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[Commonwealth Council on Aging 2024 Best Practices Award Winners](#)

2024 Best Practices Awards

The Commonwealth Council on Aging sponsors the annual Best Practices Award Program to target organizations serving older Virginians and their families. The awards are given to innovative programs and services that assist older adults to age in the community. The Commonwealth Council on Aging aims to recognize creativity in services, such as livable communities, home and community-based supports, transportation, housing, caregiver supports, intergenerational programming, and more. The Council believes the door is wide open for creative best practices.

◆ **The Commonwealth Council on Aging is pleased to announce the winners of the 2024 Best Practices Awards** ◆

FIRST PLACE AWARD (\$5,500): The Opening Minds through Art (OMA) Center at The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen (CACGA)

Developed through research at the Scripp's Gerontology Center at Miami University and reproduced across the country, Opening Minds through Art (OMA) is an award-winning, evidence-based, intergenerational art-making program for people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias (PWD). The failure-free program provides opportunities for creative self-expression and social engagement for PWD, while providing volunteers with opportunities to improve their attitudes toward aging through weekly interaction with OMA participants.

Originally designed to take place in care facilities, CACGA has implemented a center-based program that also includes caregivers. CACGA's OMA Center is offered in 8-week sessions during which "Elder Artists" are paired with specially trained volunteers who assist the Elder Artist in art-making projects that feature the OMA methodology and key principles. Through CACGA, this program is open to any family

dealing with a dementia diagnosis and is offered free-of-charge to participants. Since starting the program in 2022, CACGA has trained over 125 volunteers and has had about 50 participants complete the program.

SECOND PLACE AWARD (\$3,500): The Art, Leisure, and Recreation Program from Richmond Aging and Engaging

Richmond Aging and Engaging (RAE) provides intergenerational arts, leisure, and recreation activities to support the health, wellness, and quality of life of older adults living independently in low-income senior apartment buildings. Programming is provided on a weekly basis in the buildings where participants live. The programming is flexible and adaptable to meet the unique interests and needs of residents in each building served and is guided by feedback from participant advisory committees. Activities may include physical games (e.g., balloon pickleball, cornhole, bowling), crafting (e.g., crochet, weaving, clay sculpting, card-making), and social/cognitive games (e.g., charades, family feud, bingo, board games, cards).

Additionally, the award-winning and evidence-based Opening Minds through Art (OMA) is implemented yearly at each site and concludes with a community art exhibition, with previous work even featured in statewide art exhibits. Local college students assist in leading the activities and engaging with participants. These intergenerational experiences foster social connectedness and promote a more vibrant and inclusive society. In a year, Richmond Aging and Engaging has served 46 residents across three buildings with the support of 49 college student volunteers. Richmond Aging and Engaging aims to expand to more buildings in 2024.

THIRD PLACE AWARD (\$2,500): The Audio Accessibility and Inclusion Program from Virginia Voice

Virginia Voice focuses on providing access and inclusion for those with blindness and low vision to the same everyday community engagements their sighted peers enjoy. The Radio Reading Service features volunteer-led readings of print materials, such as local newspapers, national media, and topical programming on subjects such as pet care and gardening, via radio, smart speaker, and online streaming 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. The Live Audio Description (LAD) of events provide real-time audio descriptions of visual aspects that are key to the enjoyment and understanding of local arts performances, such as the theatre and ballet, as well as for community events.

Through LAD, Virginia Voice partners with area museums to record audio descriptions of current exhibitions and with local businesses that need to provide audio described information for their employees and customers. Virginia Voice supports a community of 11,000 Central Virginians with blindness and low vision, 80% of whom are adults 65 and older with medical diagnoses that impact their vision who often experience isolation. Nearly 73% of our listeners say that Virginia Voice's services make them feel more connected to the Richmond metro community, and 81% say Virginia Voice helps to alleviate their social isolation.

The Council gave honorable mentions to the following organizations:

- Arlington Neighborhood Village
- Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging (AAA)/Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) for The AAA Rhythm Makers
- Southern Area Agency on Aging's Volunteer Driver Program

To view a copy of the 2024 press release, [click here](#). To learn more about the winning and honorable mention programs and how to contact them, [click here](#).

The Council has recognized organizations as examples of best practices since 2006. A list of these organizations and a brief overview of their programs can be found for [2017-2023](#) and [2006-2016](#).

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