations around the world, and we appreciate their willingness to share powerful ideas and practices to move the industry forward, particularly during these difficult times.

We are pleased to honor eight organizations. Award submissions were selected based on criteria including:

- ▶ innovation
- ▶ outcomes presented
- ▶ replicability of the practice
- ▶ impact of the practice on senior living or aging services

Sharing these promising practices reinforces Mather Institute’s commitment to encouraging innovation and creating Ways to Age Well.<sup>SM</sup> By serving as an innovation incubator, the Institute strives to shine a light on ideas that will benefit many, as other organizations adapt the ideas and transform them into best practices. 🌱

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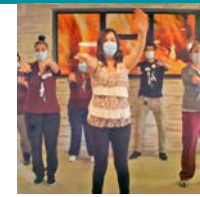


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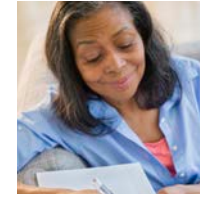
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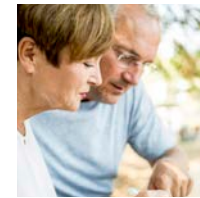
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# HITTING FAST-FORWARD ON VIEWS OF AGING BY CREATING MUSIC VIDEOS

THREE PILLARS SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITIES | DOUSMAN, WI | [YOUTUBE.COM/THREEPILLARSENIOR](https://www.youtube.com/threepillarsenior)



When it comes to conveying an important message, music and video are powerful tools. So to help smash ageism stereotypes—as well as create an exceptional experience for residents, staff, and others—Three Pillars Senior Living Communities started producing unique music videos. Each May, the not-for-profit provider creates a video to mark Older Americans Month, enlisting an intergenerational cast of residents, staff, and community members to dance and lip-synch to a song. The result: irresistible, upbeat videos that get tens of thousands of views online.

“We feel strongly that celebrating our residents in creative, fun, less-than-ordinary ways is an important part of our commitment to providing them with the best experience and quality of care,” says Kelsey Pangborn, director of customer experience at Three Pillars. “Making the videos also creates exceptional experiences for our team members, increasing engagement and bringing people together.”

A lot of effort goes into making each video, and the results are impressive. The annual project is a highlight of

the year for participating residents and staff, as well as community volunteers, including local high school students. “To us, these videos are a rewarding opportunity to surprise and delight residents, staff, volunteers, and community with something that’s not considered mainstream for this population,” says Kelsey. The community’s 2020 video alone has more than 9,200 views on Facebook and has received media coverage. Filmed during the Coronavirus pandemic, “Make Your Mark” features residents wearing face masks and social distancing as they dance exuberantly, lip-synch, and create a painting together, all to “Get on Your Feet” by Snowday.

While Three Pillars produces videos that highlight each year’s theme for Older Americans Month, Kelsey encourages other communities to put their own twist on a resident video. “It could be cooking class videos, how-to tutorials, or an intergenerational, talk show,” she says. “Whatever gets residents and staff in your community excited is likely to be a hit with your audience.”

## TRY IT YOURSELF

Producing a seemingly simple music video is fun, but it takes months of planning. Kelsey recommends enlisting as many volunteers as possible to share work, talent, and equipment. Other lessons learned:

- ▶ **Song selection:** Securing permissions for using a song may be your biggest hurdle and can take months. It involves locating not only the correct type of permission from the songwriter and publisher, but also sometimes paying a fee. “Finding the right person to speak with at each agency to explain the purpose of the project helps,” says Kelsey. “We’ve received gratis permissions from big publishers once they understood our goal.”
- ▶ **Assemble your resources:** Draft your volunteers—specifically videographers, editors, choreographers—so you know what your options are. This might range from a low-cost video shot on a smartphone to drone photography.
- ▶ **Create a storyboard:** Map out the video shot by shot, timed to your song.
- ▶ **Get permissions:** Secure consent from everyone who will appear in the video ahead of time.

*For more information on how to adapt this successful video project, contact Kelsey Pangborn at [kpangborn@threepillars.org](mailto:kpangborn@threepillars.org).* 🌱



# BRINGING COUNSELING SESSIONS ON-SITE TO SUPPORT RESIDENTS' EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

VIRGINIA TECH | BLACKSBURG, VA | LIBERALARTS.VT.EDU



Life Plan Communities are known for offering programs that address residents' social, physical, intellectual, and spiritual wellness. Programs that target emotional well-being have been slower to develop, leaving a potential gap for residents not willing to seek services beyond the community.

Virginia Tech is filling this gap at a local not-for-profit Life Plan Community called Warm Hearth Village. The university's Counselor Education Program has partnered with Warm Hearth to launch the AgeWell Counseling Program, an innovative initiative in which graduate students in counseling provide pro bono services to residents. "The program provides individual, couples, and

coming year," says Matthew. Recent additions to the program include couples counseling focused on helping couples navigate a dementia diagnosis, and launching virtual support groups that help residents and staff navigate the impact of COVID-19.

Matthew adds, "We're grateful that the program was firmly established prior to the Coronavirus pandemic. We were able to shift counseling services to a telehealth format, and launched a supportive 'phone a friend' program that provided some immediate help with residents who were most at risk of loneliness and social isolation."

group counseling services to residents in independent living, assisted living, and skilled nursing," says Matthew Fullen, assistant professor at Virginia Tech.

"Older adults are less likely to receive mental health care for a variety of reasons, including cost, accessibility, and stigma associated with help-seeking," says Matthew. "This partnership enlists graduate students who are completing their clinical internships—which minimizes costs—and the counseling services are easily accessible on Warm Hearth's campus. By making counseling available and visible within the community, the stigma appears to be shrinking as well."

The AgeWell Counseling Program, now in its third year, has provided more than 500 hours of direct counseling services to residents. "We estimate that we'll double that number in the

## TRY IT YOURSELF

Virginia Tech and Warm Hearth Village each contributed complementary strengths to develop the partnership. To find a university partner to work with on providing counseling services, consider the following:

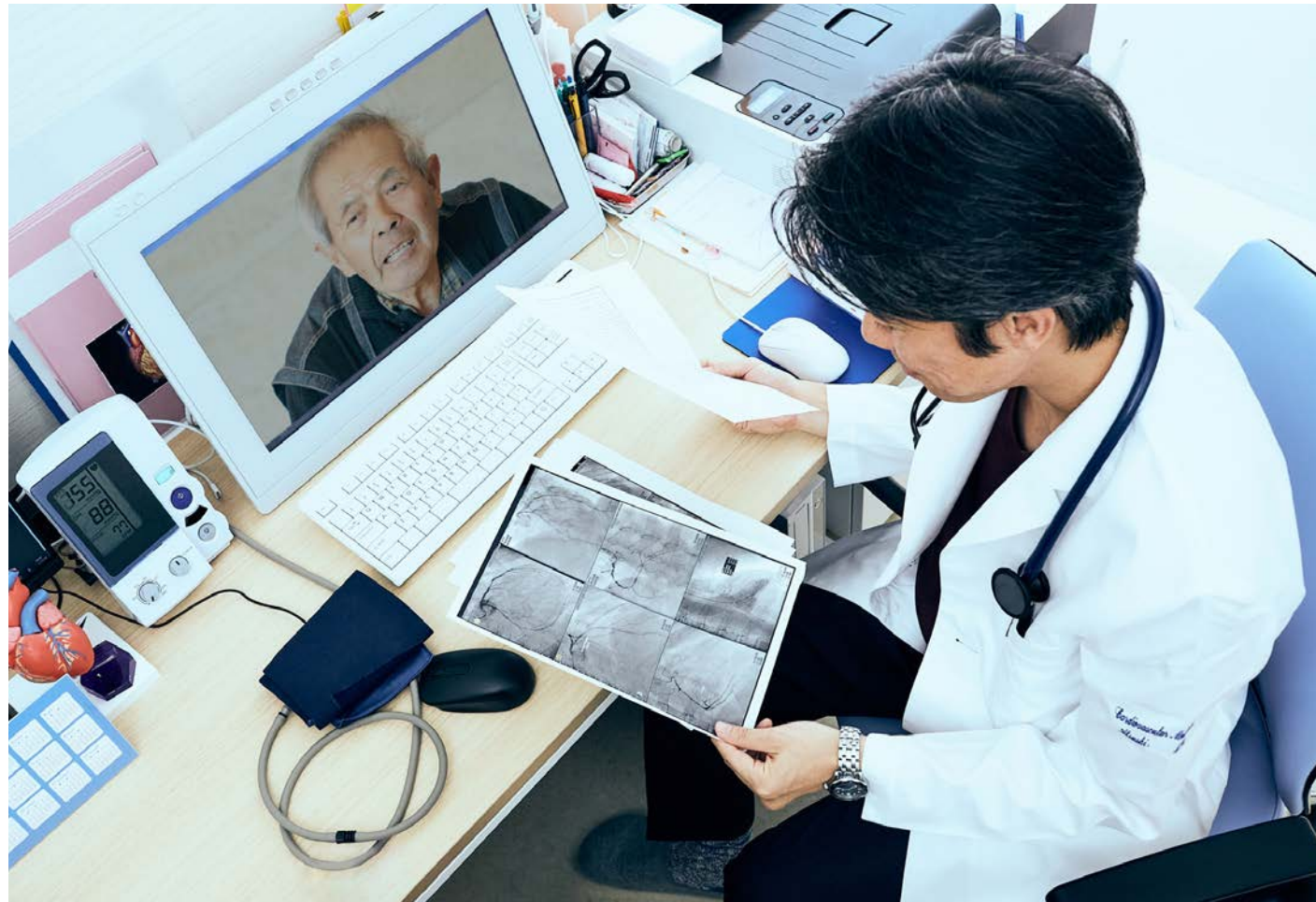
- ▶ **Provide space for sessions:** By finding a private area or areas on your campus for resident counseling, you'll help overcome the barrier of accessibility to counseling, as well as help keep costs down.
- ▶ **Recruit residents:** Using your staff's talents and resources, you can alert residents to the availability of counseling. Communication such as emails, newsletter articles, and other internal promotions can spread the word and help normalize the idea of getting counseling.
- ▶ **Integrate the counseling students:** Having a physical presence on your property allows for the counseling student to get to know community members, describe the benefits of counseling services, and work with staff to strengthen referral networks.

*For more information on how to adapt this practice, contact Matthew Fullen at [mfullen@vt.edu](mailto:mfullen@vt.edu).* 🌱



# KEEPING COMMUNITY-DWELLING OLDER ADULTS HEALTHY WITH HIGH TECH & HIGH TOUCH

WESTCHESTER PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP FOR AGING SERVICES | MOUNT VERNON, NY | WESTCHESTERPARTNERSHIP.ORG



Like many other parts of the country, Westchester County, New York, is home to a number of older adults who live alone and are below the poverty level. To get these people the medical and wellness services they need, one organization created a unique combination of telehealth monitoring services and à la carte social services. As a result, they are improving health measures and saving costs for community-dwelling older adults in their county.

Telehealth Intervention Programs for Seniors (TIPS) was created by Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services, an enthusiastic coalition of government, businesses, voluntary service agencies, and consumers, with a mission of helping older adults age with independence and dignity in their home communities.

“TIPS appointments are conducted in a ‘high tech meets high touch’ approach with an intergenerational flavor,” says Colette Phipps, LMSW, executive director, Westchester County Livable Communities. “College-student Telehealth Technician Associates, along with Social Support Associates staff, measure vital signs, ask health status questions, and capture comprehensive intake assessments.” Available services that might be prescribed include Benefits Check, caregiver support programs, chronic disease and chronic pain self-management programs, elder abuse screening, a community support program, and a variety of educational programs.

Information from these appointments is transmitted to an electronic database dashboard, which a telehealth RN reviews after sessions are completed. This information is used to provide follow-up to the participants and their primary care physicians and/or caregivers. Vital signs monitoring and predictive health status data are collected weekly, along with RN notes, and automatically transmitted to a secure project database, with summary reports reviewed

monthly. That database compares data, including hospitalizations, ER contacts, <30-day rehospitalizations, falls, and medication compliance for 12 months before enrollment to 12 months post-enrollment.

“We tracked 785 participants over an average of 300 days,” says Colette.

“We found an 87.5% compliance rate to a single weekly visit.” The data showed an average 30% reduction in ER visits, and within the Medicare cohort, a 60% reduction in hospitalizations, and a 75% reduction in <30-day readmissions.

“We estimate the program has already resulted in many millions of dollars in cost avoidance for health care insurers, along with reduced out-of-pocket expenses and caregiver costs for program participants and their families,” says Colette.

## TRY IT YOURSELF

If you are part of a coalition, or are able to partner with local government agencies and nonprofits, you can set up a program similar to TIPS. “In very broad strokes, replicating the TIPS program isn’t difficult, if an administration understands the benefits of using proactive measures to keep their residents out of ER rooms and out of hospitals,” says Colette.

“TIPS has been replicated at 17 sites in four states between 2014 and 2018,” Colette explains. “At those sites and in Westchester, it has reduced hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and under-30-day rehospitalizations.”

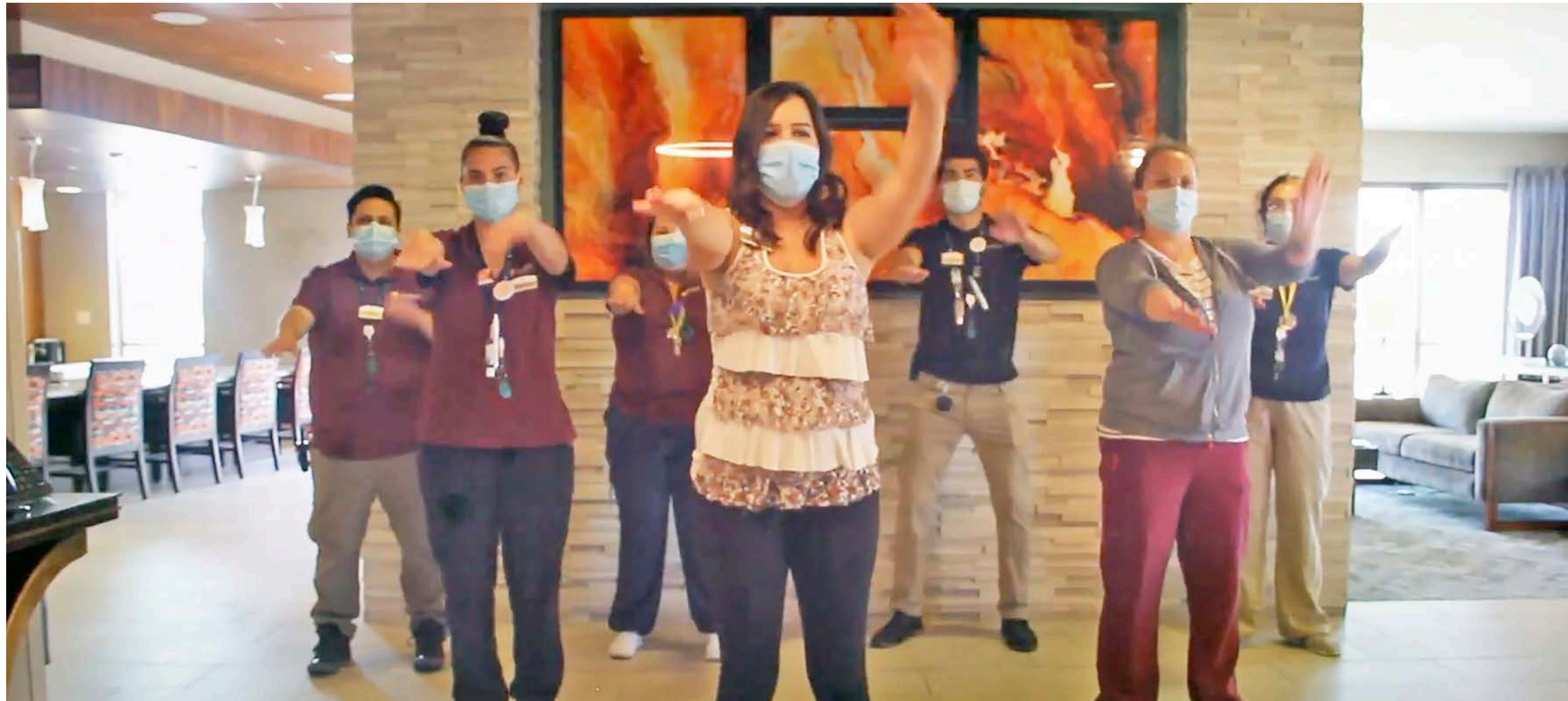
Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services received funding from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation and the Westchester County government. “With Weinberg funding, we serve a specific population—the sickest and the poorest,” says Colette. “With the county’s funding, we are able to serve everyone. And tremendous in-kind contributions have kept the program thriving.” Before the Coronavirus pandemic, TIPS was run out of congregate and affinity sites. Colette says that site directors and their participants are delighted to participate, and delighted with the results.

*For more information on how to adapt this practice, contact Colette Phipps at [cap2@westchestergov.com](mailto:cap2@westchestergov.com).* 🌱



# MAKING FACE MASKS FUN: REINFORCING MESSAGES ON INFECTION CONTROL

CHRISTIAN LIVING COMMUNITIES-CAPPELLA LIVING SOLUTIONS | ENGLEWOOD, CO | CHRISTIANLIVINGCOMMUNITIES.ORG



Most senior living communities have experienced “COVID compliance creep” among residents during the pandemic, when their adherence to wearing masks starts to slip over time. One organization came up with a unique campaign to avoid this trend.

CLC-Cappella—a not-for-profit with 23 senior living communities in six states, as well as a management and consulting services company—kicked off a friendly competition called the WE CARE WE WEAR Mask Up Challenge. Each community was asked to spotlight their superb masking-up and infection control efforts by creating a video that highlighted why, how, and for whom they wear masks.

“You never think that compliance can be fun and interactive, but it can be done,” says Moriah Bernhardt, senior director of programs. “Our month-long challenge transformed daily compliance with infection control and mask-wearing into a creative and engaging opportunity for team and residents.”

Each community put their funniest, artsiest, and most theatrical voices and faces to work. The resulting videos were judged by a panel that included the organization’s clinical team and resident representatives. The top three videos selected have been posted on Christian Living Ventures Facebook pages. “The winning teams received big prizes and fame!” says Moriah. “These incentives reinforced our goal of reminding everyone to do their part in controlling infection in their community, while helping to reduce COVID-19 stress and fatigue with a little fun.”

## TACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

As senior living communities and aging services continue to stress the importance of infection control measures like wearing masks, practicing good hand hygiene, and physical distancing, older adults (and team members) are experiencing message fatigue, along with general COVID-19 stress. “It’s important to come up with fun and innovative challenges to keep people on track,” says Moriah. “Rather than continually posting rules and guidelines, try different tools and technologies to keep your teams engaged and motivated.”

- ▶ Challenges and competitions work! Friendly competition galvanizes everyone to support your initiative. Try a different challenge every month to get more people involved and keep interest high.
- ▶ Celebrate success. Highlight the efforts that communities are taking to keep residents and team members safe. It will motivate people to continue their infection control measures.

*For more information on how to adapt this practice, contact Moriah Bernhardt at [mbernhardt@clcmail.org](mailto:mbernhardt@clcmail.org).* 🌱



# ADAPTING AN ANCIENT RITUAL TO CELEBRATE RESIDENTS' AGING

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY | SUDBURY, ONTARIO



Including celebrations to mark residents' specific life stages can reinforce positive perceptions of aging and introduce senior living communities to new cultural and spiritual aspects. Hom Shrestha, a graduate student at Laurentian University, explains, "I belong to the indigenous Newar community from ... Nepal, South Asia. We practice a 5,000-year-old tradition called Bura Janko, which celebrates longevity and the joys of aging ritually, ceremonially, culturally, and spiritually."

Bura Janko is celebrated at five ages:

- 77 years, seven months, seven days, and seven hours
- 1,000 full moon nights
- 88 years, eight months, eight days, and eight hours
- 99 years, nine months, nine days, and nine hours
- 108 years, eight months, and eight days

While the Newar community celebrates each Bura Janko differently and with religious and cultural rituals, the concept of marking these milestones for any older adult provides an opportunity to highlight the positives of aging—greater wisdom, continued wellness, and strength of community.

Modified for senior living, Bura Janko-style events could be annual or monthly celebrations for a group of residents for their 77th, 88th, 99th, and 108th birthdays. Celebrations typically include a parade around the community, with the person riding on a decorated chariot or palanquin (which could be updated to a three-wheeled bicycle), followed by food, music, dancing, and a joyful party with family, friends, and community team members. Costs and planning for the event could be shared between the community and the person's family members.

"It would be easy to 'rediscover' the value of these classic ceremonies for promoting vitality, longevity, and improved quality of life for older people anywhere," says Hom. "Combining Bura Janko-type activities with other restorative and recreational programs would enhance holistic aspects of senior living."

## TACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

Hom suggests that senior living communities interested in throwing Bura Janko-type celebrations for residents plan on group celebrations. All residents who reach one of the ages of celebration could be honored in a group, with a single parade.

More than standard birthday parties, Bura Janko-style celebrations are huge gatherings. To adhere to the Nepalese tradition, the celebration would include

- ▶ A parade with the honored residents and their spouses carried on decorated palanquins, three-wheeled bicycles, or carts. If they are local, the parade route might pass sites of previous homes, churches, etc.
- ▶ Invitations to family, friends, community members, local government leaders, and students and faculty from appropriate departments of local universities.
- ▶ An intergenerational component, as children and young people join in honoring residents' lifetimes.

The size and unique style of Bura Janko celebrations may prove to be opportunities for media coverage, as well as sponsorships, to help cover costs of food and entertainment.

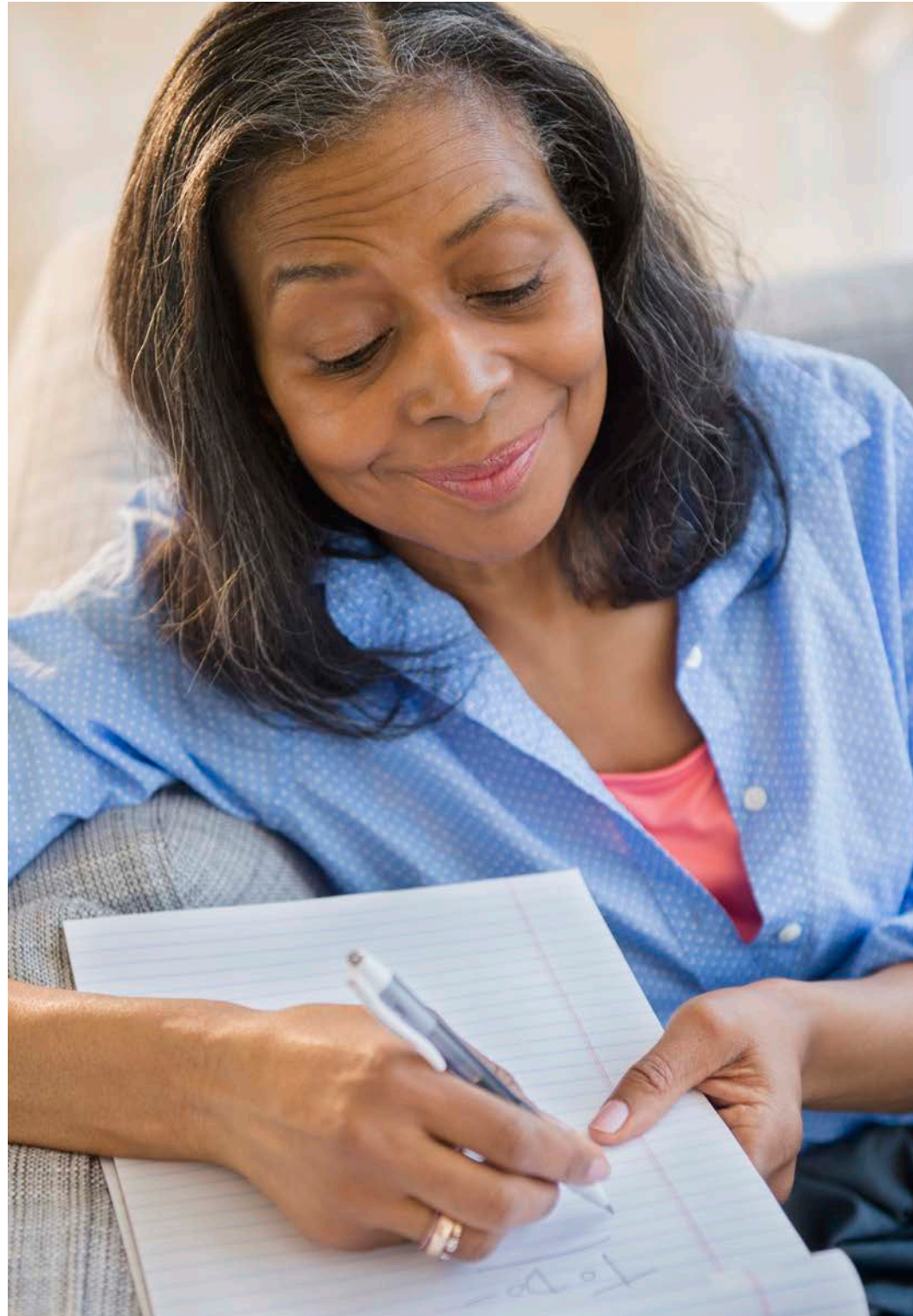
*For more information on how to adapt Bura Janko, contact Hom Shrestha at [hshrestha@laurentian.ca](mailto:hshrestha@laurentian.ca).*

Photo by Hom Shrestha



# EASING THE EMOTIONAL SIDE OF DOWNSIZING

SENIOR CENTER IN CENTRAL PARK | HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA | [HUNTINGTONBEACHCA.GOV/RESIDENTS/HUMAN\\_SERVICES/SENIOR\\_SERVICES.CFM](https://HUNTINGTONBEACHCA.GOV/RESIDENTS/HUMAN_SERVICES/SENIOR_SERVICES.CFM)



Clearing out possessions in later life identifies an emotional versus practical tug-of-war. Whether preparing for a move to a senior living community, or proactively weeding out belongings to reduce clutter and stress, downsizing can be emotionally fraught.

The Senior Center in Central Park offers a wide range of social, recreational, and educational programs promoting wellness to more than 12,000 older adults in Huntington Beach, California. Recently, the Senior Center in Central Park Care Management staff have paved the way for those facing downsizing by creating a thoughtful toolkit that addresses not only the practical aspects of reducing belongings, but the emotional aspects as well.

“The purpose of this toolkit is to help older adults and their families downsize by passing possessions to community members who need or want them,” says Kathleen Harrel, care manager for Senior Center in Central Park. “Disposing of one’s lifetime possessions during one’s later years can seem like a narrowing of life—yet this is a time when burdens should be lightened and connections and one’s potential are illuminated.” By guiding people to donate possessions to local organizations that need them, the toolkit refocuses the emotional and physical turmoil of downsizing into generosity and relief.

Tip sheets in the toolkit include thought-provoking research findings on legacy-building, positive change, relationships between happiness and prosocial behaviors, like donation, and perceived environmental impacts.

The information toolkit, made available in the senior center, includes researched fact sheets on local nonprofit charitable organizations, including details for each, such as the types of donations accepted, available methods of donation, pickup versus drop-off, and the story behind the nonprofit.

“This toolkit shines a light on wonderful efforts in a community,” says Kathleen. “Donating kitchen items to apartments for abused women, for example, can promote the safe passage of precious items while protecting fragile memories.”

## TACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

Want to create your own downsizing toolkit for older adults? More than a guide to donating belongings, support materials should address how to approach the emotional challenges an older adult—and often their family—faces.

Some tips found in the Senior Center in Central Park toolkit:

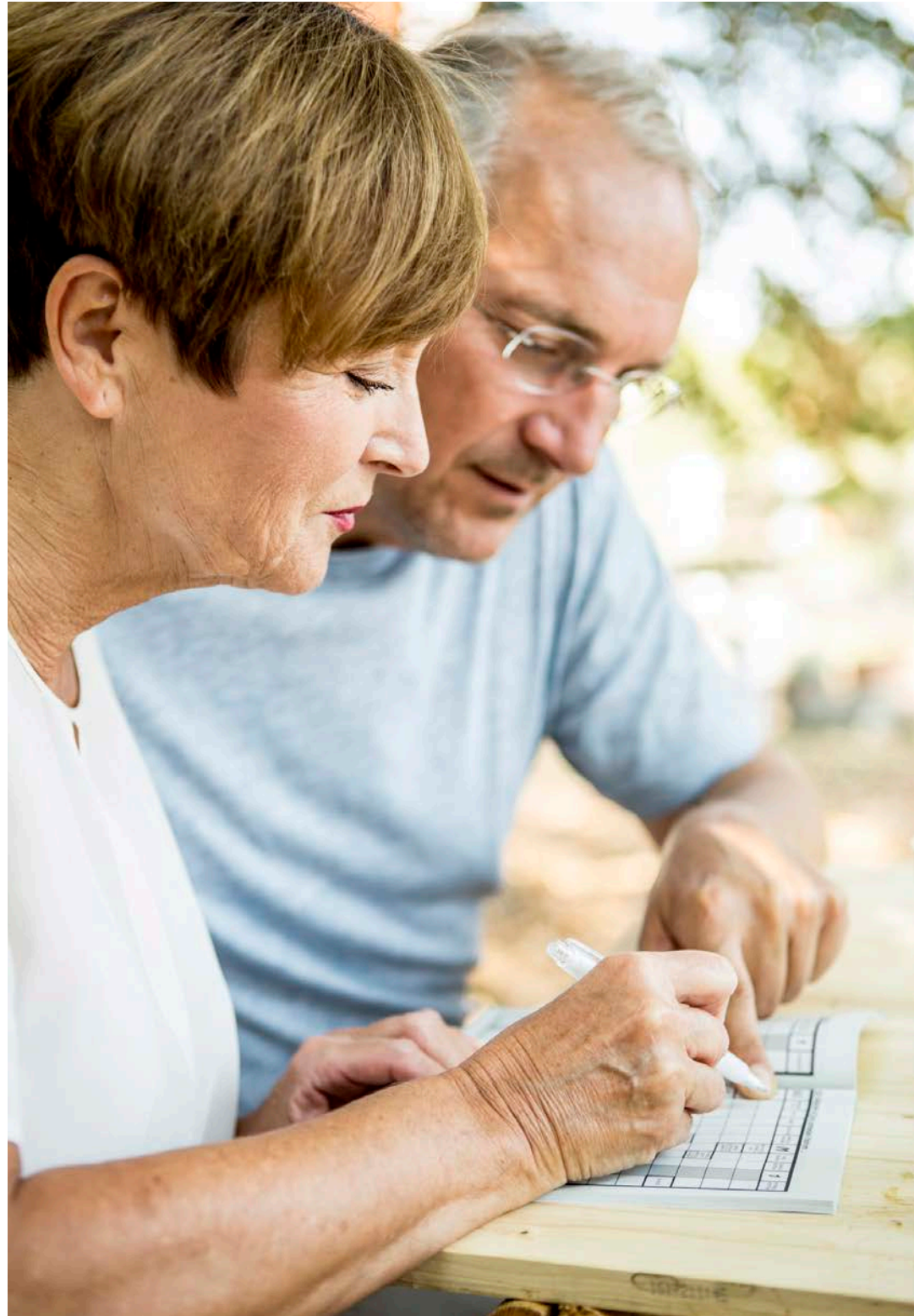
- ▶ Many people have more things than they need, while others have next to nothing.
- ▶ As vulnerability increases, the capacity to manage the content of one’s household diminishes.
- ▶ Avoid the trap of thinking that everything will be useful at some later point in time.
- ▶ Start the process early as a voluntary campaign to reduce stress.
- ▶ Bestowing possessions on others can connect one soul to the affection and life of another.
- ▶ Charity presents an opportunity for hard-to-let-go-of items to live on.
- ▶ Passing along a story with an item makes the ordinary meaningful.

*For more information on how to adapt this practice, contact Kathleen Harrel at [kathleen.harrel@surfcity-hb.org](mailto:kathleen.harrel@surfcity-hb.org).* 🌿



# BRINGING BRAIN HEALTH EDUCATION TO THE COMMUNITY

VILLAGESOKC | BETHANY, OK | VILLAGESOKC.ORG



When the brain health coaches from MINDRAMP Consulting presented at the 2018 Village-to-Village National Conference, Oklahoma City-based VillagesOKC recognized an opportunity to respond to their members' requests for brain information. "MINDRAMP's concept of 'Qualongevity,' or longevity plus quality-of-life, and their creative approach for promoting brain health align with our goals," says Marilyn Olson, executive director of VillagesOKC. "The opportunity looked like a fit; we felt that offering their presentations would likely engage current members and attract new ones, as well as promote positive and healthy images of aging."

Over the past two years, VillagesOKC has worked closely with MINDRAMP and community partners to develop and sustain a Brain Health Initiative, offering the unique MINDRAMP approach through live presentations, videos, podcasts, web-based classes, and workshops. The initiative presents a behavioral and risk-management approach that is accessible to the lay public, and is specifically tailored for the mature adult population.

From January 2019 through February 2020, classes were attended by more than 360 older adults. Classes include individual topics such as, "Your Brain on Chocolate," "Your Brain on Music," and multi-part series such as "Take Your Brain Back to School." In 2021, VillagesOKC plans to present a comprehensive MINDRAMP Brain Health Academy curriculum to engage current members and attract new members. The nonprofit will refine the model, evaluate its impact on membership, and share the findings with Village-to-Village member organizations.

"The Brain Health Initiative has expanded the range and depth of our remotely delivered services and positioned us as a leader in the aging community," says Marilyn. "This initiative allows people to consider joining our Village who otherwise might think they are not ready. As MINDRAMP says, 'Everyone wants a better brain' and offering this has grown our membership and our place in the greater community."

## TRY IT YOURSELF

Organizations can easily replicate this initiative by making use of MINDRAMP materials (many are free on [mindramp.org](http://mindramp.org)) or similar brain health education, and by learning from the implementation experience of VillagesOKC staff and volunteers.

VillagesOKC used MINDRAMP consultants and materials to provide initial presentations and classes, which could then be presented by trained staff and volunteers. "You can certainly use volunteers to replicate our presentations if you have people who will own it, and are committed and excited," says Michael C. Patterson of MINDRAMP Consulting. VillagesOKC will train two interns to replicate an in-depth MINDRAMP Brain Health Academy in 2021.

VillagesOKC is able to offer weekly brain health programs by showing recordings of previous Zoom presentations, offering discussions built around MINDRAMP's free podcasts, and by scheduling recommended films, DVDs, and YouTube presentations. "Keep in mind that the most effective sessions are interactive, because then we can really delve into what people are most concerned about," says Michael.

*For more information on how to adapt this practice, contact Marilyn Olson at [marilynolson@villagesokc.org](mailto:marilynolson@villagesokc.org).* 🌱



# ADDRESSING SENSITIVE TOPICS HEAD-ON

WESTMINSTER ST. AUGUSTINE | ST. AUGUSTINE, FL | WESTMINSTERSTAUGUSTINEFL.ORG



Discussions about diversity and inclusiveness can be sensitive topics. However, residents of Westminster St. Augustine (WSA), a not-for-profit Life Plan Community with approximately 250 residents, took it upon themselves to embark on a journey to engage their campus in discussions about social justice.

“Residents here embrace diversity, and in tune with issues emerging in our country, they wanted to not only engage in discussion about social justice within the community, but also beyond our campus walls,” says Amanda Birch, director of quality initiatives at Westminster Communities of Florida, the parent company of WSA. “The group continues to grow and meet using Zoom to continue the conversation.”

Outcomes of these meetings have shifted from internal intellectual discussion to the development of a resource library and outreach to local police organizations and other groups, in order to start purposeful community conversations. The group is hopeful that their life skills, along with their years of experience in various industries, will be of value to the greater community as they engage in meaningful, purposeful discussion.

“The resident discussion group raises questions that prompt our organization to go beyond our current practice and ask ourselves ‘What more *can* we do?’ in addition to ensuring that the diversity in our workforce is cultivated and celebrated,” says Amanda.

The objectives for the social justice discussion group are

- to honor history by moving the conversation forward to define racial justice in 2020
- to share feelings and concerns related to racial justice
- to promote continuing dialogue through the WSA community and beyond

Discussion is centered on being accepting of new ideas and thoughts, open to respectful disagreements, and maintaining confidentiality.


Topics have included

- examples of valuing diversity
- sharing of incidents demonstrating racial tension
- what do you want your legacy to be related to diversity?
- being a multicultural change agent
- four levels of oppression and change: personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional

## TRY IT YOURSELF

For this or other national/worldwide issues forums, WSA recommends striking while the iron is hot, which means topics of interest should be relevant and timely. Discussion should be inclusive of all those interested, in a safe manner (Zoom or other platforms). The community also recommends creating ground rules for group involvement, such as

- ▶ All ideas/thoughts are welcome.
- ▶ Disagreements are acceptable, as long as they are discussed in a respectful manner.
- ▶ Participants should practice self-focus, using “I” terms to signify that one is speaking for oneself.
- ▶ Notice process and content: Note how and what things are said.
- ▶ Notice intent and impact: When impacted by what is said, consider the intent of the dialogue.
- ▶ Maintain confidentiality. What’s discussed in meetings should not be discussed with others.

*For more information on how to adapt this practice, and for resources and discussion prompts, contact Amanda Birch at [abirch@wservices.org](mailto:abirch@wservices.org).* 





## INTERESTED IN SUBMITTING FOR THE 2021 PROMISING PRACTICES AWARDS?

Promising Practices Call for Submissions begins **March 2021**, with a deadline for submissions in **April 2021**. For details, visit [matherinstitute.com/promising](https://matherinstitute.com/promising).

Staffed by researchers, Mather Institute 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 Institute is part of Mather, a nearly 80-year-old not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating Ways to Age Well.<sup>SM</sup>

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