



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William

Program Title: Alternative Activities Project

Program Category: Health & Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Department: Prince Area Agency on Aging

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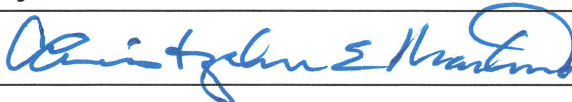
Website: www.pwcva.gov/department/area-agency-aging

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher E. Martino

Title: County Executive

Signature: 

Prince William Area Agency on Aging's

Alternative Activities Project

Prince William County's two Senior Centers serve an active older adult population. We do in person programming for individuals 60 years of age and older. The Centers provide very robust programing, offering over 230,000 hours of activities with 1100 plus members annually. With the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic, the Prince William Area Agency on Aging found it necessary, like most other facilities, and closed doors to the public on March 17, 2020. This action caused immediate disruptions to the daily social routines of our members and increased their social isolation, which the centers and its activities typically mitigated.

Studies have suggested that the psychological effects of this crisis and the prolonged lockdown includes increased stress, anxiety and depression. Looking at this prior research, loss of socialization, increased mental strain and general mental health problems, and decreased exercise, could have substantial negative effects on the elderly population. Although the lockdowns may be temporary, these effects (if not addressed) are likely to be long lasting and could pose significant risks to the quality of life of the elderly population in the coming years.

In an attempt to mitigate these effects, the Senior Center staff formed a team, spearheaded by the Recreation Specialist, Nutritionist and the Evidenced-Based Program Coordinator. The goal of the Alternative Activities Project was to provide the means whereby older adults could stay engaged with the world outside of their surroundings and by doing so, reduce the effects of isolation and promote overall wellness.

The team had minimal experience with multi-media operations and thus sought to partner with the County's Communications department. Communications assisted with platforms, data streaming and messaging of the service to the Prince William community.

With the assistance of the Communications department the team was able to develop one arm of the Alternative Activities Project, the Virtual Senior Center (VSC). The Senior Center staff started with a non-existent program and, through collaboration with other County departments, has developed a system that gives the viewer access to health and nutrition programming, games and activities, as well as crafts and community information. Some sections are not just limited to information and entertainment, but also posts and links that promote equity and inclusion in the community. Evidence Based, which was previously exclusively in person programs, was able to transition to a virtual platform as well.

The Alternative Activities Project team realized that not all older adults would be able to connect with the VSC, predominantly due to lack of skills to effectively make use of the technology or not having the necessary equipment to access the VSC. The team worked with Senior Center staff to develop and distribute activities, information and “crafts to go” (basic craft kits with materials and instructions for the recipients) to participants unable to attend or access the VSC. This was coupled with the Center’s nutrition distribution programs. The Recreation Specialist also used a portion of Cares Act funding to create activity bags. These activity bags were designed to assist in addressing the 5 therapeutic domains of mental/cognitive functioning, physical functioning, psychological/emotional functioning, social functioning, and spiritual functioning. For our circulation of these bags the team used the Agency’s data collection system to focus on three main groups to assist. The team first wanted to distribute to those persons who lived alone to reduce isolation. They then sought to send to lower income older adults to assist with their lack of resources. Another distribution group were those who frequented the Centers most often to assist with their reduced activity level. Finally, there was some distribution for those who requested assistance.

Brief Overview-

The Senior Center's mission is to provide services, education, and socialization to persons 55+ in the community, in order to foster independence and quality of life. The Alternative Activities Project made great strides in supporting the County's older adults during a time of great stress and uncertainty. We are proud of how the deliveries made to the homes of our clients greatly enhanced their quality of life while the Virtual Senior Center received the 3rd most hits of all of the County's websites.

Thanks to the support of the Prince William Area Agency on Aging and partnership with other County Agencies, the Alternative Activities Project has developed a rich and full service that is not only serving our citizens during this difficult period of "lockdown" but has provided an additional tool to couple with our other services when we reopen to the public.