



**Western Reserve**  
Area Agency on Aging

# WRAAA SPOTLIGHT

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | WINTER 2021

We Provide Choices for People to Live Independently in the Place they want to call Home



# From the Desk of WRAAA CEO, Dr. Douglas Beach

It's safe to say that nothing in WRAAA's 45-year history has come close to impacting our agency like COVID-19. From the way we provide support services to our 9,500 consumers, to relying on Zoom conferences for staff communication, we have recalibrated our service model in ways we could never have imagined.



In this newsletter you will learn how WRAAA Directors and their teams quickly and nimbly responded to the increased demands brought on by the pandemic by providing innovative programs and services to maintain the health and wellbeing of our consumers.

When congregate meals were no longer possible, staff developed a plan to deliver meals to consumers' doors. When Care Managers and Waiver Service Providers could not make home visits, they switched to comprehensive telephone assessments. Web-based technology was purchased and installed in staff home offices, allowing employees to work remotely. And online support groups were made available for our employees' physical, emotional and mental health.

As COVID-19 became a constant in our lives, we realized if we didn't have programs in place, we needed to create new ones. The Circle of Food, the Telecare Program, Safe and Healthy Home Kits, and A Mask and A Meal were born out of necessity. Along with helping us serve a broader community, these programs have garnered positive media attention.

Judging by the statistics in our five county service area, all our efforts have paid off. I'm very proud that our members, who live independently and receive community-based services provided by our agency, have a much lower COVID-19 morbidity rate than seniors living in institutionalized settings.

I know we will get through this time together and perhaps come out even stronger. To quote singer-sage John Lennon, *"Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, it's not the end."*



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# GIVEAWAY PROGRAM: SAFE & HEALTHY HOME KITS

The holidays came early for the 1,000 community members who received Safe and Healthy Home Kits, thanks to WRAAA, Spectrum Housing Assist and Channel 19 News.

In early November, Channel 19 newscasters announced the availability of these kits on their popular news segments.

On distribution day, recipients drove up to the Channel 19 News office on E. 12th Street to collect their pre-labeled packed kits that contained COVID-19 related supplies like hand sanitizer, masks, soap, disinfecting wipes and gloves, as well as home safety items like smoke detectors, tub treads, first aid kits, flashlights, window sealing tape and night lights. Shampoo and hand lotion were also included.

WRAAA's Independent Living Fund helped out by purchasing some of the essential items in the kits and also paid for 200 of them to be distributed to WRAAA consumers in Lorain County.

"These items were carefully selected to protect residents against the COVID-19 and the flu surge during the winter months," said June Taylor, WRAAA Chief, People, Performance and Quality Initiatives. "With 30% of our county's residents living in homes without smoke detectors, we had one in every kit, along with items that are often too expensive for people to buy on their own, but are essential for their health and safety."

Channel 19 News anchor Sydea Abbas interviewed WRAAA CEO Douglas Beach for the evening news segment to get his reaction to the giveaway program. "During these challenging times seniors, especially those caring for their grandkids, need our help more than ever," he said. "Many older adults feel socially isolated and can't go to a grocery store to purchase supplies and food. I'm so happy this project enables WRAAA to fill such a vital community and human need."





## THE CIRCLE OF FOOD PROGRAM ON A ROLL

Rising to meet the challenge of food insecurity brought on by COVID-19, WRAAA's Circle of Food volunteers delivered an amazing 100,000 meals to 15,000 Northeast Ohio residents since the summer of 2020.

The Circle of Food is a local, grassroots food preparation and distribution program that provides meals twice a week to residents in Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain and Medina counties. The program is the result of collaboration among WRAAA, EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute, and Gordon Food Service. Thanks to the financial support of Cuyahoga County, Circle of Food expanded the initial program to include restaurant partner, Townhall.



"Just as Covid-19 has changed the world, we have changed the way we are feeding people who experience food insecurity in our five county service area," said WRAAA CEO, Dr. Douglas Beach. "We stepped up to the plate to ensure people in need have a hot and hearty meal during this unprecedented time."



WRAAA staff volunteers played a critical role in the Circle of Food's success. "It was great to see our staffs' camaraderie as their cars were loaded with meals for delivery to designated sites throughout the area," said Lindsey Davidson, Circle of Food volunteer coordinator.

June Taylor, WRAAA Chief, People, Performance and Quality Initiatives is proud of the significant role WRAAA played in the community. "Thanks to our volunteers, food donations and our restaurant partners, we were able to provide meals to assist those facing challenges, and to offer a hot meal to people at community centers, homeless shelters, hunger centers, rehab facilities, senior centers, churches, HUD housing units and group homes."

"Providing meals to those who may otherwise go hungry is our responsibility as human beings, and a privilege," said Brandon Chrostowski, CEO, Founder and President of EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute. "The Circle of Food partnership makes this effort a reality, as we combine our resources to feed people across northeast Ohio. It is important that stronger organizations come together to give back and do something bigger than what's thought to be possible."

GFS Representative Angela Miller is looking forward to the program's next phase. "It has been an amazing experience to work The Circle of Food program," she said. "It's very rewarding to see how many lives are positively impacted."



*June Taylor, Robert Frost,  
and Sen. Matt Dolan*



# WRAAA DIRECTORS' REMARKABLE RESPONSE TO COVID-19

How did WRAAA Directors and staff cope with the challenges of COVID-19? The accounts below tell the story and prove that no matter the crisis, when the going gets tough, the tough really do get going.



**SHEILA DESSAU**, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CLINICAL SERVICES  
**KAREN BAUER**, OPERATIONS MANAGER FOR MYCARE OHIO,  
CARESOURCE/UNITED

COVID-19's onset forced WRAAA's clinical management team of Sheila Dessau and Karen Bauer to abruptly change the way Care Managers and Waiver Service Coordinators visit the Agency's 9,500 members.

With the assistance of outstanding technological support by WRAAA's IT team, Sheila's 200-plus staff now utilize regularly scheduled telephone assessments, rather than actual in-home visits, to screen members' health and wellbeing. However, WRAAA's provider agency home health aides continue to work in the field; wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), they assist members with meals, personal grooming and basic household chores.

"Before COVID-19 our Care Managers and Waiver Service Coordinators relied on five senses when making home visits; now it's their ears and well-honed listening skills that help them make comprehensive health assessments," said Sheila. "They have become attuned to small nuances like hesitations or weakness in a member's voice when asking probing questions, that indicates something is wrong or that a person is suffering from depression."

Sheila and Karen agree that telephone visits, and the plethora of documents for each phone assessment, takes as much time as home visits. "Our Care Managers and Waiver Service Coordinators must ask detailed COVID-19 related questions to determine if a member has been exposed to the virus or is experiencing any symptoms," said Karen.

Although this new way of doing business is proving effective, everyone involved misses the one-to-one contact across the kitchen table. "Our members consider their Care Managers and Waiver Service Coordinators as close as family," said Karen. "Not being able to see each other adds to members' sense of isolation and loneliness. Bonding electronically, no matter how efficient, is not the same as human interaction."



## KAREN WEBB, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

When the pandemic hit, Karen's department was determined to do everything in their power to ensure none of WRAAA's consumers in the agency's five county service region would go hungry.



In her position, Karen oversees the services and programs provided by the Older Americans Act. One part of her teams' responsibility is to manage the distribution of 5,000 daily meals to WRAAA consumers through congregate meal programs and home-delivered meal programs.

"When COVID-19 forced our senior centers to shut down, the daily congregate meal sites did too," said Karen. "Our meal providers quickly converted the congregate consumers to home-delivered consumers or provided a grab and go option to guarantee those consumers were still receiving one nutritious meal a day. We know too well that without a proper diet, many older adults will not be able to live safely and independently in their own homes for as long as they wish."

Thanks to emergency COVID-19 funding from the federal government and the Ohio Department of Aging, extra funds became available to beef up the number of meals being delivered to WRAAA's traditional consumers along with a growing wave of people calling WRAAA asking for extra food and home-delivered meals. The Grab and Go program is now available for seniors with mobile lifestyles.

"We were able to increase the number of consumers receiving hot meals as well as secure a number of shelf-stable meals to assist seniors calling our agency in need of food," said Karen.

In Cuyahoga County, WRAAA launched a new Restaurant Voucher program, which delivers hot meals, five days a week to the homes of 1,000 recipients.

Karen's staff, who quickly adapted to working from home and serving a much larger number of consumers, is responding to increased calls from seniors and their families seeking assistance. "I'm proud of my staff for adapting to new challenges during this time," said Karen.

*"We were able to increase the number of consumers receiving hot meals as well as secure a number of shelf-stable meals to assist seniors calling our agency in need of food."*

**MEGAN NELSON, SENIOR COMPLIANCE AND PRIVACY OFFICER**



When Megan Nelson's four person staff suddenly transitioned to working remotely, they pulled it together very quickly. "Fortunately, the majority of our reporting work has always been done online," said Megan. "Our few bumps in the road concerned technical issues, but WRAAA's IT department provided us with printers and other essential equipment and supplies. We were able to get our home offices up and running in no time; and Zoom and GoToMeeting helped keep us connected."

As WRAAA's privacy officer, Megan's first priority during COVID-19 lockdown was protecting the confidentiality of all medical records and printed documents related to WRAAA clients' health care. Since these documents are prepared and tabulated in WRAAA employees' Northeast Ohio home offices, Megan devised a safe and secure disposal process. Staff who accumulated sensitive, private information put the documents in a sealed box and drove to WRAAA headquarters where volunteers took the boxes out of their trunks and either placed them in shredding bins for disposal or took them to Medical Records for secure long-term storage. "It's against Federal and State law to allow a breach of a member's information and we took this matter very seriously," said Megan.

Although working from home is not ideal for everyone, Megan feels WRAAA staff has risen to the challenge. "However, as a nurse I recognize there is no substitute for having personal interaction and actually laying eyes on a client, and seeing and smelling their home environment. But our case audit scores are actually up during COVID-19."



*It's against Federal and State law to allow a breach of a member's information and we took this matter very seriously.*



To boost morale and ease isolation during lockdown, Megan's staff volunteered at The Circle of Food. "I've always believed if you want to cheer yourself up, cheer someone else up," said Megan. "The Circle of Food allowed us to do just that. And it also gave us the chance to interact with each other in a safe and meaningful way."



## **STACY TURNER, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND TRAINING**

From resource guides to raffles, WRAAA's Human Resources and Performance Measurement and Quality Initiatives (PMQI) departments developed a comprehensive plan to help employees work effectively at home, while still keeping their sanity during the pandemic. Jointly, they formed the Coronavirus Health and Wellness Team to provide a wealth of online resources, daily COVID-19 updates, employee support groups, virtual happy and lunch hours, and forums to initiate open, lively discussion.



"Recognizing the importance of keeping our staff current on the latest information regarding work practices and health and wellness, we have prepared a list of websites, podcasts, videos, hotlines and articles on topics like nutritional health, best practices for remote work, and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)," said Stacy Turner.

Stacy and her team have also emphasized the Ease@Work counseling and coaching program to further assist employees with their physical, mental and behavioral health. Along with many other essential support services, the program provides a Tip of the Week that covers topics like back to school, discount marketplaces, medical advocacy, student assistant programs and legal and financial resources.

Newly formed Employee Interest Groups meet via Zoom, allowing staff to talk casually and openly about specific topics. The first two groups, Self-Care and Cooking/Recipe Sharing, have thrived as employees share experiences and enjoy each other's company.

"These Interest Groups allow us to bridge the gap between our home offices and our ability to work as a team," said Stacy. "Through an open forum we keep people engaged, encourage camaraderie, and help our employees connect in a very powerful and meaningful way until that time when we can be together again in the workplace."

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*These Interest Groups allow us to bridge the gap between our home offices and our ability to work as a team.*

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**FATIMA PERKINS, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ADVOCACY**

What happens when you have several thousand elderly participants attending WRAAA-funded senior centers in five counties and COVID-19 closes their doors? You open new doors.

That's exactly what Fatima Perkins and her Community Outreach and Advocacy staff did just weeks after the pandemic hit. "Dr. Beach asked us to devise a plan to effectively meet the needs of seniors who relied on their local senior centers for socializing, exercise classes, regular health screenings and hot, nutritious meals," said Fatima. "We came up with the TeleCare Program to call seniors to ask if they needed additional food, or other relief assistance from WRAAA's wide array of services."

Since the Telecare Program launched in April, WRAAA's outreach staff has made over 7,000 calls to home delivered meal and congregate meal consumers. Information gleaned from these phone calls yielded hundreds of referrals for additional food and meals, and many seniors and their families have been connected to WRAAA's Aging and Disability Resource Center and its Family Caregiver Support program.

"The TeleCare Program allowed us to identify 250 seniors who requested weekly check in calls," said Fatima. "From these conversations we determine if they have enough food and other resources to live safely and independently in their own homes," said Fatima. "Many seniors feel so isolated that our weekly phone calls are now one of the few contacts they have with people who can offer them real assistance and a friendly voice."

*"Many seniors feel so isolated that our weekly phone calls are now one of the few contacts they have with people who can offer them real assistance and a friendly voice."*

Fatima has also retooled WRAAA's Annual Advocacy In Motion Public Policy Forum. "Participants used Zoom to hear our speakers, and to see the Belle Likover Outstanding Advocacy Award presented to the Medina County Office for Older Adults," said Fatima. "We also use Zoom and Webinars for community health fairs, candidate forums and even our Diabetes Self-Management Program. No matter what, we continue to educate and inform older adults."



**MARY LIPOVAN, DIRECTOR OF CULTURE CHANGE AND SPECIAL PROJECTS**



Mary Lipovan has been a key player in planning the eventual safe return of staff to WRAAA's Reserve Square offices. Utilizing information from the Ohio Departments of Public Health, Aging, Medicaid and Developmental Disabilities, Mary helped develop a comprehensive COVID-19 procedure of checklists and tools for staff that are returning to in-person visits.

In September, when the five county COVID-19 transmission cases were Levels 1 and 2, Mary's seven person Transition Care Coordination team, wearing full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), resumed making home visits to assist member's transitioning from hospital to home. "Transition staff only visited people who had no COVID-19 symptoms and were not on aerosol equipment," said Mary. "Once the county's transmission levels rose to Level 3, our team went back to Telehealth visits."

The use of Telehealth for seniors now and in the future is a given, said Mary. "The need to help an older generation understand the use of modern technology as it relates to their health has come across everyone's radar," she said. "The WRAAA Foundation is looking to collaborate with community partners to find new ways to meet our consumer's technology needs."

Being tech savvy is important for seniors to engage in a variety of Aging Mastery Program (AMP) classes (sponsored by a grant from Anthem Foundation and provided by the National Council on Aging). "The City of Solon, Senior Services is running free virtual programs geared for anyone 60 and over, that cover topics like exercise, healthy eating, hydration and finance planning, which are all important for senior's health and wellness," said Mary.

Based on what she has observed during the pandemic Mary has learned some important lessons. "As scary as this time has been for all of us, we can accomplish more with modern technology than we believed possible," she said. "We've been forced to navigate new territory and create new collaborations. I don't think we'll ever go back to the old way of doing things, but instead use a hybrid approach. However, one thing remains constant: safety for our members and staff will always be our number one priority."

*"The need to help an older generation understand the use of modern technology as it relates to their health has come across everyone's radar."*



**TERRI FOSTER, DIRECTOR OF AGING AND  
DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER**

When COVID-19 hit, Terri Foster and her staff knew they had to find a way to keep the essential services provided by her department rolling – pandemic or not.

The ADRC's 55-member department is comprised of phone screeners, assessors, preadmission review specialists and a sizable support team. "We were faced with lots of moving parts as we transitioned to working remotely," said Terri. "Zoom conference calls kept us connected, and the IT team provided the necessary equipment to allow everyone to work efficiently from home."

Through trial and error, the streamlining of some services, the ease of access of essential pre-admission documents and medical records, Terri's department learned there was nothing that could stop them from doing what they did best. "By hard work and motivation we achieved our goals," said Terri. "We approached every problem with an open mind."

*"We no longer say, 'this is how we used to do it,' because we are thinking of how we can handle the situation right now."*

Along with their regular duties Terri's staff had to respond to pressing community needs generated by COVID-19. These included an uptick in calls from people asking for food assistance and a safer place to live. In response, Terri assigned one staff person to handle all calls dealing with food insecurity. WRAAA developed a new collaboration with the Cleveland Food Bank that has resulted in a robust partnership between the two nonprofits.

"Also, seniors living in multi-generational homes are afraid of catching COVID-19 from their relatives," said Terri. "Or they live in an apartment building where tenants are not following COVID-19 protocols. One of our staff members responds to these calls and provides a list of housing resources."

Reflecting on the lessons learned from running an entire department remotely, Terri said, "We no longer say, 'this is how we used to do it,' because we are thinking of how we can handle the situation right now. My most successful staff members are not always the ones with the most education, but the ones who are most resilient and have the ability to adapt to change. We now know some people perform so well working from home we may look into that as an option in the future."

**HEATHER KELLEY, CHIEF INFORMATION AND HIPAA  
SECURITY OFFICER**



The first weekend of the COVID-19 lockdown brought an immediate response from Heather Kelley's IT team. They bore the responsibility to ensure all 300 WRAAA employees could log into a virtual office in their own homes efficiently and securely. "We worked 24/7 that weekend to come up with a plan to allow our staff to have a seamless transition as they made the switch to working remotely," said Heather.

Recognizing many staff members only had a laptop and a cell phone at their disposal, the IT team devised a simple but effective method to provide printers, modems, computers and monitors to anyone who needed them. "All staff had to do was turn in a help desk ticket for equipment or tech support; Amazon delivered the product, such as a printer, right to the employee's door in less than two days," said Heather.

Heather's team also educated a number of staff members how to use and install items like modems and routers, and how to access their home Wi-Fi passcode. "We taught Computer Science 101 to some employees and helped them become familiar with all the services offered by their respective Internet providers to boost output, efficiency and confidence," said Heather.

To ensure no client calls were missed, Heather's team rerouted phone lines so when a desk phone rings at the Reserve Square office, that call is transferred immediately to an employee's cell phone. "Our two front desk operators are now answering all incoming calls from their home and forwarding them to the appropriate staff member," said Heather. "No calls are falling through the cracks."

As the mastermind of the successful IT COVID-19 operation, Heather is pleased with the way WRAAA staff has adapted to their new working reality. "If you get out of people's way they will rise to the occasion," she said. "Right from the beginning our consumers never went without their essential services or sense of connection. Thanks to modern technology, staff members are just one phone call away from our consumers. That is something we can all be proud of."

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staff members are just one  
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## **JOE BENNY, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**



When the COVID-19 lockdown occurred, Joe Benny knew he had to devise a plan to keep the communication doors open – and fast.

“We worked nonstop to keep our seniors safe, healthy and secure from the moment the pandemic hit our community,” said Joe. “It was essential to get the word out about all our services since the risk for severe illness from COVID-19 increases with age, putting our older adults at the highest risk.”

The TV news veteran used his considerable media contacts to put WRAAA front and center in the public eye and to become a go-to resource whenever there was a news story about COVID-19 and the elderly.

“From The Circle of Food to news about the effect COVID-19 has had on seniors, WRAAA services and contact information is constantly out there,” said Joe.

Joe’s communications efforts have paid off. The phones have been ringing off the hook as older adults and their family members call WRAAA asking to access essential services like home-delivered meals, senior transportation, family caregiver support, mental health issues, and the PASSPORT program.

“Our dedicated staff is going above and beyond to answer the call, so that every senior who contacts WRAAA and qualifies for assistance, can get the support they need,” said Joe. “Educating the community about what we do has never been more important.”

## **JEFF PETIT, DIRECTOR OF FINANCIAL OPERATIONS AND BUSINESS ANALYTICS**



Once the pandemic hit, Jeff Petit’s 10-member team has switched from paper-based financial processes to an electronic, cloud-based format. But getting to that point wasn’t easy. When Jeff’s staff began working remotely they had to be trained to use new, streamlined, electronic formats to automate traditional finance and accounting processes. “There was an overwhelming learning curve at first but we got through it and are now working very efficiently from home,” said Jeff.

In his position, Jeff ensures payroll is met and vendors are paid on a scheduled basis. “A few of us still go to the office each week, wearing masks and maintaining the six-foot social distance, to cut paper checks and pay bills,” said Jeff. “And, like everything else, I’m confident this process will eventually transition to electronic payment. Even our Agency yearly audit was done electronically, using finance and accounting software.”

Just as the typewriter and adding machines are tools of the past, Jeff sees cloud-based processes eliminating the need for labor intensive, manual, paper-based procedures. “I’ve been trying to get our department headed in this direction for a while,” Jeff said. “It took a pandemic to get us there.”

*The Medina County Office for Older Adults received WRAAA's Belle Likover Outstanding Advocacy Award.*



## MEDINA COUNTY OFFICE FOR OLDER ADULTS RECEIVES AWARD

This year, WRAAA's Annual Advocacy in Motion Public Policy Forum was held via Zoom. Included in the program was The Belle Likover Outstanding Advocacy Award, which was presented to The Medina County Office for Older Adults.

"This annual award is given to a person or organization that has gone above and beyond in advocating for seniors and senior programming," said Fatima Perkins, WRAAA Director of Community Outreach and Advocacy. "The Medina Office for Older Adults was chosen for its advocacy efforts for senior funding, and for arranging for the rapid increase in home-delivered meals resulting from COVID-19."

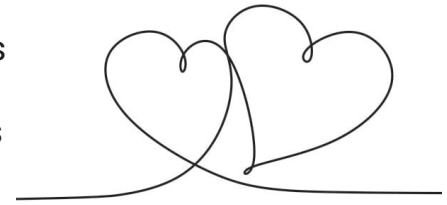
**In October, 2020 WRAAA's Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) placed #1 in the state for Ohio Benefits Long-Term Services and Supports (OBLTSS). This is the first time since inception of OBLTSS in 2017 that WRAAA completed more Support Navigation and Information and Referrals than any other Area Agency on Aging in Ohio, surpassing the long-standing leader in Cincinnati. Congratulations to Haven Ohly and his team for a job well done.**



## WRAAA CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT

### VERNEDA WILLIAMS

At age 67 Verneda Williams has a lot to be grateful for. She lives in her own Cleveland-area home, has family and friends who check in on her and most importantly, she has Frances Moss as her WRAAA PASSPORT Care Manager.



“Living independently would have been almost impossible without Frances and all she has done for me,” said Verneda. “She has been my advocate and arranged for me to have my aide, a new walk-in shower, a stove, home delivered meals, a Medical Alert Button and many other essential services.”

Having served as a paralegal and law clerk during her professional life, Verneda is aware of the importance of having an advocate. “Due to my physical limitations and complications resulting from diabetes, I’m at a point where I need extra help,” she said. “I am careful not to call Frances unless necessary, but when I do she calls me right back and as my advocate she makes things happen for me. This is not just a job to her, she really, sincerely cares about people.”

During COVID-19, Verneda rarely leaves her home except for doctor’s visits and trips to the neighborhood food pantry. Yet Verneda does not feel alone. “Even though Frances can no longer make home visits, I know she is just one phone call away. I thank God for all I have and especially for my friend, Frances Moss.”

The connection the two women feel towards each other is mutual. “I’ve been given the gift of caring from God, and take it as an honor to spread this gift out to as many people as possible,” said Frances. “Verneda is kindhearted, warm and a great listener. It’s a pleasure to be her care manager.”



# WRAAA EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

## COURTNEY MCDONALD



Courtney McDonald has found her calling. In her role as WRAAA Aging and Disability Resource Specialist, Courtney cheerfully provides information over the phone about WRAAA's wide array of support services to clients, caregivers, area professionals and the general public.

"It's so gratifying to connect people with opportunities and programs that help them lead happier, healthier and more independent lives," said Courtney. "And during COVID-19, with so many additional, sometimes desperate calls for help, I consider it an honor to be of assistance."

Courtney's passion for helping others brought her front and center to The Circle of Food volunteer team. The Parma resident drove to the Buckeye neighborhood twice a week to pack and deliver meals to underserved members of the community. "I'm energetic and able-bodied and was thrilled to be part of the meal distribution process," said Courtney.

As a natural leader and motivator, Courtney recently reached the green belt certification level in the Lean Six Sigma (LSS) program, being implemented by WRAAA staff. LSS is a methodology designed for greater efficiency, heightened response to customers' needs and improved working conditions.

"It's so great to have the chance to work with other staff members on team building, problem solving, and the best way to accomplish a task," said Courtney. "It's been a remarkable learning and growing experience for me."

A Youngstown native and an avid traveler, Courtney looks forward to the day when she can resume exploring places far and near. She particularly likes solo travel which allows her to go off the beaten path and follow her interests.

In the meantime, Courtney is exploring all the ways she can continue to help people. "I'm an advocate for people who often aren't given a voice," she said. "Mine has always been loud and clear."



# PANDEMIC PASTIMES

Many WRAAA staff members have been making the most of their leisure time during COVID-19. Activities include reading new books, binging on TV shows and holiday movies, going for hikes, decluttering closets, baking chocolate chip cookies, crocheting, Bible study, playing board games, and spending quality time with family. A few people used this time for imaginative pursuits. Jennifer Stanton stayed in her bubble and began an artisan soap business; Annie Stahlheber conquered the knotty problem of macramé; and Bette Shutes got a blast from the past while writing historical fiction.

## BOOKS

Unsheltered - Barbara Kingsolver  
Outlander - Diana Gabaldon  
When Women Pray - TD Jakes  
Becoming - Michelle Obama  
The Guest List - Lisa Foley

## TV SHOWS

Schitt's Creek  
The Office  
The Ozarks  
The Mandalorian  
The Queen's Gambit

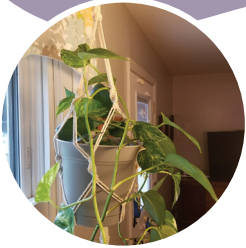
## HOBBIES

Arts & Crafts  
Baking / Cooking  
Home Improvements  
Crochet  
Watching Sports  
Paddle boarding  
Making kombucha  
Woodworking  
Puzzles  
Creating essential oils

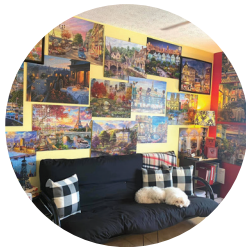
Amanda Schmigel  
has enjoyed playing  
with her twins



Annie Stahlheber  
learned how to  
make macrame  
plant hangers



Heather Kelly had a  
puzzling pastime



Kristin Scharte and  
her daughter ice  
skating



Veronica Slone spent  
quality time with her  
baby daughter



Megan Nelson's son,  
Oliver, at Brandywine  
Falls



Jennifer Stanton and  
her daughter started  
making soap during  
the pandemic



# WRAAA RECOGNIZED FOR HEALTH CARE SERVICE EXCELLENCE



Congratulations to WRAAA staff for receiving the prestigious National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) recognition, the most comprehensive evaluation of performance in the health care industry. NCQA is the only widely recognized accreditation program that bases results on clinical performance and consumer experience.

"It is gratifying for WRAAA to receive this recognition," said Karen Bauer, Operations Manager, MyCare Ohio, CareSource/United. "Since NCQA Accreditation standards are intentionally set high to encourage organizations

to continuously enhance their quality, this accreditation gives us confidence that we are performing at our highest level while providing care to our members."

Dr. Douglas Beach, WRAAA's CEO, calls the NCQA Certification Award the "Gold Standard" in the industry. "Our staff achieved this 3-year award through diligence, perseverance and uncompromising, best practices consistency," he said. "It also reflects our commitment to provide the maximum level of independence to our members who require home-based care support services."

*NCQA is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving health care quality. NCQA accredits and certifies a wide range of health care organizations. It also recognizes clinicians and practices in key areas of performance. NCQA's Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS®) is the most widely used performance measurement tool in health care.*



# SPOTLIGHT ON AGING WELL

## THE DOCTOR IS IN



**James W. Campbell, MD**

METROHEALTH DEPARTMENT CHAIR OF GERIATRIC MEDICINE

Americans are living longer than ever before, yet misconceptions about the natural aging process casts a negative light on the way people view growing older. WRAAA Board of Trustee member, Dr. James Campbell, debunks six popular aging myths.

**MYTH: Older adults cannot learn new things**

**TRUTH:** Older adults are fully capable of learning and mastering new things. Many seniors experience spiritual growth, learn new languages, study musical instruments, write novels, take up new hobbies, create works of art and master modern technology. Learning new things is important at any age, and has been indicated to be protective against dementia.

**MYTH: Dementia is a normal part of aging**

**TRUTH:** Dementia is not inevitable as people age. There is only a small subset of older people who get dementia. Even over the age of 100, one in five people have no impairment in their mental acuity and can continue to perform their activities of daily living and enjoy life.

**MYTH: There is no way to treat older adults who suffer from depression**

**TRUTH:** Depression is very common in older people who find themselves isolated and alone, particularly those seniors who have lost their spouses. Adults who suffer from depression can receive medication, which is very effective in improving their symptoms.

By volunteering, joining group activities, exercising, increasing contact with friends, family, and religious communities, people can reduce their isolation and symptoms of depression.

**MYTH: If older adults have their blood pressure under control they can stop their medication**

**Truth:** If blood pressure is under control that means the blood pressure medicine is working and should be continued, with no exceptions. Controlling blood pressure is one of the best ways to prevent heart attacks, strokes, kidney disease and dementia.

**MYTH: People need less sleep as they age**

**TRUTH:** Older adults don't need less sleep than younger people, but they do tend to have interrupted sleep patterns. Seniors sleep the same number of hours in a 24-hour period as younger people, but sometimes that sleep is broken up throughout the day and night.

**MYTH: Older adults don't contribute to society**

**TRUTH:** This is totally false. Older people are excellent community volunteers and are often the backbone of the volunteer force. Also, some older adults are raising grandchildren and are often their primary caregivers. Their grandchildren are fortunate to have grandparents who can provide stability, nourishing meals, guidance, and help with their schoolwork and life skills.

# SPOTLIGHT ON WRAAA FOUNDATION

## WRAAA FOUNDATION ACHIEVEMENTS:

- **Circle of Food Grant** – To address food insecurity in Northeast Ohio, WRAAA Foundation secured over \$250,000 from Cuyahoga County to expand the Circle of Food Program, which prepared and distributed 100,000 meals to over 50 community organizations. The program was awarded an additional \$100,000 from the State of Ohio's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program to continue delivering hot meals to those homebound in 2021.
- **Independent Living Fund** – This fund allowed 250 families to remain safe and independent in their homes throughout the year. The fund meets the basic emergency needs of WRAAA's clients who have nowhere else to turn in times of crisis.
- **Lorain County Community Fund** – With the help of a \$16,000 grant from the Lorain County Community Fund, WRAAA Foundation expanded its impact and provided much needed supplies during COVID-19 to assist older adults and their families.
- **WRAAA Newsletter** – WRAAA Foundation launched its first newsletter, bringing updated COVID-19 news to the community.
- **Other Contributions** - WRAAA Foundation continues to pursue grant funding to support program development. From meals, to quilts, to hygiene kits, and holiday cards, WRAAA Foundation continues to provide supplemental funding to enable people to live independently in the place they want to call home.

The WRAAA Foundation team would like to extend our gratitude to supporters whose generous donations have expanded WRAAA's capacity and reach. This year, on Giving Tuesday, WRAAA Foundation exceeded our goal of \$10,000. We welcomed over 50 new supporters to our campaign. Through you, our champions, WRAAA Foundation raised over \$50,000 in 2020.

Please visit <http://give.areaagingsolutions.org/wraaafoundation> to join our family of supporters and contribute to the important work being accomplished by WRAAA on behalf of our community.



*WRAAA was all in for the Giving Tuesday Campaign*



**Western Reserve**  
Area Agency on Aging

## **WRAAA IS HERE TO SERVE YOU!**

**Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (WRAAA) provides individuals and community organizations information and services to allow older adults, and individuals living with a disability, to remain independent in their own homes.**

### **ABOUT WRAAA**

The Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (WRAAA) is a private nonprofit corporation organized and designed by the State of Ohio to be the planning, coordinating and administrative agency for federal and state aging programs in Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain and Medina counties. Building upon four decades of experience in providing services and support to elderly and disabled individuals in need, WRAAA continues to expand its service portfolio in the long-term and healthcare delivery systems.

### **OUR MISSION**

We provide choices for people to live independently in the place they want to call home.

### **OUR VISION**

We aim to create a community that provides aging individuals and people with disabilities the opportunity to have their needs met with optimum choice, dignity, and maximum independence.



# ESSENTIAL SERVICES

## **AGING AND DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER (ADRC):**

Older adults of all incomes, ages, and disabilities can contact WRAAA's ADRC for information and assistance in accessing a full range of long-term services and support options. The ADRC provides information from a five county and state network of organizations that create independent and community living options for consumers. Information assistance includes an array of referrals, benefit assistance and counseling.

## **MANAGED CARE PROGRAMS:**

WRAAA provides supportive programs that enable independent living. These include, PASSPORT, MyCare Ohio, and a variety of Waiver programs.

## **NUTRITION SUPPORT:**

WRAAA supports the nutritional needs of our customers by coordinating home delivered and congregate meals throughout our five- county area. These meals offer older adults sustained and improved health, socialization opportunities and a reduction in food insecurity.

## **HEALTH SCREENINGS:**

Through our community outreach WRAAA provides health promotion programs. These include vision and diabetes screenings and fall prevention programs.

## **FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT:**

This program provides caregiver counseling, and referrals through our collaborating organizations. Our efforts support the caregiver through education and access to respite care.

## **OTHER SERVICES:**

A full range of supportive services including coordination of transportation, legal help, and assistance with daily living.

## **WRAAA FOUNDATION:**

The WRAAA Foundation provides additional funding for a wide range of projects to benefit the elderly. It is also an advocate to support the needs of older adults and people living with a disability in the five county area served by WRAAA.



**Western Reserve**  
Area Agency on Aging

# WRAAA COOKS!

WRAAA will soon present WRAAA Cooks!, a cookbook chock full of easy-to-follow, nutritious, down home recipes designed to open the door to good health and nutritious eating.

## Try Parmesan Crisps from WRAAA Cooks!

- 2 oz grated fresh Parmesan cheese (about 1/2 cup)
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground pepper

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper. Spoon cheese by tablespoonfuls 2 inches apart on prepared baking sheet. Spread each mound to a 2-inch diameter. Sprinkle mounds with pepper. Bake at 400°F for 6 to 8 minutes or until crisp and golden. Cool completely on baking sheet. Remove from baking sheet using a thin spatula.



**Western Reserve**

Area Agency on Aging

## CONTACT US

For more information regarding this newsletter please contact the Performance and Quality Measurement Department at [pmqi@areaagingsolutions.org](mailto:pmqi@areaagingsolutions.org)

## FOLLOW US



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