



Forum on Rural Population Health

May 19-21, 2025
Seaside, Oregon
ohsu.edu/orhforum



Promoting Social Connection Through Innovative Programming & Community Collaboration

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Jerry Conklin, South Morrow County Senior Matters
Misty Palmer, Grant County Senior Programs



A New Epidemic

“Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation has been an underappreciated public health crisis that has harmed individual and societal health. Our relationships are a source of healing and well-being hiding in plain sight – one that can help us live healthier, more fulfilled, and more productive lives,” said **(Former) U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy**. *“Given the significant health consequences of loneliness and isolation, we must prioritize building social connection the same way we have prioritized other critical public health issues such as tobacco, obesity, and substance use disorders. Together, we can build a country that’s healthier, more resilient, less lonely, and more connected.”*



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- Social connection is a fundamental human need...it is as essential to survival as food and water.
- Lacking social connection has serious health consequences.
- Our fundamental human need for belonging is so strong that we may seek it out even in ways that may be unhealthy to ourselves or to our broader community.



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Who is Most Likely to Experience Loneliness

- Those that need or are a caregiver
- With decreased family and friend relationships
- Living alone
- Lack of transportation
- Experienced a major life transition recently (retired, health change, grief/loss, divorce)
- Lower socioeconomic status
- Geographic location (rural, frontier)
- Lack of internet
- Physical limitations
- Part of the LGBTQ+, older adult, and/or BIPOC communities
- English as a second language or immigrant



<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/05/ce-corner-isolation>



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Loneliness Impact on Older Adults

- Adults who are lonely or socially isolated are less healthy, **have longer hospital stays, end up readmitted to the hospital more often, and are more likely to die earlier than** those with meaningful and supportive social connections
- Loneliness is **as dangerous as smoking 15 cigarettes a day**
- Individuals who feel lonely are **more likely to fall and have longer recovery time**
- Subjective feelings of loneliness can increase **risk of death from 26% to 45%** (AARP)
- Medicare alone spends an extra \$6.7 billion per year caring for socially isolated older adults, according to AARP (pre-COVID numbers)



Loneliness and Chronic Disease

Loneliness and social isolation can be associated with higher risks of chronic illnesses including:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Anxiety
- Dementia
- Depression
- Obesity
- Cognitive decline
- Death

Poor health often leads to loneliness AND feeling lonely can put your physical and mental health at risk. It is vicious cycle!



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Goal of the programs being discussed today:

Reduce loneliness and social isolation for older adults in our community with low barrier and innovative programming and community collaboration.

What does low barrier mean?

Reducing the obstacles that get in the way of someone receiving services/support.

What does community collaboration mean?

Having multiple agencies, individuals working toward the same goal and support not just for the program/service or the individuals receiving services but each other.

Broadly speaking, community collaboration, involves working with community members as equal partners in the decision-making process. The goal is to co-create solutions that meet the needs and goals of both the community and the organization or group leading the collaboration.



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Yamhill County Older Adult Behavioral Health Program designed two specialized projects to combat loneliness and social isolation in older adults

OPODS (Older Adult Peer Outreach for Depression and Substance Use)
and

PIPP (Positive Intergenerational Pen Pal)

Low Barrier

- ✓ No cost to participant
- ✓ Outreach (meet the individual where they are at)
- ✓ No cost for material
- ✓ Minimal eligibility or no eligibility limits
- ✓ Anyone can refer

Collaboration

- ✓ State (OHA)
- ✓ County (Yamhill County HHS)
- ✓ Non-profits (99 GALS)
- ✓ Insurance (Yamhill County Care Organization)
- ✓ Public Health
- ✓ Schools
- ✓ Long-Term Care Communities
- ✓ Adult Behavioral Health

OPODS

Older Adult Peer Outreach for Depression and Substance Use

OPODS is available to Yamhill County residents aged 55 or older who are experiencing mild to moderate depression, loneliness, and/or substance use. The goal of this program is to reduce substance use, loneliness, and depression in older adults in Yamhill County.

Received \$75,000 from OHA for one year pilot project (12/1/23-11/30/24). Program was widely promoted by OABHS. Hired 2 temp part time (19 hour/week) peer support specialists. Peers provide up to 10 in-person outreach visits to individuals in their homes or other community settings (including nursing facilities, assisted livings, adult foster homes). Peers offer general peer support, visitations, and utilized elements of evidence-based Behavioral Activation and/or BRITE models. Screenings for substance use issues (AUDIT, DAST), depression (PHQ-9), and loneliness (UCLA 3 question scale) were completed initial visit and final visit. Follow up support or referrals were offered as indicated/needed.

*Goal was to serve 25 individuals at the one-year mark



Purpose

Reduced
incidence of
loneliness,
depression, and
substance use
in older adults in
Yamhill County



Contact us
for more
information

Email:

opods@yamhillcounty.gov

Call:

503-474-6853



HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES

Older Adult
Peer Outreach
for

Loneliness

Depression

Substance Use

Age-Related Concerns



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OPODS REFERRAL FORM

OLDER ADULT PEER OUTREACH FOR DEPRESSION & SUBSTANCE USE

| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| Individual's name: | _____ |
| Date of birth: | _____ |
| Address/location: | _____ |
| Phone number: | _____ |

| | |
|---|-------|
| Referral source name & contact info: | _____ |
| Who should we contact to coordinate services? | _____ |

CONCERNS (please check all that apply)

Depression

- Reports depressed mood
- Loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- ☐ Other _____

Substance Use

- Use in large amounts or for a long time
- A lot of time spent using or recovering
- Craving or strong desire to use
- Social/interpersonal issues due to use
- ☐ Other _____

Loneliness

- Reports feeling lonely
- Feels isolated from others
- Lack of companionship
- ☐ Other _____

Age-Related Concerns

- Concerns about aging
- Difficulty with life transitions
- Grief and/or loss
- ☐ Other _____

Additional information:

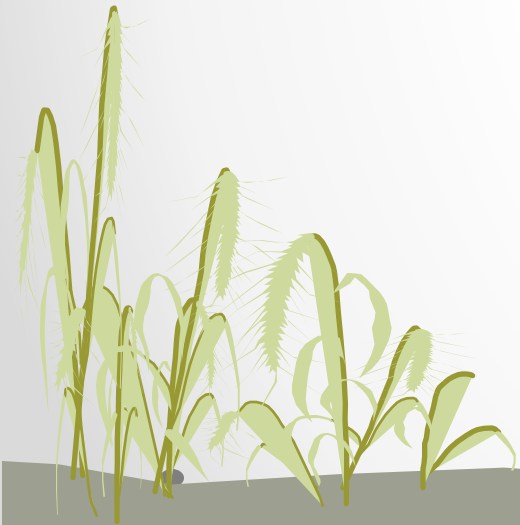
PLEASE SEND REFERRAL TO OPODS@yamhillcounty.gov



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OPODS

Initial 2023-2024 project year outcomes



12/1/23 - 11/30/24

Goal: To serve 25 older adults in Yamhill County

Total Referrals=83

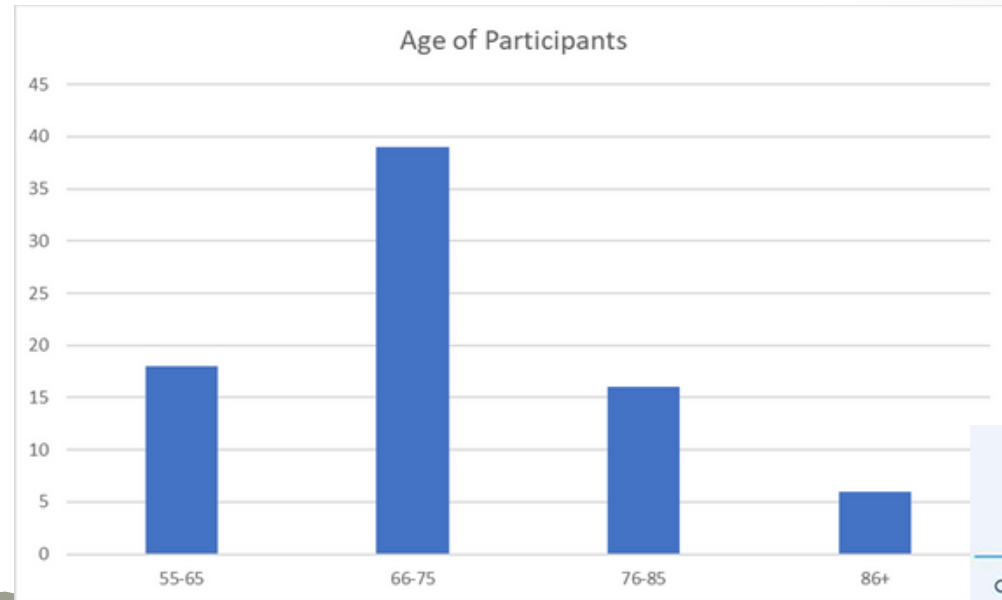
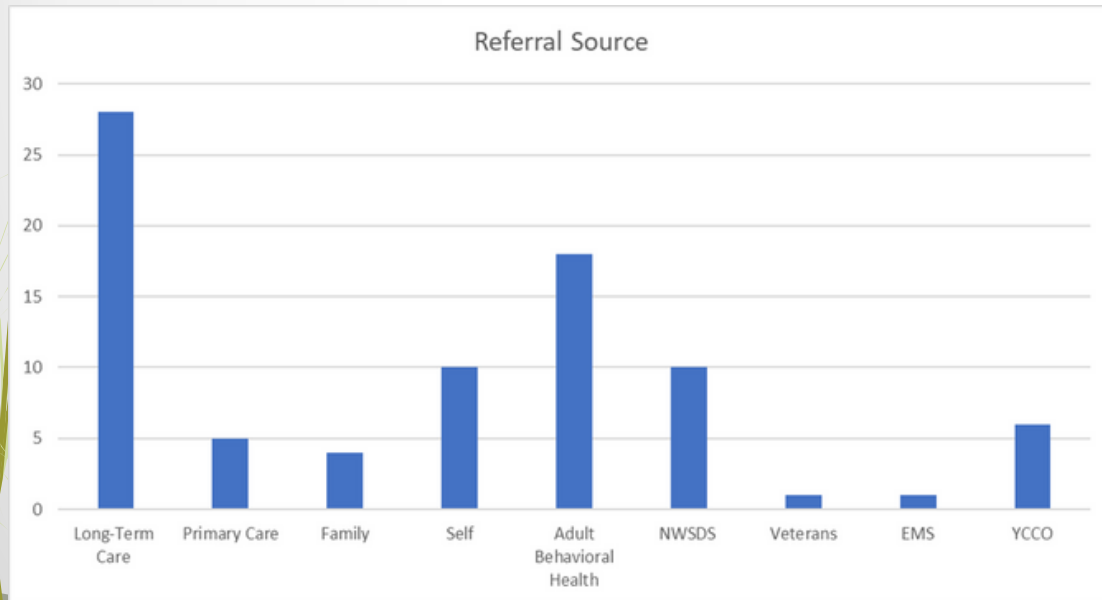
Total graduated=63

Declined services after initial engagement= 9

Denied due to age(younger than 55)= 2

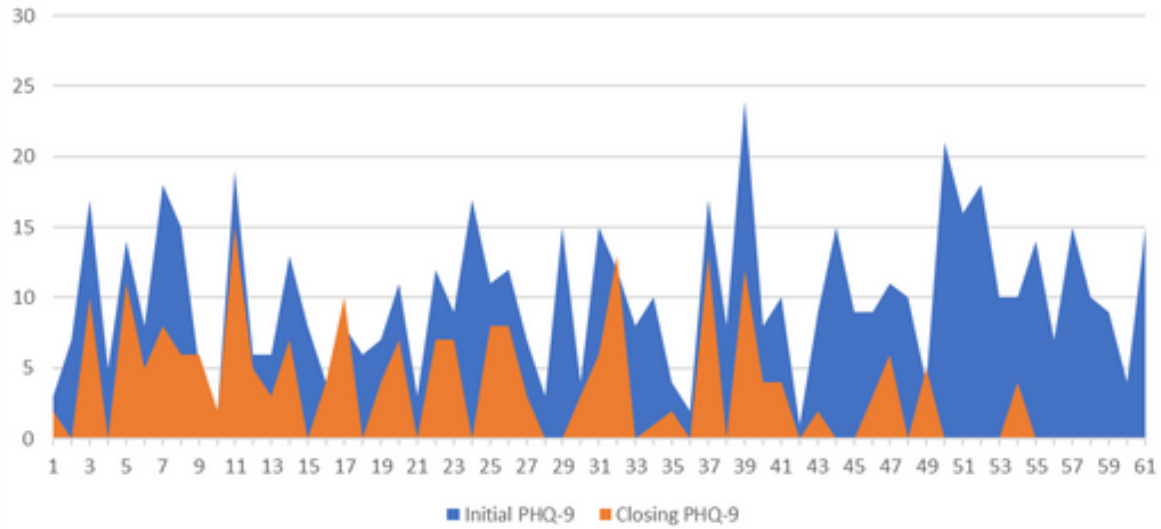
Referred to higher level of care/crisis due to PHQ-9 score=4

No final assessment due to death or moved out of area=5

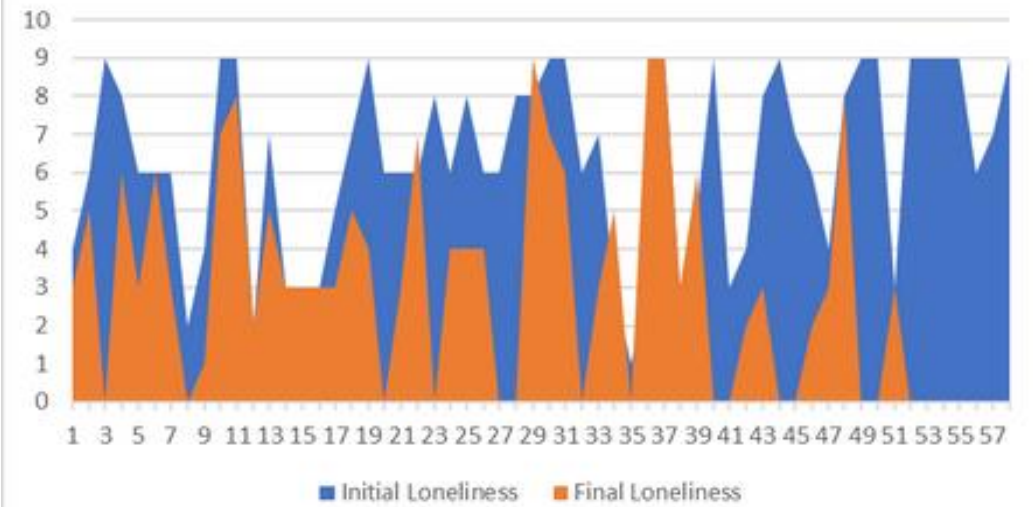


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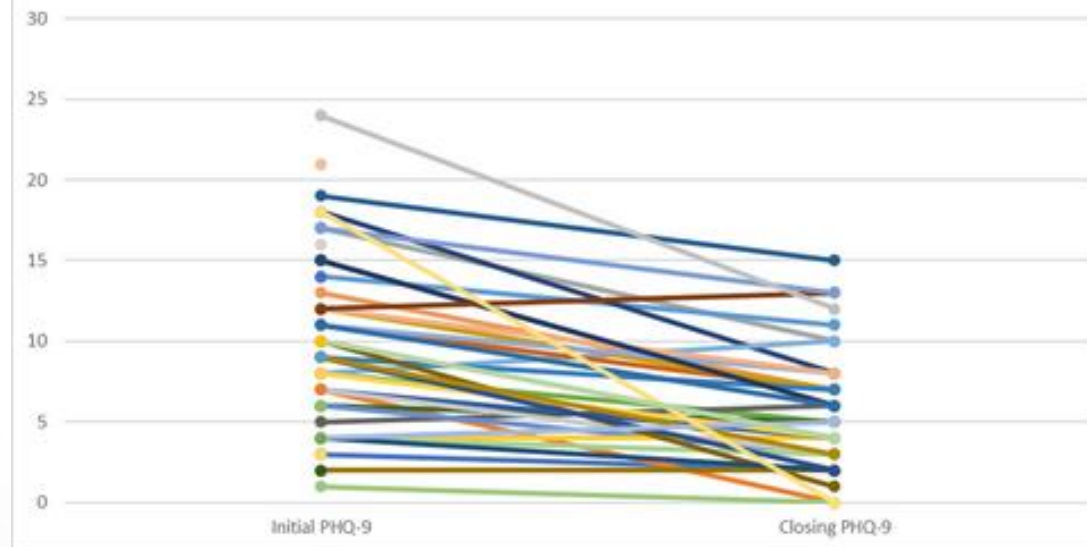
Depression Score



UCLA Loneliness Scale

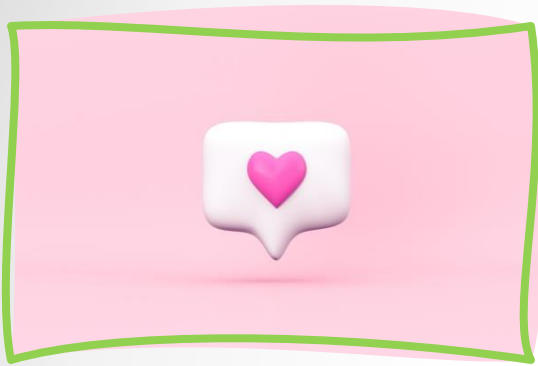


Depression Score



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Thoughts From The Community About OPODS



I wanted to commend the young woman who has been visiting me weekly in McMinnville. Her name is Carmen. She is very helpful and I truly enjoy her visits. I was hesitant about your program but Carmen has added a bright light to my life. Thank you!
-Participant (2024)

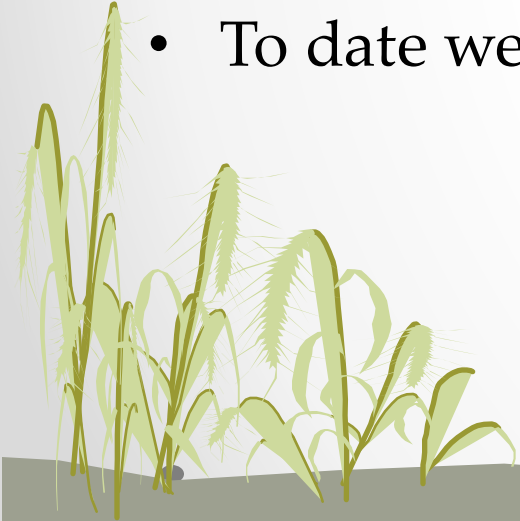
P.S. also had very positive feedback from the other individual I sent a referral for. She's already met with Peer Support and had very positive experiences. Thanks!
-ABH Therapist

The support that the consumers have received from the peers is more than I could have asked for. They work so well with some very difficult individuals.
-NWSDS case manager

He attributes a great deal of his newfound hope and energy to you and your work with him. He said that you "saved his life." I truly appreciate the work you are doing with this member. Honestly, you have surpassed any expectations I had. When I first met him, he was just so depressed and feeling like there was no hope. He has so many needs and you have managed to help him realize that he can overcome many of his challenges. I just can't tell you how grateful I am for what you have accomplished. Thank you, from the very bottom of my heart.
-YCCO Care Navigator

Updates OPODS

- Project continued from 11/24 until 6/25 funded by the county due to the success (continues to be low barrier and payer blind)
- Grants for program to continue have been submitted and county is re-assessing to see if their funding can continue as well.
- Possibility of becoming a billable service or volunteer-based program at some point depending on the outcomes of 2025-2026 funding source.
- To date we have received 146 referral and graduated nearly 100 participants.



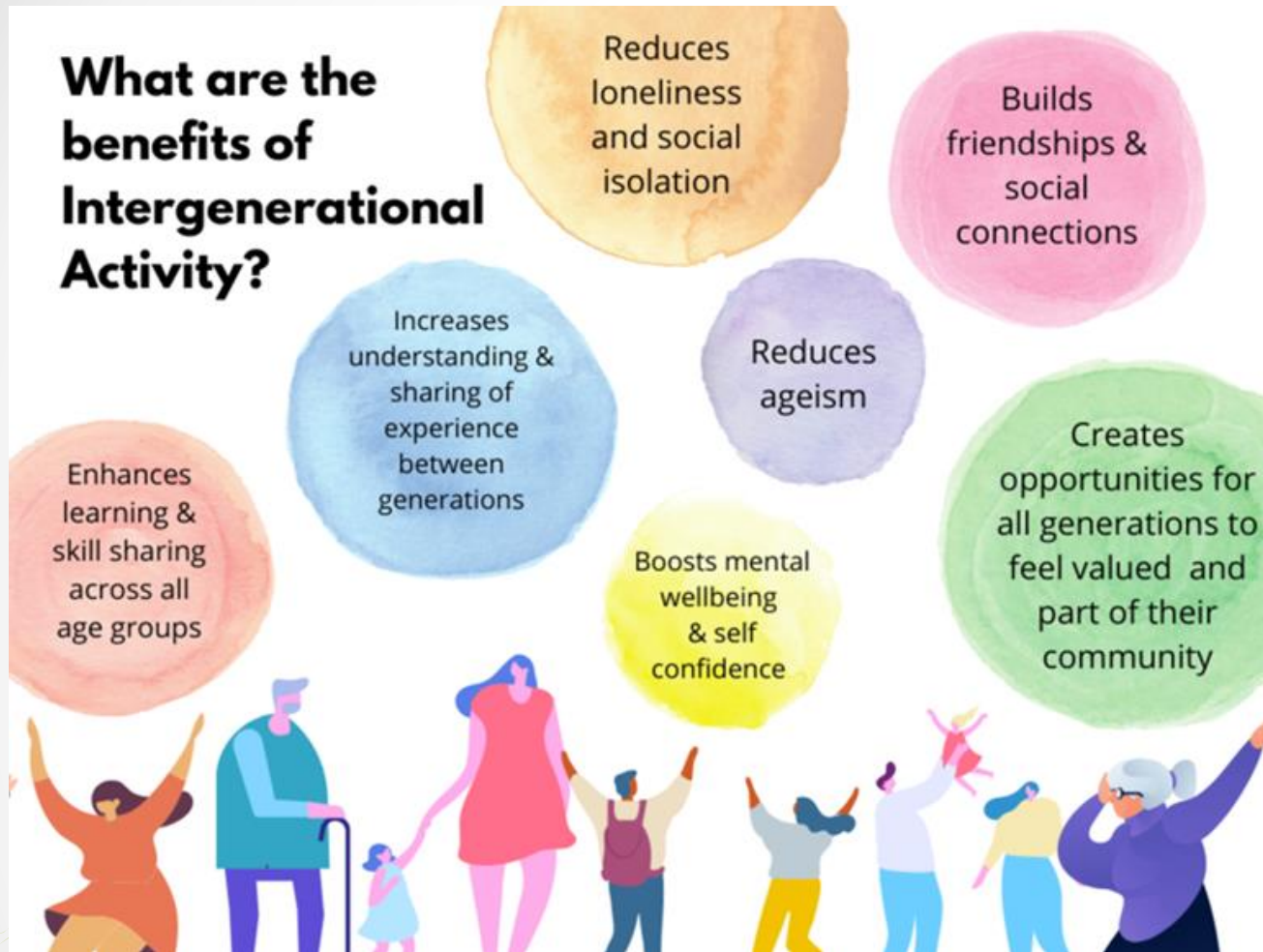
PIPP

Positive
Intergenerational
Pen Pals
2023-2025



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What are the benefits of Intergenerational Activity?



Goal:

Combat loneliness through intergenerational pen pal program.

Assist teachers in helping 2nd graders learn to write letters while connecting with older adults.

Opening lines of communication and collaborations between schools and LTC.



Guidelines & Prompts

Positive Intergenerational Pen Pal (PIPP)

Guidelines

- All participants will use the Positive Intergenerational Pen Pal (PIPP) program for its intended purposes. The program is intended for handwritten communication via snail mail only.
- Be respectful of other cultures, beliefs, ways of thinking, opinions, ages, and background.
- Do not seal your envelope. All letters will be screened to ensure that they are appropriate.
- Do not share your address, your last name, or other identifying information.
- Letters should be positive in nature



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Positive Intergenerational Pen Pals (PIPP)

2024-2025 School Year

Monthly Prompts

September

What is your name? How old are you?
What is your favorite color?
What is/was your favorite thing to do in school?

October

What do/did you want to be when you grow up?
What job(s) did you have?

November

What are a few things you're grateful for right now and why?
Tell me about your family. Do you have any siblings?

December

What is your favorite winter activity and why?

January

Do you have any goals for the year? If so, what are they?
What are you looking forward to this year?

February

Who are/were your role models?
What are a few of your favorite books?

March

What is something you wish you could change about the world?

April

What are five things that make you smile?

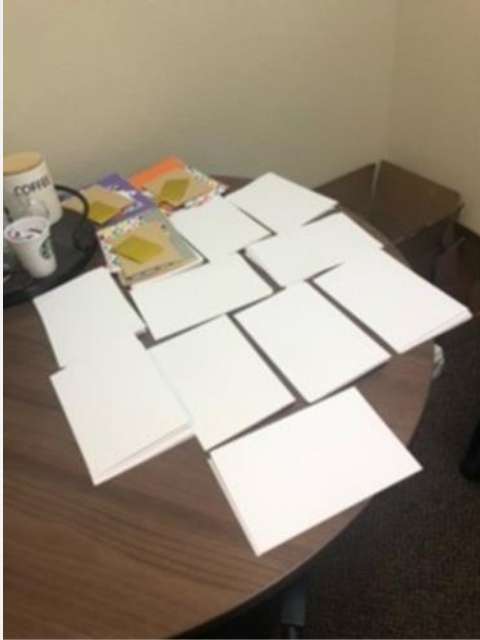
May

What are you most excited to do this summer?

Additional Questions as Needed:

What they've been up to?
How are the people and pets in their family?
What they're looking forward to?

Starter Kits



Included:

Blank Cards

Blank Envelopes (multi-colored)

Multiple pens/pencils

Encouraging stickers

List of prompts

Mailbox (for the classrooms and communities)



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2023-24 PIPP program

80 - 2nd graders

80 - Older adults

3- Classrooms

5- Local Long-term care communities



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End of 2023-2024 PIPP project for Yamhill County “Let’s Partea”



It's Partea Time

You Are Invited to Newby's
2nd Grade Family Night
& Pen Pal Connection

Come join us for snacks while you possibly
meet your pen pal!

Games, crafts & photo booth will be available.

When: May 22nd, 2024

Time: 6:30-7:30pm

Location: Newby Cafeteria
1125 NW 2nd street, McMinnville



PIPP 2024-25 Funding and Future

Funding: 99 GALS

The purpose of 99 GAL Friends is to engage women of Yamhill County in a powerful form of collective giving -a philanthropic "circle."

Collaborations

- Community Engagement Coordinator (YC Public Health)
- Suicide Prevention Coordinator (YC Public Health)
- ICM OASIS team (specialize outreach program within ABH)



2024-225 PIPP

- Grant for \$2000
- Recruitment
- Planning
- Purchasing
- Organizing
- Distribution
- Monthly connections
- Split responsibility



Positive Intergenerational Pen Pal

The Positive Intergenerational Pen Pal program is seeking to expand its participants! The Positive Intergenerational Pen Pal (PIPP) program is a unique program that connects second-grade students with an older adult in their community.

Older adults face isolation in society, a situation often exacerbated by living at home, loss of mobility and driving ability, and retirement. This increased isolation is linked to a decline in mental and physical health. At the same time, the students will have the opportunity to take part in meaningful service and learn letter-writing skills.

The PIPP program will strengthen intergenerational connections, decrease isolation and loneliness in older adult participants, and help classes meet state writing standards.

During the 2023-2024 school year, 3 classrooms and 5 long-term care communities (180 total participants) participated in the first-ever PIPP program. After the success of the program, the program organizers are looking to expand to more care centers and classrooms.

I am connecting with you today to ask if your second-grade teachers and classrooms are interested in participating in the PIPP Fall 2024 cohort.

Staff from Yamhill County Health & Human Services will pair each classroom with a care center, provide letter-writing materials and prompts, and facilitate the exchange of letters each month. All we need from participants is to agree to write one letter a month.

If you are interested in this program please email the Older Adult Behavioral Health Specialist for Yamhill County, Lacey Plasker, at plaskerl@yamhillcounty.gov or call her at 503-474-6853.



*Pictures from the PIPP party (end of the year celebration where pen pal got to connect and Partea!)

PIPP 2024-25 Data

Participants= 400+

Classrooms= 9

Schools=5

Long-term care communities=13

9 months of letter exchanges

Ornament exchange

Party grant for \$600



In the works:

Plans for three large end of the year parties
(99 GALS will sponsor and help plan, already planned)

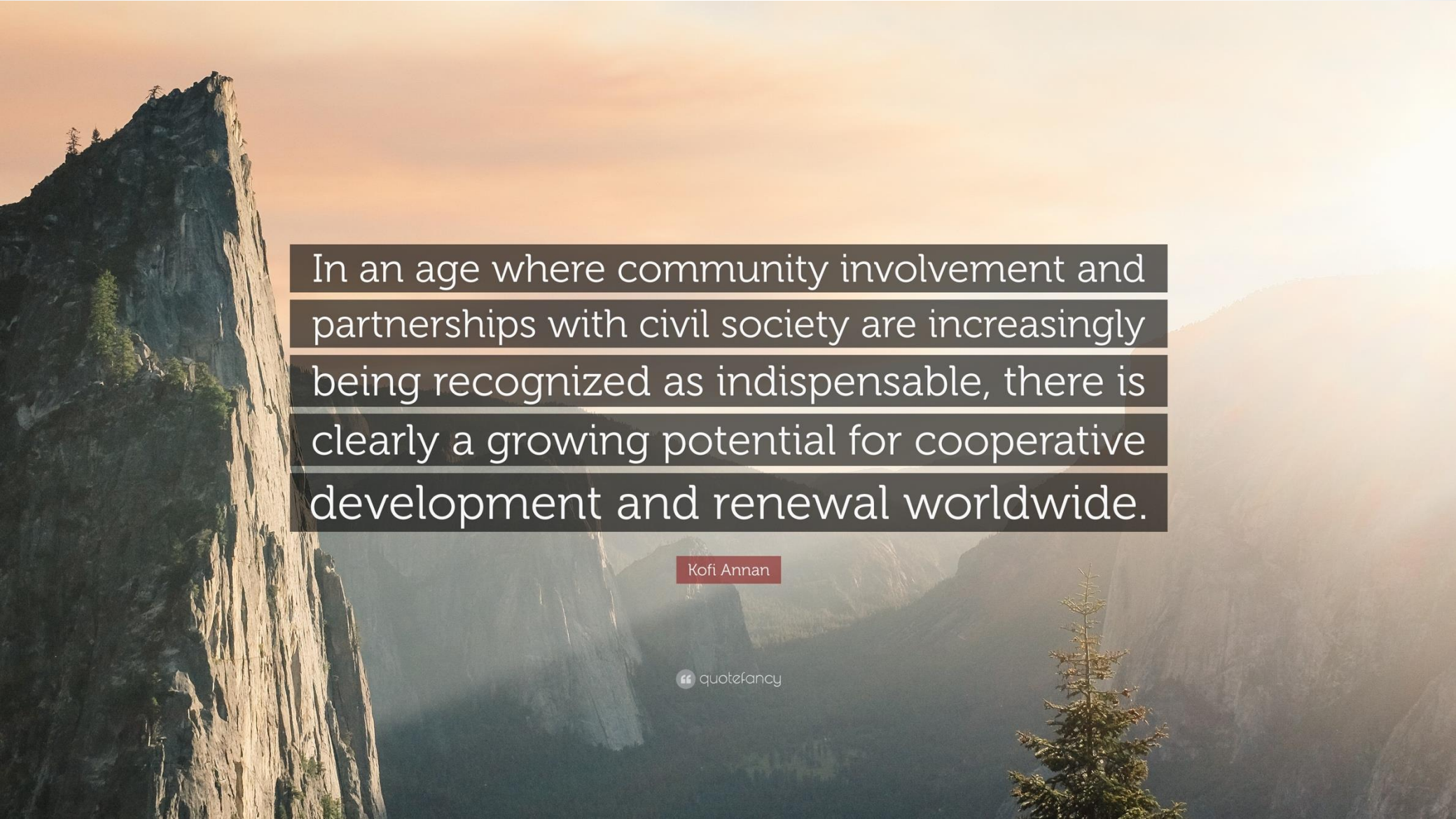
Increase school involvement and collaborations with
other agencies (hoping to have one take over eventually)

Start additional intergenerational programs
(including the high school)

Increase public health events within LTC and schools
(doors are now open)



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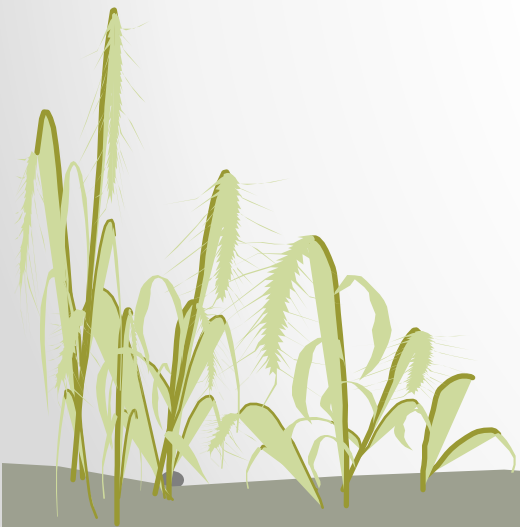


In an age where community involvement and partnerships with civil society are increasingly being recognized as indispensable, there is clearly a growing potential for cooperative development and renewal worldwide.

Kofi Annan

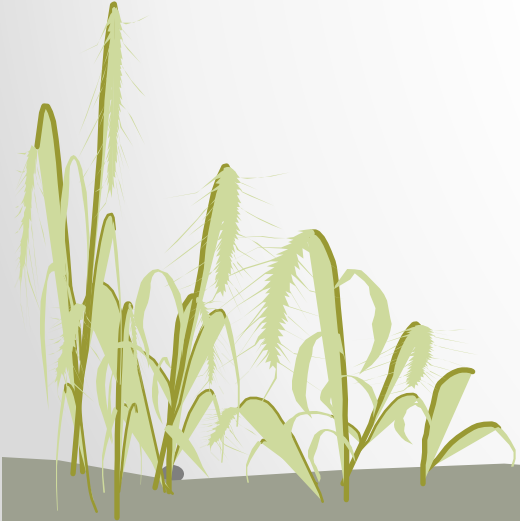
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Involving Rural Communities to Enhance the Wellbeing of Older Adults



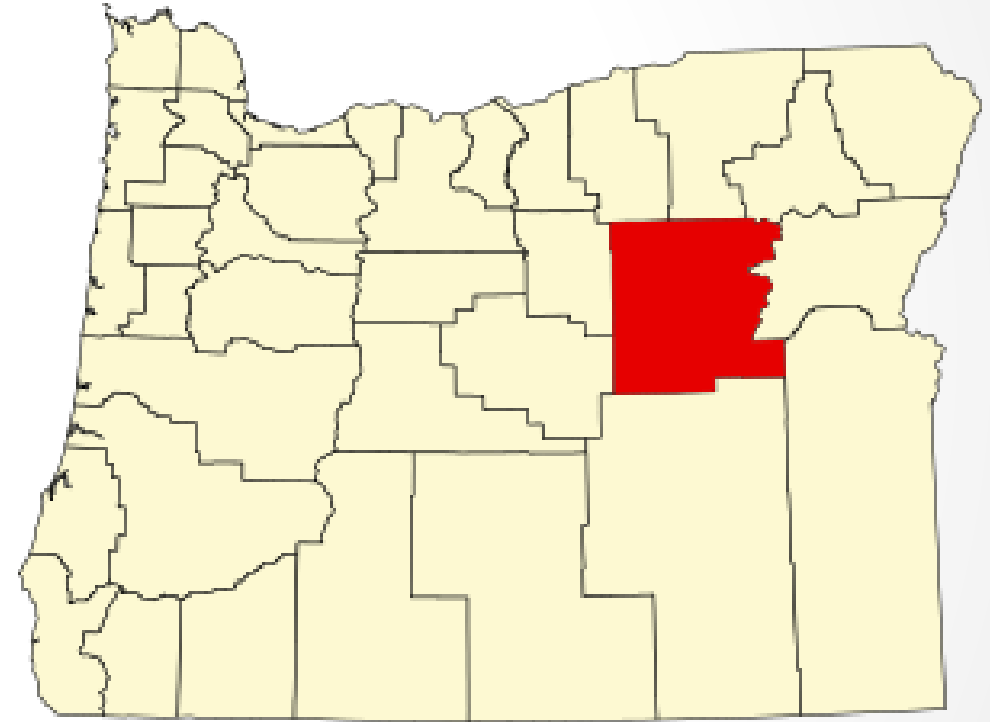
Introduction

- Misty Palmer: Senior Programs Manager, Grant County Senior Services
- Jerry Conklin: Board Chairman, South Morrow County Seniors Matter



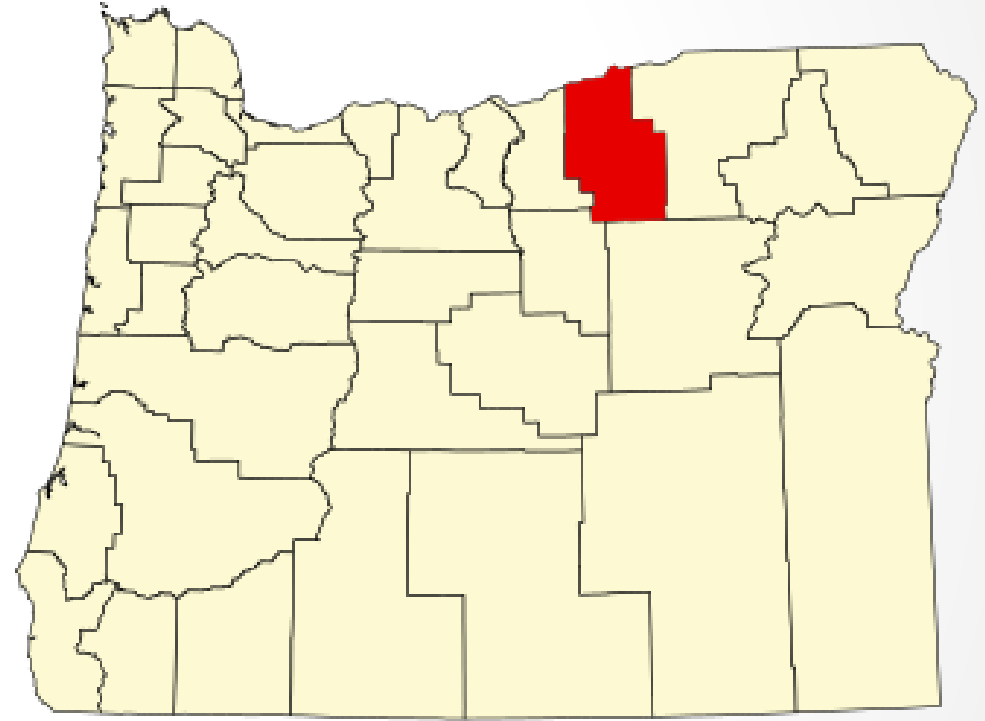
Grant County Senior Services

- **Grant County Senior Services oversees lunches and a variety of other programs:**
 - Twice weekly lunch at John Day Senior Center (John Day, Oregon; pop. = ~1600)
 - Weekly lunch at Prairie City Senior Center (Prairie City, Oregon; pop. = ~836)
 - Weekly lunch at Monument Senior Center (Monument, Oregon; pop. = ~116)



South Morrow County Seniors Matter

- **South Morrow County Seniors Matter** (Heppner, Oregon; pop. = ~1200)
 - Weekly lunch serves ~70 older adults. Monthly free veterans lunch serves ~30 vets.
 - YOLO (You Only Live Once) Senior Center hosts a variety of programs





SOCIAL CONNECTION

Senior Centers: A Community HUB

To hang out with friends

To engage in healthy programs

To connect to helpful resources

To involve the entire community

SENIOR PROGRAMS

Programs/Activities

- Senior Lunches
- Veterans Lunches
- Exercise Classes
- “Tech Savvy” Seniors Classes
- Instructional Classes
- Support Groups
- Movie Nights
- Group Excursions
- Bingo
- Arts/Crafts/Cooking Classes

Connecting Seniors to Resources

- Home Delivered Meals
- DHS/CAPECO/Community Connections
- Transportation Assistance
- Housing/Energy/Medicare Assistance
- Emergency Preparedness
- Americorps Seniors Foster Grandparents Program
- Long Term Care Planning
- School Letters to Seniors
- Monthly Free BP Checks





INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY

- **Enlist Volunteers**

- Engages volunteers in helping seniors, which elevates concern for seniors throughout the community
- Facilitates connection with seniors, even intergenerationally
- All eight Heppner Churches, two local businesses, and students from Heppner High School (over 135 volunteers) help SMCSM

- **Engage Community Partners**

- Partners who can help with funding
- Speakers who have something of interest or relevance to share (over 60 speakers have shared at SMCSM)
- Community partners who can encourage and support in caring for older adults

- **Utilize Media**

- Flyers/schedules
- Facebook
- Local Newspaper



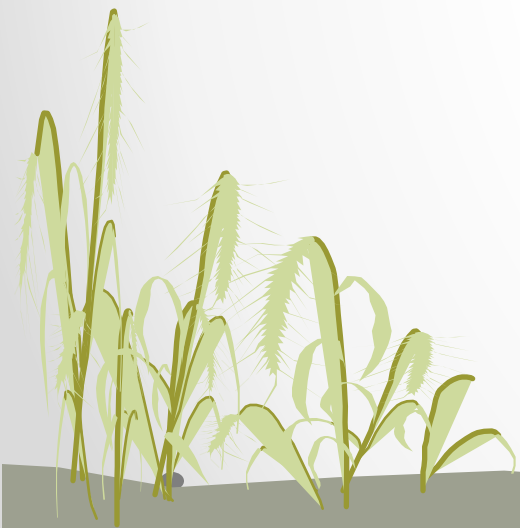
SMCSM SPEAKERS: July 2023 - April 2025

| | | | |
|----------|--|----------|---|
| 7/11/23 | SMCSM Board Members | 12/26/23 | Christmas Gift Raffle (Gifts provided by Heppner Businesses) |
| 7/18/23 | None | 1/2/24 | None |
| 7/25/23 | None | 1/9/24 | Ken Grieb (Heppner High School) |
| 8/1/23 | Sue Gibbs (Morrow County Fair Manager) | 1/16/24 | Barb Orwick (Neighborhood Center of South Morrow County) |
| 8/8/23 | Madison Rosenbalm (Heppner Chamber of Commerce) | 1/23/24 | None |
| 8/15/23 | John Murray (Murrays Pharmacy) | 1/30/24 | Representative Greg Smith (Oregon House of Representatives) |
| 8/22/23 | Steve Rhea (Fire Chief of Heppner Fire Department) | 2/6/24 | Molly Rhea-Medi planner use (Retired Director of Pioneer Home Health and Hospice) |
| 8/29/23 | Danielle Gray/Paige Wayton (Community Counseling Solutions) | 2/13/24 | Dick and Jill Schoenberg (Valentine's Concert) |
| 9/5/23 | David Sykes (Morrow County Commissioner) | 2/20/24 | Tiffany LaHue (Director; Pioneer Home Health and Hospice) |
| 9/12/23 | John Bowles (Morrow County Sheriff) | 2/27/24 | Andy Fletcher (CEO Columbia Basin Electric) |
| 9/19/23 | Stephanie Case (Morrow County VA Services) | 3/5/24 | Pat Sweeney (Sweeney Mortuary) |
| 9/26/23 | Sarah Rea/Molly Rhea (Information regarding upcoming Flu Vaccination Clinic) | 3/12/24 | Rod Harwood (Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc.) |
| 10/3/23 | Flu Vaccination Clinic (Morrow County Public Health) | 3/19/24 | Petra Payne (Heppner High School) |
| 10/10/23 | Shelly McCabe (Pioneer Physical Therapy) | 3/26/24 | Barb Orwick (M.S. Walk); Molly Rhea/Deb Green (YOLO Senior Center) |
| 10/17/23 | Andrea Mitchell (Community Health Improvement Project of Morrow County) | 4/2/24 | Representative Greg Smith (Oregon House of Representatives) |
| 10/14/23 | Brandon O'Conner (Les Schwab Tires) | 4/9/24 | Melody Henderson/Steve Cherry (Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife) |
| 10/31/23 | Heppner Preschool children visit | 4/16/24 | Cherry Clark (F.A.R.M. Museum) |
| 11/7/23 | None | 4/23/24 | Kimberly Lindsay (Executive Director of Community Counseling Solutions) |
| 11/14/23 | Daniel Curtiss (Community Action Program of Eastern Oregon) | 4/30/24 | Jessica Peterson (Bank of Eastern Oregon) |
| 11/21/23 | Rod Harwood (Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc.) | 5/07/24 | Kay Davis (AmeriCorps Seniors; Project Supervisor) |
| 11/28/23 | Kaitlyn Zinter (Heppner Fire Department) | 5/14/24 | Dick & Jill Schoenberg Concert |
| 12/5/23 | Corey Sweeney (Mayor of Heppner) | 5/21/24 | Kathy Street (Director, Oregon Trail Library District) |
| 12/12/23 | Heppner High School Choir Concert | 5/28/24 | Andrea Nelson (Owner of Flood Town Books; Teacher at Heppner High School) |
| 12/19/23 | Dick and Jill Schonberg (Christmas Sing-Along) | | |

SMCSM SPEAKERS: July 2023 - April 2025

| | | | |
|----------|---|----------|---|
| 6/4/24 | Jamie Stewart (Stewardship Specialist; Tillamook Cheese) | 12/3/24 | No speaker |
| 6/11/24 | Robin Canaday (Public Health Director; Morrow County Public Health) | 12/10/24 | Heppner Jr/Sr High Choir |
| 6/18/24 | Amy Patterson/Bria Wright (Heppner Market Fresh) | 12/17/24 | SMCSM Update |
| 6/25/24 | Sheriff John Bowles (Morrow County Sheriff); Steve Freeland (Emergency Coordinator) | 12/24/24 | Dick and Jill Schoenberg (Music) |
| 7/2/24 | Dick and Jill Schoenberg concert | 12/31/24 | No senior lunch |
| 7/9/24 | CANCELED HVAC FAILURE | 1/7/25 | Alexandra Gonzalez-Rodriguez and Melissa Fitzpatrick (ODHS) |
| 7/16/24 | Julia Brown (AGE+) | 1/14/25 | Ryan Gerry (Principal, Heppner High School) |
| 7/23/24 | Shelly McCabe (Pioneer Physical Therapy) | 1/21/25 | Kim Cutsforth Coil (Howard Beth Foundation) |
| 7/30/24 | Sue Gibbs (Morrow County Fair Director) | 1/28/25 | Erik Chick (Assistant Fire Chief, Heppner Fire Department) |
| 8/6/24 | No speaker (local fire prevented) | 2/4/25 | Steven Davis (Morrow County Public Transit) |
| 8/13/24 | John Doherty (Heppner City Manager) | 2/11/25 | Rachel Payton (Manager, St. Patrick's Apartments) |
| 8/20/24 | Jerry Conklin (Chairman SMCSM) | 2/18/25 | Emily Roberts (Executive Director, Morrow County Health District) |
| 8/27/24 | No speaker (canceled because of illness) | 2/25/25 | Corey Sweeney (Mayor of Heppner) |
| 9/3/24 | Vince Guerrero (Assistant County Administrator); Teresa O'Halloran (CCS) | 3/4/25 | Nikki Clark (Neighborhood Center of South Morrow County, Coordinator) |
| 9/10/24 | Dick and Jill Schoenberg (concert) | 3/11/25 | Alice Massey (The Arc Oregon, Program Coordinator) |
| 9/17/24 | Amanda Kendrick (Morrow County VS0) | 3/18/25 | Melissa Coiner (CCS Zero Suicide Coordinator) |
| 9/24/24 | Madison Rosenbalm (Heppner Chamber); Katie Murray (Heppner Community Foundation). | 3/25/25 | Music by Dick & Jill Schoenberg |
| 10/01/24 | Stephanie Heaton (CAPECO) | 4/1/25 | Steven Davis (Morrow County Public Transit). DHS/CAPECO visit |
| 10/08/24 | Jerry Conklin (SMCSM Chairman) | 4/8/25 | Rebeckah Berry (The Roundhouse Foundation) |
| 10/15/24 | Katie Murray (Heppner Community Foundation); Linda Kenny (SMCSM). Medicare Assistance | 4/15/25 | Brandi Marshall-Sweeney (Morrow County Schools Proposal) |
| 10/22/24 | Beth Leslie (ODHS, Dept of Resilience and Emergency Management) | 4/22/25 | Carolina Muniz (OSU Extension Office, SNAP-Ed Program Coordinator) |
| 10/29/24 | Justin Nelson (Morrow County DA) | 4/29/25 | Jerry Conklin (SMCSM Chairman: "What Makes for an 'Age-Friendly' Community?") |
| 11/5/24 | Rebecca Humphreys (Pioneer Home Health and Hospice Social Worker) | | |
| 11/12/24 | Dick and Jill Schoenberg (Music) | | |
| 11/19/24 | Anne Morter (BMCC) | | |





IT TAKES A VILLAGE

“The needs of our older adults are too great for any individual or agency to meet alone. That’s why community is so vital. It truly takes a village to support those who have given so much to the community. With a growing number of older adults, we are at our best when we come together as a community to care for them. Our work isn’t just about providing services; it’s about showing that every older adult has value and that their well-being matters to all of us. Not just to survive, but to thrive. We are strongest when we unite in this common purpose.” —Jerry Conklin at Senator Jeff Merkley’s Morrow County Town Hall

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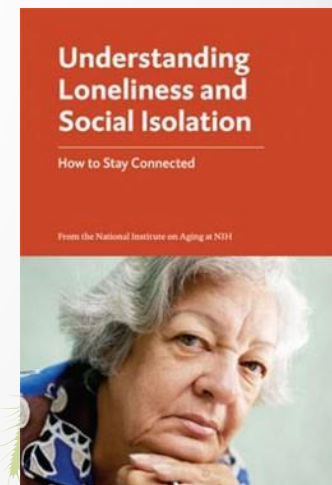
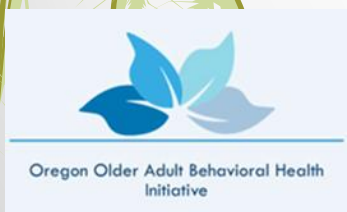
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[Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System | The National Academies Press](#)



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Thank you!

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