



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** 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: Loudoun County  
Program Title: Rhythm Makers  
Program Category: Parks & Recreation

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Kraig Troxell  
Title: Communications Manager  
Department: Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services  
Telephone: 703-771-5605 Website: www.loudoun.gov/prcs  
Email: kraig.troxell@loudoun.gov

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Valmarie H. Turner  
Title: Assistant County Administrator  
Signature:

## **VACO Achievement Award Nomination, July 5, 2023**

### **Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services: Rhythm Makers**

**Brief Overview of Program:** The Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging/Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (AAA/PRCS) developed an innovative hand chime group (The AAA Rhythm Makers) to create opportunities for people with cognitive impairment and their caregivers to have positive and successful interactions through music. The Rhythm Makers program utilizes music to create this unique group that gives individuals with early to moderate stage cognitive impairment a purpose, routine, and enjoyment. It is open to residents who wouldn't normally be able to participate in other group settings. This is the only known hand chime group in the country for individuals with early to moderate stage cognitive impairment and their caregivers.

**Executive Summary of Program:** Loudoun County, Virginia remains a fast-growing county and saw the 50-to-64 age group as the fastest growing population in the past decade, increasing 64.1 percent between 2010 and 2021. Aware that there are many older adults with a cognitive impairment in the United States and understanding Loudoun County has a growing senior population, county staff recognized the need to target this underrepresented segment of the population. The hand chime group keeps individuals with a cognitive disability engaged and motivated; otherwise, these individuals might withdraw from society as their activities become limited and are at risk for depression and social isolation.

The Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) as part of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) developed an innovative hand chime group (The AAA Rhythm Makers) to create an opportunity for individuals with early to moderate stage cognitive impairment and their care partners to have a positive and successful experience through music. By utilizing music to create this unique group, each member of the group feels that they have a purpose, contributing to their sense of pride and providing an opportunity to experience joy in a social setting. At the same time, caregivers participate in a positive activity with their loved one at a time when positivity may be limited due to the difficulty of living with dementia or other cognitive disabilities (for both the individual and their caregivers).

This is the only known hand chime group in the country for individuals with early to moderate stage cognitive impairment and their caregivers.

**Problem/Need for the Program:** Targeting an underrepresented segment of the population, the hand chime group keeps individuals with a cognitive disability engaged and motivated who might tend to withdraw from society as their activities become limited. For these individuals, the AAA Rhythm Makers provides a positive program to engage in, with successful outcomes and a sense of community and friendship. The caregivers also recognize the significance of the group in helping the individual feel a sense of pride and experience joy in a social setting.

**Collaborations with the Program:** The Area Agency on Aging first collaborated with our intradepartmental partners at one of PRCS's five senior centers to find needed space for practice and concerts. Staff worked with our three adult day centers that are geographically spaced across

the county to help identify potential participants. To further assist with recruiting, PRCS worked with local media to promote recruitment and bring awareness to the development of the program.

Outreach was conducted at local places of worship such as churches and synagogues, and several members of those faith communities joined the AAA Rhythm Makers.

### **Cost and Funding for the Program:**

The AAA/PRCS Case Manager and Elder Resources team purchased hand chimes, secured a site, created an outreach flyer, and began recruiting participants in June 2022. Anyone with a cognitive impairment in the early to moderate stages can participate, and musical experience or the ability to read music is not required.

Participants just need to be able to follow along with the leader of the group. Caregivers and the person with dementia are equals in this setting— as the caregiver participates just the same as the person with the cognitive impairment (they both have the same note but have their own instrument).

Student volunteers from local high schools are integral to the success of the program as they provide support by assisting the group leader. This intergenerational program fosters connections and engages teens and young adults with our senior community.

**Results and Success of the Program:** Since the inception of The Rhythm Makers in 2022 the group has grown significantly and held their first-ever live performance in December 2022 featuring holiday classics at one of our senior centers centrally located in Loudoun County. The caregivers and their family members performed in front of a full house (approximately 160 people attended) with many members of our senior centers and adult day centers in attendance.

The program has also raised awareness about other Loudoun County parks and recreation programs that are offered in the community. For example, members of the Rhythm Makers rehearsed at one of the senior centers, and many of the participants were not senior center members prior to joining the music group. Because they are already at the senior center for rehearsals, some have stayed for the congregate meal program and others have joined the center.

In addition to new membership at the senior center, participants of the Rhythm Makers have greater access to Area Agency on Aging staff who can provide information and support to assist with aging-in-place and any challenges that arise with participants who have cognitive impairments. The program has ultimately achieved success by developing an understanding (appreciation) from caregivers in seeing their loved one in a whole different light by realizing their loved one is still capable of learning a new skill and can engage and be attentive during the sessions and concerts- and most importantly, laugh.

## **Addendum: Letter from a Rhythm Makers Caregiver and Participant**

*The AAA Rhythm Makers is a phenomenal program to first get people out of the house and moving, but secondly because music is universal. The program is interactive as well as musical and has put a positive note on my dad when he is there. He may not remember his participation, but while there he is having the time of his life. He is social and focusing more than he normally does, so he must play the notes, but I think music in any shape or form is something that is uplifting. I think the Director brings such a positive spirit to the session. It starts from the top, and the director is so positive and inspirational to everyone even if you have never played a musical instrument in your life. The participants when directed are playing their hand chime. When we have a performance, the joy coming from everyone including the participants, and the audience members is just incredible. We talk about this as a family, and it is amazing. I wish there was more people like our Director in the world as it would be a better place to live. It's inspirational and I hope moving forward that more programs like this are put together to not only have seniors together, but family and the community as well.*

Dena Kirson

Caregiver of Rhythm Makers Participant

*Participating in the AAA Rhythm Makers has been an amazing experience for me. It has allowed me to find some joy in the day, getting together with friends in a pleasant activity that is easily engaged in. I find the group to be not horribly challenging, but quite enjoyable and that is a rarity when you have cognitive issues. Regardless of the level of impairment, everyone enjoys participating. When you are dealing with dementia, you begin to feel really stressed and it becomes hard handling the emotions of your responses and not embarrassing yourself which is challenging. Those issues do not seem to come up in the group and allows me to feel successful whether you are or not. It feels that you participated and want to return again and again.*

Judith Beck

Rhythm Makers Participant

## **Video of Rhythm Makers First-Ever Live Performance- December 2022**

<https://www.facebook.com/LoudounPRCS/videos/558200976158922>