

2020

CLINTON COUNTY Elderly Services Program

ANNUAL REPORT Success Stories



Read below for the full success stories from the 2020 Clinton County Elderly Services Program Annual Report, and for additional success stories of how the program and its partner network assisted older adults in the county to remain safe and independent in their homes.

Farmers' market program treats low-income older adults to fresh produce

In 2020, low-income older adults in southwestern Ohio, were able to participate in the United States Department of Agriculture Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. More than 1,100 older adults in Council on Aging's (COA) five-county service area participated in the program – 62 in Clinton County – which provides fresh, nutritious, unprepared locally grown fruits, vegetables, herbs and honey through farmers markets, roadside stands and community supported agriculture (CSA) farmers.

COA was able to offer the program for the first time locally, thanks to support from some Clinton County community members.



COA's Nutrition Business Relations Partner, Jennifer Lake, worked with local community members, area farmers and the Ohio Department of Aging to secure a \$180,000 grant from Ohio's General Revenue fund to bring the program to the area.

"We were absolutely thrilled to be able to support two very important communities here in southwestern Ohio with the program – older adults who might not otherwise be able to access nutritious, fresh produce – and our farmers," Lake said.

In June, seniors who applied and qualified began to receive \$50 worth of coupons to redeem through the end of October at participating farmers' markets in Hamilton, Butler, Clermont, Clinton and Warren counties.

The older adults using the coupons were thrilled to have access to the produce. "I greatly, greatly appreciate you for sending [the coupons] to me. They are going to be well-used and it will help my health even better because of the vegetables and the fruit," said Diana, a Senior Farmers' Market participant.

And, for older adults with limited financial means, this access to fresh produce is priceless. Pam is grateful to have “fresh food, and less money out-of-pocket, because vegetables cost a lot.”

Lake plans to continue to build the program by serving even more older adults and bringing in more farmers markets in the future. “Despite the pandemic disrupting the operations of many area markets and keeping many older adults at home this year, I was very pleased that we established great relationships with local farmers and we were able to get so much fresh produce into the hands of those who really needed it. I’m looking forward to building on this great launch in coming growing seasons,” she said.

Program changes address special nutritional and dietary needs of older adults

In 2020, Elderly Services Program (ESP) and other Council on Aging (COA) clients who receive home-delivered meals had more choices available to them to help meet special nutritional and dietary needs. Council on Aging made changes to the specifications home-delivered meals producers must follow, requiring contracted meal providers to expand options for certain types of therapeutic meals to clients who have a medically-documented need. Therapeutic meals are special meals that meet the nutritional or dietary needs of clients with certain medical conditions.



When Council on Aging sought bids from qualified providers for the home-delivered meal service in the Elderly Services Program in 2019, Jennifer Lake, COA’s nutrition business partner and a registered dietitian, worked to make sure the special meals were part of the required service specifications.

“Nutrition is an important part of aging – and staying healthy,” Lake said. “With these changes, we can now provide meals that are appropriate for clients with a variety of medical issues ranging from diabetes to lactose intolerance.”

Clients can now receive the following types of meals: diabetic, cardiac, renal, lactose free, gluten free, dysphagia and mechanically-altered meals (most of these meals require a physician’s order). The meals are also available to children who receive a kinship meal.

In 2020, more than 58,000 meals were delivered to 331 older adults via the Clinton County Elderly Services Program. More than 1.7 million meals were delivered to nearly 10,000 individuals across COA’s service area.

Critical homecare workforce deserves recognition

Home health aides provide critical and often life-saving care for older adults who want to remain in their homes as they age. They help with bathing, dressing and eating, as well as important everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking and running errands, and they get to know their care recipients intimately. Home health aides are often the first to notice critical changes in physical and behavioral health.



Most older adults – nine out of 10 – want to stay in their homes as they age. But most will also need some form of long-term care (seven out of 10). This means many will need the help of a caregiver. As families work to find balance in their daily lives – raising children and managing a career while caring for an older loved one – they increasingly turn to home health aides to fill gaps in care and ensure a good quality of life for their loved one.

But the stability home health aides provide is in jeopardy. Low wages, thin benefits, unpredictable schedules and other job challenges and stresses have resulted in a shortage of qualified home health aides. As the economy has improved in recent years, many have left the industry for higher paying, more stable employment opportunities. The pandemic has made things worse.

The impact of this shortage can be felt nationwide, and our region is not immune. Home health care agencies that hire aides to provide care for their clients are struggling to recruit and retain staff. Council on Aging (COA) contracts with home health care agencies to deliver services to individuals enrolled in its programs, including Clinton County ESP. As a result, older adults who rely on this critical care experience delays in starting their services, irregularities in their service schedule and inconsistencies in the aide who provides their care.

“Because of the shortage, clients that need help aren’t getting it,” said Samantha Williams, clinical director with Home Care by Blackstone, a COA contracted service provider. “We just don’t have the aides to work.”

“This workforce is absolutely critical to helping us fulfill our mission,” said Ken Wilson, vice president of Program Operations at COA. “Right now, the demand for qualified home health aides far exceeds the available supply. This impacts our ability to provide consistent, high-quality care to our clients. If this trend continues, older adults and families will be faced with difficult decision about how and where to get care.”

Clinton County has fared better than other regions of Ohio and the country. In COA’s five-county service area, older adults who need in-home care services in Clinton County are more likely to be quickly matched with an appropriate home health care provider – and less likely to wait for or experience interruptions in their services. That’s because Council on Aging worked to recruit new, local home care providers into the program.

In addition, COA worked with providers and the Clinton County ESP Advisory Council to adapt program rules and guidelines to create more flexibility for providers and the home care workers themselves.

- Conducted focus groups with area home health aides to learn more about their career choices. The results showed home health aides take pride in their work. “It’s a good day for me when I’m able to make someone’s day a little brighter,” an aide said. Feedback from the focus groups helped COA identify ways to minimize the impact of the aide shortage, including expansion of a program that gives families more choice in selecting a care provider.
- Worked with providers to adjust training requirements for aides who provide only housekeeping services and to create efficiencies to improve scheduling and travel time for aides.
- Created the Service Excellence Awards to recognize home health aides by showing appreciation for the important work they do. Since 2019, COA has recognized 121 home health aides who provide care through a COA contracted service provider. “Winning the award was very meaningful to me,” said one aide. “It showed me that all the hard work I’m putting into this passion is being recognized by my clients.”
- Created the Home Health Aide Hero award to recognize aides who go above and beyond to meet the needs of their clients. Three aides were recognized in April 2021 and received cash prizes from COA. The top winner was Deborah Grant, an aide with Clinton County Community Action Program.

Ramp is key to independence, peace of mind for local family

When his parents moved from rural Jamestown into their new Clinton County mobile home in September 2020, Bob knew right away that they would need help from the Clinton County Elderly Services Program (ESP).

His parents – Florence, 87, and Glenn, 89 – both had difficulty navigating the stairs that led to their new home’s front door. The couple had to cross a three-foot gap to get from the last step to the threshold of their home. Clint, with Home First, a service provider for Clinton County ESP, built a ramp to make their lives easier – and safer.



ESP is an important community resource for families. It supplements, or fills in gaps, in care that families may be unable to provide for their older loved ones. In this case, ESP helped pay for the basic ramp structure. Then, the family accepted financial responsibility to add decorative touches that met the requirements of their homeowner’s association.

Glenn couldn’t be happier with the ramp. “There’s no way we could stay here without the ramp. It’s very durable and will definitely outlive us – it will be here forever.”

Bob remembers how concerned he and his eight siblings were before the ramp was installed. “We couldn’t sleep at night knowing they were going up and down those steps,” he said. “It was very, very stressful for all of us.”

Now, Bob and his siblings are relieved their parents are safe, not only because of the ramp, but also with the electronic monitoring system (life alert button) supplied by ESP. Though they have not needed to use them yet, Florence and Glenn have a history of falls and the devices provide peace of mind for the couple’s adult children. “We told our parents: ‘those necklaces hanging around your necks are just as much for your children as they are for you.’”

Bob and his siblings help out when they can but have work and family responsibilities of their own, so the extra support from ESP is appreciated.

The couple is still able to do most of their cooking, but their daughter, Diane, delivers additional meals on Mondays and Fridays. And even though they were reluctant at first, Glenn and Florence agreed to have an ESP home aide, Jesse, visit for two hours per week to help with cleaning. Now, Jesse is the only person Florence will allow to change her bedsheets.

Should they need additional help, Glenn and Florence know their ESP care manager, Carla, is only a phone call away. They keep her phone number posted on their refrigerator.

ESP and COA fill gaps caused by pandemic

If Joan can do something, she will. She is an independent person, but knows that as she is aging, she cannot do it all. Joan has been a Clinton County Elderly Services Program (ESP) client for a few years, receiving weekly homemaking services as well as an electronic monitoring system (life alert button).

When COVID-19 entered the world and changed lives, times were uncertain. Council on Aging (COA) and ESP were able to be a support for Joan. Her ESP care manager, Carla, was able to provide some personal care supplies - toilet tissue, paper towels, disinfectant spray and wipes.



As if things weren't uncertain enough, the wheel on Joan's walker broke. Because of the health crisis, she was not able to get a new one delivered. However, Carla stepped in and was able to get it and deliver it to Joan, making her life easier.

"Council on Aging has been a great help. Without them, I would have to go to a nursing home."

Pandemic upends life for Wilmington daughter, caregiver

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many lives, including the lives of Suzie and Priscilla. Suzie, 53, is the primary caregiver for her 69-year-old mother, Priscilla. Priscilla's recent stroke meant she needed continuous care and help moving around - sometimes using a wheelchair.

Beginning in 2019, when she enrolled in the Clinton County Elderly Services Program (ESP), Priscilla went to adult day care while her daughter was working her job in customer service.



When the pandemic began in March 2020, adult day centers closed and Priscilla had nowhere to go. That meant Suzie couldn't work. She became her mother's full-time caretaker, in the home they shared in Wilmington.

From March to July, Suzie and Priscilla existed with no income. But, five months after their struggles began, Suzie was scheduled to return to work. With adult day services still closed, she desperately needed somewhere for her mom to stay during the day.

"I couldn't leave my mom," Suzie said, choking up. "She's been my rock. There is nothing she wouldn't do for me, and I owe her that, too."

Suzie turned to her mother's ESP care manager, Carla, who went above and beyond the call of duty and was able to secure an aide to stay with Priscilla in her home six hours a day, four days a week. Suzie's job has been flexible and she does not work on Fridays so she can be with her mom.

Suzie is beyond grateful. "You have been amazing. There is no way I could have done this without you. You have jumped in and helped us through a very difficult time. Carla has been awesome; she calls all the time to check on us - just to see if we're OK. You just don't get that anymore."

Positive attitude, COA and ESP help local woman through pandemic

Jackie appreciates a hard worker. That's why she is especially grateful for the Clinton County Elderly Services Program (ESP) and the hard work a team of professionals have put in to make her life easier these past 10 years.

"I'm a little bit particular," Jackie, 83, says of her cleaning habits. So when Jackie's homemaking aide, provided through ESP, visits every two weeks to clean her apartment, she is very pleased. Jackie prides herself on being able to help her aide, Jesse, to clean and dust, but there are some things Jackie can't do on her own.



Jackie's decades-long struggle with chronic back and neck pain resulting from a fall down the basement steps, makes walking and mobility a challenge. She has begun using a walker to steady herself, and sometimes uses a back brace.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jackie received COA's home-delivered meals, but put them on hold when she began to use her Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons. The program, which provides fresh, nutritious, unprepared locally grown fruits, vegetables, herbs and honey through farmers markets, roadside stands and community supported agriculture (CSA) farmers, was available in Council on Aging's service area for the first time in 2020. More than 1,100 eligible older adults, like Jackie, enrolled in the program.

Jackie enjoyed using the fresh vegetables in her cooking. In fact, she received so much corn, she froze it in individual packages for the winter – a process which brought back memories of younger days in which she and her husband canned everything from green beans to beets from their garden.

Jackie and her husband, Daryl, lived in Clarksville, 15 minutes outside of Wilmington, for 47 years. In the country, they raised their four children, Rick, Rhonda, Randy and Rita. Daryl suffered from heart issues and diabetes and died in 2001.

As Jackie got older, she realized that the large, country house was too much for her to handle on her own. She moved to the senior apartments next to the senior center in Wilmington. There, she enjoys the attentions of her adult children. She especially enjoys exchanging "I love yous" when they bring her dinner.

During the pandemic, Jackie spent a lot of time inside and was not able to see her children as often as she would have liked. But she kept herself busy. If she wasn't watching the Amazing Race or Young and the Restless, she'd spend time crafting and making wreaths. She is especially proud of the face masks she made for herself and her family out of scrap material.

In November, as cases of COVID-19 began to increase sharply in Ohio, Jackie said, "We've got to conquer it. There's still winter to go through, yet."

FastTrack Home supports older adults and caregivers during pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when nursing facilities were hot spots for outbreaks and even deaths, an innovative Council on Aging (COA) program helped area hospitals divert more than 1,800 older adults away from care facilities, to instead receive support in their homes. The program, FastTrack Home, has been available in Clinton and Hamilton counties since 2017 and expanded to Warren County in 2020.



FastTrack Home provides temporary in-home care services (transportation, meals, personal care and homemaking services) before an older adult goes home from the hospital. While other COA programs require an in-home assessment and focus on meeting long-term needs, FastTrack Home assessments are completed at the hospital bedside and are designed to meet short-term needs – while recovering from an illness, injury or procedure. This distinction is key because older adults have an increased risk of illness and injury in the 30 days following hospital discharge. With a speedy assessment and enrollment process, FastTrack Home services can be in place when the patient first arrives home.

During the pandemic, COA worked with area hospitals to adapt the program to safely serve older adults who were being discharged home from hospitals, and who needed to be isolated or quarantined to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a result, the region saw a decrease in the number of older adults who were discharged from hospitals to area nursing facilities to complete their recoveries. Additionally, FastTrack Home helped to free up critical bed space in area hospitals – especially when the region experienced surges in hospitalizations due to the virus in the spring of 2020 and winter of 2020/21.

The program also offered relief and peace of mind to families who were worried about sending a loved one to a nursing facility – where visitation was limited (if available at all) and COVID-19 positivity rates were often the highest in the state.

For example, Shelley was already juggling a full-time job and caring for three grandchildren when her 82-year-old father, Wayne, was admitted to the hospital and diagnosed with COPD complications. While in the hospital, Wayne tested positive for COVID. Shelley also tested positive.

Shelley's required quarantine period meant she would be unable to care for her father when he was discharged home from the hospital. She worried about his meals, cleaning and personal care. "It was a very stressful and desperate time for me," Shelley remembered.

In Wayne's case, Savannah, one of COA's FastTrack Home hospital coaches, worked to ensure he was not discharged over a weekend – when services are more difficult to arrange. She also arranged for home-delivered meals to start right away, and within five days had a home health aide begin visiting to help with personal care and housekeeping issues.

Wayne's FastTrack Home services were provided by COA through the Elderly Services Program. His services were temporary, designed to support a safe recovery at home. Before Wayne's FastTrack Home services ended (a maximum of 60 days), he received a full evaluation for the Elderly Services Program and other Council on Aging programs. This process ensures continuity of care for older adults who need assistance beyond FastTrack Home's 60-day window.

Shelley was grateful for FastTrack Home – the support it offered her father and the peace of mind it brought to her. “Without FastTrack Home,” she said, “I don’t know what would have happened.”

In Clinton County, COA programs and services, including FastTrack Home, helped to divert more than 160 older adults from area nursing facilities during the pandemic (through May 2021). In 2020, 66 Clinton County older adults received temporary supportive care in their homes via FastTrack Home.

Beaugard’s Southern Bar B Que provides comfort meals for Clinton County seniors during pandemic

During the pandemic, Council on Aging (COA) has partnered with many area restaurants, including minority and family-owned businesses, to provide special meals to area low-income older adults. Beaugard’s Southern Bar B Que, in Wilmington, is a partner in COA’s award-winning Comfort Meal Program.

When Ohio Governor Mike DeWine issued stay-at-home orders in March 2020, COA began hearing from older adults who were afraid to go out for groceries and other necessities. Others found themselves without their regular support network. Many who contacted COA had never before needed help.

“We learned from past emergency situations that food quickly becomes an urgent need for older adults,” said Council on Aging CEO, Suzanne Burke. “We didn’t want supply chain or staffing issues to interfere with our ability to provide meals to older adults, and we knew they might be asked to shelter-in-place for quite a while.”



[Watch video about Beaugard’s Southern Bar B Que’s participation in the comfort meal program](#)

After receiving additional federal funding via the Ohio Department of Aging and the CARES Act to expand meal service to older adults during the pandemic, COA began looking for ways to adapt traditional meal programs to address not only food insecurity among older adults, but also the quality of life older adults were experiencing during the pandemic.

As the pandemic continued, older adults felt increasingly isolated and forgotten. To help ease the monotony felt by many older adults, COA sought out partnerships with local restaurants to bring comfort meals to older adults – particularly low-income older adults who were isolated in senior apartment buildings across COA’s service area.

With the delivery of a few hundred LaRosa’s meals to older adults impacted by a power outage in April, 2020, COA’s award-winning comfort meal program was born.

Beaugard’s began providing meals for COA’s comfort meal program in October. COA home-delivered meal provider, Clinton County Community Action Program, picks up meals from Beaugard’s – including pulled chicken, green beans, potato salad and a roll – and delivers them to home-delivered meal recipients in the county.

Being part of COA's comfort meal program is important to owner Marty Beaugard, and his family. "I'm excited, we're going to do some nutritious meals," he said. "I pray that I will be a senior one day. You know, nothing is guaranteed. We're going through some tough times, and we've got to take care of our people. That's the bottom line. We can't forget about our seniors; we've got to take care of them."

For 20 years, Clinton County has embraced Beaugard's Memphis-style BBQ, which is known for using a vinegar-based sauce as it cooks for hours on the outdoor smoker.

Marty and Dianne Beaugard took over the restaurant from Beaugard's parents in 2002. Marty Beaugard followed in his father's footsteps and is the chef and Bar B Que master, while Dianne handles the scheduling and administrative side of the business. Their adult children, Marty Jr. and Dylan, helped develop the website and consulted on the menu.

"Partnering with locally-owned restaurants is a win-win during the pandemic," said Suzanne Burke, COA's CEO. "Not only are we bringing good, local food to older adults who've been homebound during the pandemic, but we're also able to support a business with a decades-long tradition of serving Clinton County residents."

Beaugard is a 20-year Air Force veteran. Throughout his military career, he lived all over the world, including England, Germany, Korea, Washington D.C. and Nebraska.

His experiences led him to Wilmington, and as the president of the Wilmington School Board, Beaugard is proud to be a Clinton County resident. "Our customers were very supportive and loyal to us when we were closed because of COVID – they supported us and they came to our drive-through."

COA's comfort meal program is a community partnership. The meals are paid for by COA via funding from a variety of sources, including the Ohio Department of Aging, CARES Act funds, grants, sponsorships and donations. In addition to Beaugard's, the following restaurants have prepared meals for the program: LaRosa's Pizzeria, Frisch's, Taste of Belgium, C&M BBQ Grille, Chef Anthony Jordan, La Soupe, Neal's Famous BBQ and Quatman Café. COA service providers, including Clinton County Community Action Program, collect meals from each restaurant and deliver them to older adult across COA's service area. From April – December 2020, more than 58,000 comfort meals were delivered to the doors of older adults in need. In November 2020, COA received a Clinton County Community Champion (C4) award for its comfort meal program.

"It's rewarding to see the impact these meals are having on older adults in our community," said COA's CEO Suzanne Burke. "I have been impressed with the level of teamwork, flexibility and commitment demonstrated by everyone involved in this effort – from the restaurants doing the cooking, and our providers delivering the meals, all the way down to the coordinators at each building where meals are delivered. This is work that makes you feel good. We all need that right now."

[Click here](#) to read more about the Comfort Meal Program in COA's 2020 Impact Report.

Council on Aging Nominees Selected as Recipients of First Annual Clinton County Community Champions Awards

In 2020, Council on Aging received a Clinton County Community Champions (C4) Award. The awards, presented by the Wilmington-Clinton County Chamber of Commerce and the Clinton County Convention and Visitors Bureau, highlight the stories of the Clinton County citizens, employers and employees, and organizations who are making an impact in Clinton County, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over 70 nominations were submitted in the following categories: Business, Citizen, Education, Healthcare, Non-profit and Youth. According to the chamber, nominees exemplified one or more of the following, during the course of the current year:

- Exceptional commitment to the community by helping with a special project and/or ongoing activities
- Unselfish leadership, creativity, cooperation, and hard work in the service to others
- Inspiration to others as a role model

COA submitted nominations in two categories: the non-profit category for COA's COVID-19 Comfort Meal Program, and the individual category for Donna Slone Gumbert, a key partner in helping COA meet the needs of area older adults during the pandemic. Both nominations were announced as winners on Nov. 24, 2020.

Council on Aging's COVID-19 Comfort Meal Program

Council on Aging's COVID-19 Comfort Meal Program has been providing restaurant meals to low-income seniors since the start of the pandemic. COA has partnered with nine area restaurants, including Beaugard's Southern Bar B Que, to provide the meals. The program brings comfort through food to seniors who feel isolated and alone during the pandemic, and it also provides an economic boost to restaurants that have been financially impacted by the pandemic. To date, more than 80,000 meals have been delivered to older adults across COA's service area.

"Partnering with locally-owned restaurants is a win-win during the pandemic," said Suzanne Burke, COA's CEO. "Not only are we bringing good, local food to older adults who've been homebound during the pandemic, but we're also able to support an industry that has been hit hard by the pandemic."

As the pandemic continues to worsen, COA is seeking donations to help sustain this important community program. For more information, visit www.help4seniors.org/comfortmeals.

Donna Slone-Gumbert

During the pandemic, COA worked with many organizations and individuals to serve some of our region's most vulnerable individuals. In Clinton County, one individual stands above the crowd in her commitment to meeting the needs of Clinton County seniors during the pandemic: Donna Slone-Gumbert. Ms. Slone-Gumbert is the director of marketing at Continental Manor in Blanchester and a life-long resident of Clinton County.

Through grassroots leadership and recruiting, Donna formed the Blanchester Senior Community Collaborative with the goal of identifying and meeting the needs of seniors during the pandemic. Members of the collaborative, including Council on Aging, area hospice organizations, churches, businesses and volunteers, work together to



identify and support seniors in need. The collaborative has provided meals, personal care and cleaning supplies and other sources of comfort to older adults in need.

“Because of Donna’s leadership and innovative, collaborative way of thinking, older adults in this community got the food and supplies they needed to stay safe in their homes during the pandemic,” said Haley Allgood, a Council on Aging case manager who coordinates in-home care services for seniors in Clinton County. “Donna doesn’t know the meaning of the word no and she’s always thinking one step ahead to anticipate seniors’ needs.”

For more information about the C4 Awards, [click here](#).

Provider network adapts to serve during the pandemic

As the Area Agency on Aging for southwestern Ohio, Council on Aging (COA) contracts with nearly 300 area businesses and organizations to deliver critical in-home care services to more than 27,000 older adults and people with disabilities in COA’s service area, which includes Clinton County.

During the pandemic, COA and its provider network adapted programs and services to protect staff, providers and clients. While adult day care centers, senior centers and congregate meals sites were closed in accordance with state orders, other services, including home-delivered meals, transportation and homecare assistance, continued without interruption.



Demand for certain services, like housekeeping and personal care, fluctuated based on spikes and declines in COVID-19 infection rates. But other services, such as home-delivered meals, saw an increase in demand. For example, COA service providers delivered nearly 1.8 million home-delivered meals in FY 2020 – a 32 percent increase over the previous year.

In fact, food security has been a focus of COA and its providers during the pandemic. Calls for food assistance increased when older adults were urged to stay at home to protect their health. COA’s provider network adapted operations to meet this need, converting congregate meal sites to drive-thru operations and distributing more than 21,000 emergency food boxes and nearly 60,000 restaurant comfort meals to older adults across COA’s service area from April – December. Some of this work continues today.

At Meals on Wheels of Southwestern OH & Northern KY (MOW), CEO Jennifer Steele said her team began overproducing meals and ordering shelf stable food right away. This kept them ahead of the supply chain crunch.

Even with this preparation, Steele and her team were shocked by the demand for services. “Demand tripled overnight,” she said. “In one week in March, we delivered as many meals – 50,000 – as we would have in a typical month, pre-COVID.” MOW is a service provider for Council on Aging but also serves private pay customers in southwest Ohio and northern Kentucky.

During the pandemic, COA distributed tens of thousands of personal protective equipment (PPE) items to service providers and senior apartment buildings, including masks, hand sanitizer, face shields, gloves, booties, gowns and more. COA received PPE supplies from county emergency management agencies and the Ohio Department of Aging and used CARES Act funds to purchase PPE from other sources.

The PPE items were critical in protecting provider employees, and the older adults they serve, from COVID-19. “Quite frankly, I don’t know what we would have done without this program and [COA’s] assistance,” said Beverly Ellis, director of nursing at Helping Hands Healthcare, a COA contracted provider.

Teresa Winters, owner of Katy’s Home Care, said she got to work right away making masks for her staff and their clients but soon needed help. “...As we started getting down to no supplies and things got harder to find, I took the supplies from COA. It was a great help.”

Like many other businesses, COA’s providers had to find ways to adapt to new realities during the pandemic. At Katy’s Home Care, Winters’ biggest challenge was ensuring staff followed safety protocols. She provided training and showed a video about the 1918 flu pandemic. “That put the fear in everyone and they understood how serious this is,” she said.

Winters stayed in contact with clients to let them know what she was doing to keep everyone safe. Staff had clear guidelines to follow and clients knew who to contact if they ever felt concerned for their safety, Winters said. “We worked together through all this – our staff, our clients, everyone,” she said.

At Helping Hands, services were adapted to be “contactless.” Clients’ laundry and to-do lists were left on the doorstep and Helping Hands’ staff took it from there. While this ensured clients’ basic needs were met, Ellis said the emotional toll soon became apparent.

“What was sad though, was the increased amount of loneliness and fear we saw in each client,” Ellis said. “I would have to say the distancing of care and lack of closeness during delivery of care [was our biggest challenge]. It took a lot for us not to hold someone’s hand or give them that much needed hug.”

At Maple Knoll Communities, Director of Outreach Services and Affordable Housing, Joshua Howard, said, “It didn’t take long for the conversation about providing services during a pandemic to also include discussions about seniors’ mental health and how the isolation and lockdown was taking a different toll on our community.”

To help, Maple Knoll engaged volunteers to make regular calls and provide lessons on how to conduct Zoom calls with friends and family.

Operationally, Helping Hands had to adapt to the impact of school and daycare closures. Ellis said 90 percent of Helping Hands’ staff have school-aged children. To help employees and ensure they were still able to meet clients’ needs, Helping Hands developed a program called Daycare Share where employees took turns watching children and assisting with schoolwork while other employees focused on work. As a result, Ellis said, “We saw our staff relationships transform and it became a win-win for many.”

Maple Knoll's Howard said even though the pandemic impacted his organization's operations, it never affected the mission. "Whereas the 'how' dramatically changed, the 'why' and 'what' were never in doubt," he said. "Our clients never saw an interruption in service."

While some clients did contact Maple Knoll at the start of the pandemic to cancel appointments, Howard said many more called worried about how they would get to dialysis, therapy and other important appointments. For grocery shopping and other errands, Maple Knoll adjusted trip times to align with special "senior only" hours at area shopping destinations.

"I'm extremely proud of the work our provider network has done throughout this pandemic," said COA CEO Suzanne Burke. "Despite this challenging environment, they have continued to provide services to our clients in a caring and safe manner – often responding to calls for help on short notice. Because of this teamwork, we've been able to help our clients weather the storm."

[Click here](#) to read the full version of this story in COA's 2020 Impact Report.

COA works to get personal care items into the hands of clients

Question: What do 30,000 rolls of toilet paper, 22,500 tubes of toothpaste and 7,600 bottles of hand sanitizer have in common?

Answer: These – and thousands more personal care and cleaning items – were included in more than 7,600 boxes recently assembled and distributed to Council on Aging (COA) clients. Nearly 215 of the boxes went to COA and Elderly Services Program (ESP) clients in Clinton County. More than 120 volunteers from COA, COA's network of service providers and members of the community contributed to the effort.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our clients have been stuck at home, afraid to venture out to shop for groceries, which includes not just food, but personal care and cleaning items. And at times, items such as toilet paper, antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer were not even available to purchase because manufacturers and supply chains couldn't keep up with demand.

Through various efforts – including its award-winning Comfort Meal program – COA has made it a priority during the pandemic to ensure vulnerable seniors in our area have access to food. But also important is the ability for seniors to keep themselves and their environments clean and safe.

Early pandemic partnerships between COA, local churches and Frame USA's Fill the Truck charity yielded hundreds of care packages of personal care and cleaning items distributed to those who contacted COA for help. At the time however, these products were in such high demand that it became difficult to procure enough for all the older adults in our area who needed supplies.

CARES Act funding received by COA months later – along with leveled off demand for the items among the general public – made it possible for COA to source the box contents and move ahead with the project in August. After hundreds of volunteer hours and several months, the last of the boxes shipped to clients during the first week of 2021.

In addition to the toilet paper, toothpaste and hand sanitizer, each box also contained disinfectant, dish detergent, laundry detergent, paper towels, soap, facial tissues and disinfectant wipes. Receiving a box full of these items is a big deal when you have limited financial resources – and when you're following public health guidelines to stay at home.

“These items mean the world to so many of our clients,” said COA CEO Suzanne Burke. “Sometimes they have to make the choice between these items and a meal.” The project – which was a major undertaking – required a large physical space at the Butler County Fairgrounds, and 84 industrial-size rolls of bubble wrap to bring to fruition.

The items in the boxes serve a practical purpose, but they’ve also provided a big psychological boost to older adults who’ve been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. They appreciate they haven’t been forgotten during this difficult time. One client, upon receiving COA’s letter alerting her the box would arrive soon, said, “You get to the age of 80 years old, and all your family’s gone, and not many friends left, it’s just good to know that somebody’s got your back, and it gives you hope, and it lifts your spirit.”

COA-led effort aims to prevent spread of COVID-19 in area senior apartment buildings

Recognized as the regional expert on helping older adults remain independent in the community, Council on Aging (COA) staff members have participated in local, state and even national efforts to help protect and serve vulnerable older adults during the pandemic.

One such group was the regional COVID-19 Multi-Agency Coalition (MAC). Created by Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, MACs include regional organizations and experts that work together to respond to COVID-19 on a local level. Smaller subcommittees in the MAC tackle specific issues related to COVID-19.



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COA's Vice President of Program Operations, Ken Wilson, served as a co-chair for the MAC's Congregate Care Steering Committee and led COVID-19 response efforts in settings such as assisted living facilities and senior apartment buildings. Other members of the committee include The Health Collaborative, University of Cincinnati Medical Center, emergency management agencies and local health departments.

The committee's goal was to reduce the number of COVID-19 cases that spread in settings such as senior apartment buildings and assisted living communities through uniform education, prevention and vaccination strategies.

"Focusing on congregate living settings was a priority for the state and our region because most COVID-19 cases that were going to the hospital were coming from congregate living settings, such as nursing homes," Wilson said. "COA is the local expert in serving older adults so it was natural that we were tasked with working with senior apartment buildings to protect residents and prevent the spread of the virus."

COA developed a database of approximately 175 senior apartment buildings in its service area of Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton and Warren counties. The database helped COA understand how many people lived in each facility and provided a way to track COVID-19 cases among residents and staff.

Wilson and the committee developed protocols and education materials to reduce infection rates in senior apartment buildings, including: ramping up testing and contact tracing; standards for how and when to quarantine; basic guidelines for distribution and use of personal protective equipment (PPE); and education on handwashing, masks, sanitizing and social distancing.

COA then compiled and sent education kits to each building. In addition to specific information and tools for building management, kits included enough education materials and reusable face masks for each resident in every building – more than 8,700 residents in all.

The kits were well-received, according to Judy Eschmann, COA's Vice President of Community and Business Operations and the architect behind the database. "This was the first time anyone had reached out to many of these buildings with specific information and guidance about COVID-19," Eschmann said. "We've received lots of feedback from building managers who were happy to have information and masks to share with their residents and to know that someone was concerned about their health and safety."

Robyn Allen is the lead social service coordinator at Prairie Oaks Village, a senior apartment building in Clinton County, and seven other regional properties owned by Episcopal Retirement Services (ERS). Allen said they recently distributed the masks and education materials they'd received from COA.

"I'm a big believer in information," Allen said. She said both ERS and COA have been good about sharing information and keeping staff and residents up to date on what's happening with the virus – everything from scams to handwashing and social distancing. And she said the information from COA arrived at a time when people are starting to put the virus out of their minds. The materials were a good reminder that the virus is still here. "My goal is to make sure residents have the information they need to stay healthy."

COA's Wilson agreed. "We've learned that education is a big piece of the puzzle. Early in the pandemic, we heard that older adults were afraid to report COVID-19 symptoms. Now, we're hearing that some older adults are

reluctant to get vaccinated,” Wilson said. “If we provide consistent information and connect people to trustworthy resources, we can help stop the spread of this virus in these vulnerable communities,” he added.

COA created a resource page on its website where building managers could access electronic copies of all the materials included in the education kits, as well as additional resources. And, as the pandemic continued, COA began to host virtual Town Hall meetings with staff at senior buildings, pulling in local experts to share the latest news, information and guidance. Later Town Halls focused on COVID-19 vaccination.

COA’s work in senior apartment buildings during the pandemic extended beyond education. Beginning in April 2020, COA partnered with local restaurants, including Beaugard’s Southern Bar B Que, to deliver COVID-19 “comfort meals” to residents older adults across COA’s service area. COA provided more than 58,000 comfort meals in 2020, and more than 84,000 since the start of the pandemic.

Residents in Allen’s buildings received some of these meals. “We’re out here in Rural America and COA’s presence has made such an impact on our residents,” Allen said. “We are so grateful and appreciative that COA stepped up during this difficult time. We are here and you didn’t forget us.”

Note: Beginning in February 2021, COA worked with the Ohio National Guard, local health departments, the Ohio Department of Aging and management staff at area senior apartment buildings to prepare buildings for COVID-19 vaccination clinics. Read more about this effort [here](#).

Council on Aging distributes 10,000 wellness kits to older adults in southwestern Ohio

In an ongoing effort to help protect and support vulnerable adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, Council on Aging (COA) partnered with the Ohio Department of Aging (ODA) and Pro Seniors to distribute 10,000 wellness kits to older adults in the region.

The kits were paid for by funding from the CARES Act and were distributed via the United States Postal Service to households in Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton and Warren counties that met certain age and income criteria.



The kits included reusable cloth masks, hand sanitizer, and education materials regarding the virus, resources, and frauds and scams. Approximately 400 older adults in Clinton County received the kits.

“We’ve kept a close eye on the needs of our clients and the community during this pandemic,” said Council on Aging CEO, Suzanne Burke. “But we knew there were people out there who likely needed help, but for whatever reason had not reached out. We saw these wellness kits as an opportunity to extend a helping hand and to let community members know that we are here to help if they need us.”

Throughout the pandemic, COA remained connected to the more than 26,000 individuals enrolled in its programs and services. COA also heard from many individuals who never before needed services. The greatest needs were personal care supplies, personal protective equipment and food.

Throughout the summer of 2020, COA distributed 20,000 reusable cloth masks to enrolled clients and to individuals living in low-income senior apartment buildings in southwestern Ohio. COA also worked with a variety of community partners during the pandemic to procure and distribute personal care supplies, additional personal protective equipment and meals to older adults in need.

COA received calls and letters from people who received the kits expressing appreciation for the help. Pro Seniors, a local non-profit organization dedicated to helping older Ohioans with legal and long-term care problems through a variety of free programs, contributed to the project. Each wellness kit included a Pro Seniors brochure, highlighting the organization's free legal hotline, and information about frauds and scams prevalent during the pandemic.