



Western Reserve
Area Agency on Aging

WRAAA RESPONDS TO COVID-19

SPECIAL EDITION NEWSLETTER | WINTER 2021

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PLUS!
VALENTINE'S DAY SENIOR SWEETHEART STORIES INSIDE

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, enabling 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 Great Grocery Giveaway, The Circle of Food, the Telecare Program, and Safe and Healthy Home Kits 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 the pre-labeled, packed kits that contained COVID-19 related supplies like hand sanitizer, masks, soap, shampoo, hand lotion, 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.

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

"The items were strategically selected to protect residents against the COVID-19 and 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 comments about 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."



GREAT GROCERY GIVEAWAY FILLS THE NEED

During January's cold winter days Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging was able to warm the hearts of 5,000 people living in Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain and Medina Counties thanks to the Great Grocery Giveaway.

The initiative was in response to the overwhelming need to provide food and essential household supplies, worth up to \$60, to people facing food insecurity brought on by the pandemic. The Ohio Association of Food Banks reports that one in five people in Ohio who require supplemental food is 60+ years, and in 2020, Ohio hunger centers served nearly 400,000 more seniors than in the prior year.

To help meet this unprecedented food demand, the Great Grocery Giveaway boxes contained shelf-staple foods like beans, tuna, mac and cheese, soup, pasta, peanut butter, jelly, bread, pork and beans, corn bread mix and crackers. Also provided were paper towels, toilet paper, hand sanitizer, deodorant, toothpaste and disinfectant wipes.

The largest drive-through distribution point was Tri-C West where over 1,000 boxes were put in recipients' cars. Volunteers included Tri-C students, WRAAA staff, Parma Mayor DeGeeter and State Rep. Jeff Crossman.

"We are so pleased to host the Great Grocery Giveaway in partnership with WRAAA," said Tri-C West president Donna Imhoff. "People are getting what they need today. What could be better."

"Because of great partners, elected officials and area grocers we are able to provide grocery boxes that tackle food insecurity, and home safety and personal hygiene needs," said June Taylor, WRAAA Chief of People, Performance and Quality Initiatives. "Too often people have to choose between food and buying household items since they can't afford both. The success of this initiative shows that through outstanding partnerships we can help individuals in Northeast Ohio who truly need assistance during these unprecedented times."



Other Great Grocery Giveaway distribution points were Christ Presbyterian Church in Chesterland, Black River Landing in Lorain, the city of Medina and Willowick Senior Center. In some neighborhoods councilmen and volunteers distributed food boxes to residents living in housing complexes.



Priscilla Fayne, Resident Coordinator/Community Leader, at Garden Valley Estates Housing on Kinsman Road in Cleveland was overjoyed when 33 Great Grocery Giveaway boxes were delivered to her building. "We live in a food desert and can't get out much because of the pandemic," said Priscilla, who is still suffering the side effects of COVID-19 that left her with permanent nerve damage. "Having this large box filled with healthy, nourishing food brought right to our door is an unimaginable gift, and it means people like us are not forgotten. God bless WRAAA and the work they are doing."

"Our agency has been looking at innovative ways to partner with for-profit and non-profit organizations to serve a greater community in need," said Dr. E. Douglas Beach, CEO of WRAAA. "We're thrilled to find the resources to make this program a reality and to serve so many."



"I'm glad Kleenex was included in the box to wipe my tears. The generosity of WRAAA during my hour of need is more than I could have imagined. I thank the Lord for this kindness."

-Bessie Kelley

"When I opened the large box delivered right to my door I couldn't believe how much was inside. I can use every item, especially the cleaning products like paper towels, soap and the toilet paper. And I am amazed at all the brand name products. I feel like someone is looking out for people like me, and it's a good feeling."

-Juanita Davis

"Having all these extras on my shelves will make a big difference in my life. I'm a humble person, I've learned not to ask for much, but I'm so grateful for this unexpected kindness. I'm so happy, I'm crying."

-Rose Dorsey

"This big box of food and cleaning items mean more to me than anyone can imagine. It shows that my councilman Joe Jones and Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging care about people like me, and don't want to let old folks down. I don't know how anyone knew how badly I needed everything in this box, but my prayers were answered."

-Robert Macon



THE CIRCLE OF FOOD PROGRAM ON A ROLL

Rising to meet the challenge of food insecurity caused 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 (GFS). 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's June Taylor is proud of the significant role the agency 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."



Along with the hot meals provided by Circle of Food, each recipient received a packet of 10 masks, hand sanitizer and a hygiene kit. These items were provided by the State of Ohio Department of Health, the Ohio Department of Aging, and Cuyahoga County.

"Thanks to the generosity of local and state governments we were able to offer a substantive hygiene packet to keep Circle of Food recipients safe while remaining at home during this pandemic," said June Taylor. "Governor DeWine has a strong commitment to Ohio seniors and has generously supplied these extra resources to ensure their wellbeing during this pandemic."



"Providing meals to those who may otherwise go hungry is our responsibility as human beings, and is 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 with 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 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.



Dr. Douglas Beach, WRAAA's CEO, calls the NCQA Certification Award the "Gold Standard" in the industry. He emphasized, "Our staff achieved this 3-year award through diligence, perseverance and uncompromising, best practices consistency, and 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.

MEDINA COUNTY OFFICE FOR OLDER ADULTS

WRAAA's Annual Advocacy in Motion Public Policy Forum was held via Zoom this year. 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 increase in home-delivered meals resulting from COVID-19."



WRAAA VALENTINE'S DAY SENIOR SWEETHEARTS



In honor of Valentine's Day, WRAAA salutes couples in our five county area who have celebrated more than 40 years of marriage and whose love stories validate poet Robert Browning's words, "Grow old with me! The best is yet to be."

MEDINA COUNTY - ROBERT AND SHIRLEY ALEXANDER – 72 YEARS



True love has no expiration date

Robert and Shirley Alexander hit the WRAAA Valentine's Day Senior Sweetheart sweepstakes. The Medina couple have been married for 72 years, and are still going strong.

"We were high school sweethearts living in a small town outside of Buffalo," said Robert. "When I was 15 years old I was standing outside a movie theatre and saw Shirley and her girlfriend ride by on their bikes. I noticed Shirley right away and knew she was something special."

The couple married in 1948 after Robert came home from serving as a pilot for the U.S. Navy.

As a salesman for Pillsbury Company, Robert's job took his family across America. The family lived in Buffalo, Houston, Tampa Bay, Pittsburgh and Cleveland.

Robert and Shirley eventually settled down in Medina close to children and grandchildren and easy access to the Medina Office for Older Adults. "The staff is so kind and loving and we enjoy the meals, programs and camaraderie," said Robert.

But life has not been all fun and games for the couple. The parents of five children, only two remain alive, and Shirley, 91, has suffered several strokes, which has led to brain impairment. "Along with the good times comes the bad," said Robert, 92. "We are lucky we had each other, and our strong faith, to get through life's tragedies."

Looking back on his life Robert says the secret of his successful marriage is having a sense of humor, being adventuresome, retaining a strong faith in a higher power and that "Shirley and I are in love with the same man," he quipped.



CUYAHOGA COUNTY - CLARENCE AND SARAH HAYNES – 42 YEARS



It's amazing how one day people walk into your life, and you can't remember how you ever lived without them

Stepping out of a hotel elevator in St. Louis, Missouri changed Clarence Hayne's life. A very pretty woman sitting alone in the lobby caught his eye, and quickly stole his heart. "Clarence came up to me and started a polite conversation and I sensed he was so kind and humble," said Sarah Hayes. "He called me the next morning and we met for breakfast. We both felt such a strong connection, we knew God's work was at play."

The couple's romance quickly blossomed and Sarah and Clarence were married in Sarah's hometown of Florence, South Carolina. "I had a big family and lots of friends and business acquaintances," said Sarah, who was a beautician and owner of a cab company at the time of her marriage. "We had 500 people at our wedding, and it was really something with lots of good food and dancing."

The couple settled in Cleveland where Clarence worked as a supervisor in a steel mill. They were active in their church and Sarah opened a catering business famous for down-home sweet potato pies.



According to Sarah, 90, the success of her 42 year marriage to Clarence, 100, is the couple's ability to "compromise, show gratitude, even over little things, talk things out, and start each day by saying I love you to each other. It also helps to trust in the Lord and show love wherever you can."

GEAUGA COUNTY - TONY AND SHIRLEY ROMAN – 48 YEARS



You don't marry someone you can live with – you marry someone you cannot live without

Tony and Shirley Roman's theme song could be "Love is better the second time around." Fifty years ago the Chesterland couple, both widowers, met at a church social for singles in Euclid. "The room was lively and there was a great band," said Shirley. "Tony asked me to dance and that was how it all started. We've been married for 48 wonderful years."

Both Tony, 101, and Shirley, 90, agree that the secret to a good marriage is to "realize no one is perfect and learn to accept each other, without trying to change the other person," said Shirley. "You also have to give a little and take a little. Life is about compromise and being grateful for all that you have, rather than dwelling on what you're missing."

Reflecting on his long marriage, Tony said romance will never go out of style and that Shirley fits him like a pair of gloves "because she is my perfect mate. Some guys never get a second chance at love, but with Shirley I found the girl of my dreams, and then some."



LAKE COUNTY - BOB AND DORIS HAYES – 54 YEARS

The best thing to hold onto in life is each other

As Shaw High School teens, Bob and Doris Hayes met at their local movie theater. Neither Bob nor Doris remembers the name of the movie, but they remember how much they liked each other the moment they met. The couple eventually married, and stayed in Cleveland where they raised their three children.



Bob, a Vietnam vet, spent the bulk of his professional career as an Ohio Bell repairman, and Doris held an administrative position at Lubrizol. Upon retirement, Bob was encouraged by some of his buddies to become a Meals on Wheels volunteer at the Lake County Council on Aging. "I like helping out and doing some friendly visiting with the seniors when I deliver meals to their doors," said Bob.

During their 54-year marriage, Bob knows a thing or two about helping out. He has done his best to follow his wife's motto, *A happy wife is a happy life*. "Bob makes a good wife," teases Doris. "He helps with the cooking, cleaning and laundry and has been a wonderful father and grandfather. There are times, however, especially during COVID lockdown, when I feel I deserve a Purple Heart."



Bob and Doris agree the key to remaining sweethearts is to make all the important decisions together, and to treat marriage as a 50/50 partnership. Bob's advice for young couples is for the bridegroom to remember, "No matter what, your wife is always right."

LORAIN COUNTY – JAMES AND MARILYN REGAL – 64 YEARS



May you live as long as you wish and love as long as you live

After 64 years of marriage Marilyn and James Regal's love story is still going strong despite their current health crisis. "When we were standing at the altar we promised to take each other In sickness and in health," said Marilyn. "Even now while facing difficult health challenges, we continue to love and care for each other with all our heart and soul."

The Regals, who have lived in the same house in Wellington for 51 years, are parents of two sons, three grandchildren and three great grandchildren. James, 86, was a driver/salesman for Nichols Bakery and Marilyn, 83, worked in an insurance office.

"We had so many good times and are grateful for all we had in life," said Marilyn.

Marilyn's advice for young couples is to learn to compromise, to be patient, and to be mindful of your partner's strengths and limitations. "No one is perfect." said Marilyn. For Valentine's Day Marilyn plans to send James a card and on it she intends to write, "I love you – and always will. "

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 technological support by WRAAA's IT team, Sheila's 200+ staff conducted 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) as 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 to check for physical illness or depression," said Sheila.

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 Webb'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 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&Go option to guarantee those consumers were still receiving one nutritious meal a day. Without a proper diet, many older adults will not be able to live safely and independently in their own homes."

Thanks to COVID-19 emergency funding from the federal government and the Ohio Department of Aging, 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&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.



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."



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 plan to help employees work remotely from home. They formed the Coronavirus Health and Wellness Team to provide online resources, daily COVID-19 updates, employee support groups, virtual happy and/or lunch hours, and discussion forums.

"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 assist employees with their physical, mental and behavioral health. The Employee Interest Groups meet via Zoom, allowing staff to discuss specific topics. The first two groups, Self-Care and Cooking/Recipe Sharing, have thrived as employees share experiences.

"These Interest Groups let us 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 and help our employees connect in a meaningful way."



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.

"We had to devise a plan to meet the needs of seniors who relied on their 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 resources."

Since the Telecare Program launched in April, WRAAA's outreach staff has made thousands of calls to home delivered meal and congregate meal consumers. Information

from these calls has yielded hundreds of referrals for additional food and meals. Some seniors and their families have been connected to WRAAA's Aging and Disability Resource Center and its Family Caregiver Support program.

"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 assistance and a friendly voice," said Fatima.

Fatima's department now uses Zoom and Webinars for community health fairs, candidate forums and the Diabetes Self-Management Program. "No matter what, we continue to educate and inform older adults," she said.

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 programs and services since the risk for severe illness from COVID-19 increases with age, putting 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 breaking 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 promoted,” 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 seeking access to essential services like home-delivered meals, transportation, family caregiver support, mental health resources, 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.”



MEGAN NELSON, SENIOR COMPLIANCE AND PRIVACY OFFICER

When Megan Nelson’s four person staff transitioned to working remotely, they pulled it together quickly. “The majority of our reporting work has always been done online,” said Megan. “We had a few 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 kept us connected.”

As WRAAA’s privacy officer, Megan’s first priority during lockdown was protecting the confidentiality of all medical records and printed documents related to WRAAA clients’ health care. Since these documents are prepared in WRAAA employees’ home offices, Megan devised a secure disposal process.

Staff who accumulated sensitive, proprietary information put the documents in a sealed box and drove to WRAAA headquarters where volunteers took the boxes from their trunks and 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, 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.”



TERRI FOSTER, DIRECTOR OF AGING AND DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER

When COVID-19 hit, Terri Foster and her staff knew they had to keep rolling out the essential services provided by her department.

The ADRC's 55-member department is comprised of phone screeners, assessors, preadmission review specialists and a sizable support team. "Zoom kept us connected, and the IT team provided equipment to allow everyone to work efficiently from home," said Terri.

Through the streamlining of some services, the ease of access of essential pre-admission documents and medical records, Terri's department persevered.

Along with their regular duties, Terri's staff responded to community needs generated by COVID-19, including an uptick in calls for food assistance. Terri assigned one staff person to handle all calls dealing with food insecurity and WRAAA formed a new partnership with the Cleveland Food Bank.

"Additionally, 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 working remotely department, 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."

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.

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 late summer 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. "Once the county's transmission levels rose to Level 3, our team went back to Telehealth visits."

The reliance on Telehealth visits in the future is a given, said Mary. "It's vital to help an older generation understand the use of modern technology as it relates to their health," she said. "The WRAAA Foundation is looking to collaborate with community partners to find new ways to meet our consumers' technology needs."

Based on what she has observed during the pandemic Mary has learned some important lessons. "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. One thing remains constant: safety for our members and staff will always be our number one priority."



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 to create a plan to allow staff to have a seamless transition for working remotely," said Heather.

Recognizing many staff members only had a laptop and a cell phone at their disposal, the IT team devised a 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 right to the employee's door in less than two days."

To ensure a smooth transition, Heather's team helped employees learn how to use and install modems and routers, and how to access their home Wi-Fi passcode. The IT team also rerouted phone lines so when a desk phone rings at the Reserve Square office, that call is transferred to an employee's cell phone.

"Our phone operators are now answering all incoming calls from their home and forwarding them to the appropriate staff member," said Heather. "Our consumers never went without their essential services because staff members are just one phone call away. That is something we can all be proud of."

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 extends its gratitude to supporters whose generous donations have expanded WRAAA's capacity and reach. This year, on Giving Tuesday, WRAAA Foundation exceeded its goal of \$10,000 and welcomed over 50 new supporters to its campaign. Through its 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

COVID-19 VACCINATION INFORMATION

Like other Area Agency on Aging offices in Ohio, WRAAA has been designated by Governor Mike DeWine as a “key partner” in providing education and information for COVID-19 vaccinations for our five county service area. Below are phone numbers and locations to register or schedule an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccine.

Use this link to search by county, ZIP code, and category to find a provider in the area to administer the vaccine: <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/vaccine>.

CLEVELAND DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Phone: 216-664--2300

Website: <https://clevelandhealth.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CLEDPH>

CUYAHOGA COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

Phone: 216-201-2000

Website: <https://www.ccbh.net/covid-19-information-and-resources/>

Vaccine Pre-Registration: <https://www.ccbh.net/vax/>

CUYAHOGA COUNTY DIVISION OF SENIOR & ADULTS SERVICES

Phone: 216-420-6700

Website: <https://hhs.cuyahogacounty.us/divisions/detail/senior-and-adult-services>

GEAUGA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

Phone: 440-279-1940

Website: <http://gphohio.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GPHOHIO/>

**Geauga county is only taking calls for registrations when they have capacity which will change week-to-week.

LORAIN COUNTY HEALTH

Phone: 440-322-6367

Website: <https://www.loraincountyhealth.com/>

Vaccine Notification List: <https://www.loraincountyhealth.com/vaccines>

MEDINA COUNTY HEALTH

Phone: 330-723-9688

Website: <https://medinahealth.org/community/current-outbreaks/>

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.

WRAAA STAFF RESPONDS TO THE QUESTION ONCE COVID IS OVER, I AM GOING TO...

**GO TO
FLORIDA**

GO TO AS MANY CONCERTS AS I CAN

travel

*Finally have my
wedding reception*

**RIP
OFF MY
MASK**

**Take a trip
to Vegas**

**Have a nice steak
dinner and drinks**

**Have a giant
cookout**

*Dance and say
"Thank you Lord!"*

GO TO THE BEACH

**RELAX AT
THE SPA**

*Hug
my
loved
ones*

**Have a huge
party**

**Volunteer at a
community food pantry**

**Explore the
National Parks**

*Enjoy a show
at the theatre*



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 COOKBOOK!

WRAAA will soon present *Eating Well Becomes You*, a cookbook chock full of easy-to-follow, nutritious, down home recipes designed to open the door to good health and nutritious eating.

Chocolate Covered Strawberries for Valentine's Day

- 4 oz dark semi-sweet chocolate
 - 12 strawberries
1. Rinse and completely dry the strawberries.
 2. In a medium microwave safe bowl, microwave chocolate on HIGH for 30 seconds. Stir and repeat until all the chocolate is melted. (Do not overheat or the chocolate will become chunky and separated)
 3. Dip strawberries and place on waxed paper to cool.
 4. You can eat right away or refrigerate to give it a hard chocolate coating.



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

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