

# Vermont Senior Centers

Supporting Socialization, Health and Well-being  
for Older Vermonters

Report of Survey Results and Recommendations  
September 2018

Survey conducted by Cameron Segal,  
Senior Engagement Intern  
With Support from the State Unit on Aging of the Department  
of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living

Contact:  
Angela Smith-Dieng  
State Unit on Aging Director  
(802)-241-0309  
[Angela.smith-dieng@vermont.gov](mailto:Angela.smith-dieng@vermont.gov)

## Executive Summary

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A growing body of research links social isolation to adverse health outcomes, including increased risk of chronic disease, depression, dementia and death. Prolonged social isolation can have the equivalent health impact of smoking 15 cigarettes a day. With Vermont's changing demographics, including 40,000 older Vermonters living alone and over 10,000 living in poverty, it is critical that the state do all that we can to provide opportunities for older Vermonters to engage with neighbors, friends, and their community.

Vermont's senior centers are on the front lines of supporting socialization and engagement and preventing isolation. They are essential in the state's effort to support healthy aging and prevent or delay institutionalization. Together with the five Area Agencies on Aging, they serve thousands of older Vermonters with nutritious meals, wellness activities, and social opportunities at little or no cost to participants.

The Older Americans Act, federal legislation which funds a variety of supportive services for older Vermonters, calls on states and communities to develop and promote the use of "multipurpose senior centers" to maximize collocation of supports and services for older people, especially those "in greatest economic and social need." As part of Vermont's new State Plan on Aging, the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) is seeking to better understand the capacity of the state's senior centers and identify opportunities to work with our network to provide more assistance and support and ensure a high-quality, sustainable network of centers that can meet the growing and changing needs of older Vermonters.

As a first step in this effort, DAIL conducted a survey of senior centers in July 2018. The following pages outline the results of the survey in detail. Key highlights include:

- Senior Centers are serving over 15,500 older Vermonters annually.
- Over 80% of senior centers are open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and most centers serve people from multiple towns.
- Senior centers offer a wide range of activities and services to promote socialization, health and well-being. In addition to nutritious meals, over 90% offer exercise classes and 85% offer health and wellness education. 73% offer recreational activities and organized trips.
- Senior centers provide communities with a significant return on investment. Most operate with an average of two staff and median budgets of \$101,000, but with the dedicated help of dozens of volunteers, offer a wealth of services to older Vermonters that support healthy aging. Volunteers are foundational to their success.
- Partnerships and collaborations are a key to sustainability – In addition to partnering with Area Agencies on Aging, thriving senior centers are partnering with financial institutions and foundations, farmers, chefs, and grocery stores,

schools, hospitals and small businesses. They are developing multigenerational programming, expanded meal choices, and are breaking down the walls of the center in the community.

The survey also points to some key challenges faced by Vermont's senior centers that will become more urgent with our changing demographics. The most common challenges and concerns identified include:

- Limited budgets and limited ability to bring in new revenue, preventing centers from hiring staff, diversifying offerings and providing transportation to participants.
- An aging staff and volunteer network, and limited ability to recruit new and younger staff and volunteers
- Within a limited budget, how to address the wide-ranging needs and desires of multiple generations of older Vermonters; in other words, how to provide a welcoming, engaging senior center for older Vermonters from age 60 to 100.
- How to reframe the conversation around healthy aging, address the stigma associated with a "senior center" as a place for "old people," and increase participation overall.

DAIL recognizes that for Vermont's senior centers to thrive into the future they will need to transform and evolve. But they cannot do this alone. They need the support of the State, Area Agencies on Aging, towns and municipalities, business sector, healthcare systems, and local communities. Recognizing the significant cost of social isolation on our health and human services systems in the long-term, we all have a role to play in supporting these front line providers of healthy aging supports, whether it be through coordination, technical assistance, financial support or volunteerism.

DAIL is committed to seeking creative solutions to support the sustainability and transformation of senior centers in Vermont. Following this survey report, our next steps include:

- Sharing this information and raising awareness about the critical link between preventing isolation and strengthening senior centers,
- Providing more technical assistance support to senior centers by bringing centers together on a regular basis for networking and learning, and working with leaders in the field to develop a toolkit of best practices and innovations, and
- Advocating with various entities for more sustainable support for senior centers.

## Survey Development and Distribution

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The DAIL 2018 Senior Engagement Survey was developed, circulated, and analyzed by Cameron Segal, an intern of the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL). It was reviewed and revised by staff of the DAIL State Unit on Aging, as well as Janna Clar, Director of the Montpelier Senior Activity Center and Deanna Jones, Executive Director of the Thompson Senior Center.

The purpose of this survey was to build upon information yielded from a similar survey conducted in 2014, to analyze trends, changes, challenges, and opportunities and to better understand the current capacity and needs of the network of Vermont senior centers. The survey collected information regarding governance, programming, internet access, meals, staffing, and transportation.

The survey was distributed in July 2018 to 46 identified senior centers across Vermont, 32 by email and 14 by mail. Of those sent, 28 were returned, a 60.87% return rate. Both mailed and emailed surveys were identical, with 60 questions organized into 9 sections. Those who completed the survey were primarily senior center Directors, Executive Directors, Assistant Directors, and Program Managers.

The following pages include a break-down analysis of the data yielded from the survey.

## Participation and Access

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### How many unduplicated older Vermonters are served annually?

Senior Centers reported serving a total of over 15,500 older Vermonters annually.

The range of unduplicated older Vermonters annually served ranged from 25 to 2,500. It is important to break down these numbers by the counties with the most responses, as there was significant variance:

Chittenden County (from 6 reporting centers)

- The range was 25-500
- The average was about 345
- The median was 400
- Only one senior center reported serving less than 250

Orange County (from 2 reporting centers)

- The range was 100-143
- The average was 121

Rutland County (from 4 reporting centers)

- The range was 60-2,400



- The average was about 830
- The median was approximately 438
- Only one senior center reported serving more than 500

Washington County (from 3 reporting centers)

- The range was 200-1,500
- The average was about 630
- The median was 200
- Only one senior center reported serving over 1,000

Windham County (from 2 reporting centers)

- The range was 300-400
- The average was 350

Windsor County (from 3 reporting centers)

- The range was 275-2,500
- The average was about 1,185
- The median was 465
- Two senior centers reported serving less than 500

### **How do senior centers track participants?**

68% use sign-in sheets for meals and activities, 18% use online resources like RecTrac, [www.myseniorcenter.com](http://www.myseniorcenter.com), and Google Docs, and 14% keep track based on how many newsletters are mailed out, how many households meals are delivered to, or how many people attend congregate meals.

### **What days of the week are senior centers open?**

Over 80% of senior centers are open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Almost 70% of senior centers are open Monday through Friday. Only 11% are open throughout the week plus at least one day over the weekend, and only one reported being open seven days a week. Just 11% of senior centers have hours limited to less than three days a week.

### **How many towns do senior centers serve?**

The majority of senior centers, 64%, serve between three and ten towns; while 25% reported serving over fifteen. One senior center reported serving seniors from both Washington County, New York as well Rutland County, Vermont. Attached to this survey report (Page 19) is a map of Vermont showing the location of senior centers across the state.

## **Budgets and Revenue**

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### **What are senior centers' annual operating budgets?**

Senior center budgets vary significantly and impact how much programming they are able to offer, how many meals they can provide, how many employees they can pay, and whether or not they can provide any sort of transportation for participants. Analysis of the survey data showed that Vermont senior centers have drastically varying annual operating budgets (AOB). AOB ranged from \$4,000-\$600,000. The average AOB was \$159,373, although that number is higher than over 60% of senior centers in the state. The median may be a more accurate statistic in this case, which is \$101,000.

The results showed that almost 44% of senior centers had an AOB less than \$100,000 and 30% had an AOB less than \$55,000. Windsor and Washington counties had an average AOB close to \$260,000, although each of those counties had an AOB ranging from \$52,000 to \$560,000 and \$87,000 to \$600,000, respectively. Orange and Windham counties had an average AOB between close to \$162,000 and \$107,000, although those counties had significant ranges from \$4,000 to \$256,560. Four senior centers are funded through municipal and town recreational budgets, so their AOB is much lower, although the real cost would not be represented with reported AOB.

When asked what the biggest challenges of their centers were, 36% of respondents mentioned challenges related to the costs of operating their facility, paying their employees, or funding specifically.

There was a positive, moderate correlation between AOB and number of unduplicated older Vermonters served (Pearson's correlation coefficient at 0.583).

### **What are the most popular sources of revenue?**

The options provided for revenue sources were:

- Town department funding (i.e. part of a Parks and Rec department budget)
- Funding from towns served (solicited via town meeting day petition)
- Donors/events
- Participant contributions
- Area Agency on Aging contract
- Foundation grants
- Some other source of revenue

The most popular reported sources of revenue were:

1. Town department funding (i.e. part of a Parks and Rec department budget)
2. Three-way tie between:
  - a. Funding from towns served (solicited via town meeting day petition)
  - b. Donors/events
  - c. Participant contribution

One senior center listed their contract with the Area Agency on Aging as their number one source of revenue, and two senior centers listed foundation grants as their number one source of revenue.

## **Governance**

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### **What form of decision making body do senior centers utilize?**

75% of senior centers utilize a board of directors, while 21% utilize an advisory board or council.

### **Do senior centers have 501(c)(3) federal tax-exempt status and are they incorporated?**

68% of centers indicated that they had 501(c)(3) federal tax-exempt status and 84% of those are incorporated. In total, 59% of senior centers indicated that they were incorporated.

## **Services and Programming**

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### **Do senior centers have membership fees and are they based on residency status?**

About 29% of senior centers have membership fees and less than 10% were dependent on residency status. The cost of membership fees ranged from \$10 to \$50 a year. One senior center reported that their membership fees ranged from \$15 to \$50 based on participant town of residency.

### **What activities and services are offered at senior centers?**

Social	100%
Exercise classes	92%
Health/wellness education	85%
Arts and crafts	73%
Recreational	73%
Organized trips	73%
Health screenings or clinics	73%
Educational speakers	65%
Online learning/computer classes	38%
Cooking classes	35%
Educational classes	31%
Oral health screenings	12%
Legal/financial assistance	10%

Other	4%
None	0%

Respondents were asked to elaborate on what activities or services they considered to belong to each category. Most senior centers mentioned that all of their activities promoted socialization and could fall under the “social” category. These activities included, but were not limited to: sing-a-long live music, dancing, food socials, holiday parties, Christmas tree decorating, TED talks and subsequent reflections, talks on current events, card and board games, luaus, beach parties, knitting, bingo, and coffee hours.

Almost 65% of returned surveys indicated that their senior center offered some combination of tai chi, chair yoga, or bone builders. One senior center indicated that they offered 12 bone builders and 21 yoga classes a week as well as Zumba and HIIT (High-intensity interval training) Kickboxing. Other senior centers reported that they offered activities like: jazzercise, marital arts/self-defense, snowshoeing, stand-up paddleboard lessons for seniors, stretching, qi gong, water aerobics, and pickle ball.

Although 85% of senior centers reported offering health/wellness education, there was significant variance within this category. Many senior centers included speakers from local medical centers, wellness centers, SASH, and Area Agencies on Aging in this category. Speaking topics included Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, USDA meal planning, dental health, fall prevention, diabetes, weight management, caregiver support, Medicare and mindfulness.

There was overlap of what sorts of health screenings or clinics were offered. Almost 50% offered foot care clinics; 38% offer blood pressure clinics; 35% offered flu or flu shot clinics; 12% offered oral health clinics and screenings; and about 15% reported offering cancer checks and hearing screenings.

Arts and crafts is one of the more popular categories of programming offered at Vermont senior centers. Most offered some sort of painting including watercolor, oil, and acrylic mediums. Many senior centers offered other activities such as: knitting and crocheting, jewelry making, birdhouse painting, adult coloring, photography, drawing, pottery, expressive arts, journaling, quilting, and wood working.

Most respondents indicated that their senior center had consistent organized trips for their participants. These trips included many day-trips around their respective towns to local museums, baseball games, off-site educational lectures, funeral homes, statehouses, aquariums, and gardens, as well as longer trips to New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, New York, South Carolina, Washington D.C., Massachusetts, New Orleans, Canada, and as far as Europe. When asked what the biggest challenges of their centers were, about 30% reported that either transportation issues were a concern or that they would like to be able to take more trips. Additionally, a few senior centers mentioned that some of their greatest successes was participation in day and over-night



trips. One senior center noted that their center was unable to continue trips due to physical limitations, but had past trips to museums, art galleries, and concerts.

Most senior centers, 73%, reported offering recreational activities to their participants. These included: sports, tai chi, Wii bowling, boating, hiking, bird-watching, kayaking, indoor walking, singing groups, hydro massage, walks around town, dancing, pickle ball, tennis, ping pong, whiffle ball, softball, bocce ball, basketball, swimming, and horseshoes. Educational speakers are also readily utilized by senior centers. These speakers included: speakers from area museums, art galleries, libraries, health centers, insurance agencies, tax attorneys, psychology students, recycling centers, police officers, and town clerks. Most centers reported that these were well-attended.

Compared to the above activities, there are far fewer online learning/computer classes and cooking classes offered at Vermont senior centers. Many senior centers reported that they were in the planning stages of offering some sort of technology class. One senior center mentioned that they had a well-attended computer class, but the teacher took a full-time job elsewhere and they haven't been able to replace them. Another senior center mentioned that one-on-one technology tutoring had been the most popular and helpful. Another senior center utilizes high school and middle school students as both an inter-generational program and a technology class. Few senior centers offered cooking classes, but the ones that did reported numerous options ranging from African, Indian, Chinese, Mediterranean, Polish and Italian cooking to pie-making, cupcake classes, and baking classes. One senior center mentioned offering multiple inter-generational meal preparation events with middle school students, library staff, and community health centers.

Many respondents added additional activities and services under the "other" category. These included: Vermont Reads events, safe-driving courses, local bands, live music, chair massage, and reflexology.

### **Who leads activities at senior centers?**

100% of centers reported that they use volunteers to lead activities. Only 50% of respondents reported that paid staff led activities. 56% reported that they used outside organizations or experts to lead their activities. One senior center reported that members of their Board of Directors led activities.

### **If resources were not an issue, what programs would senior centers like to add?**

The responses for this question were relatively similar. Most common answers included: computer classes, more arts and crafts, cooking classes, more health and dental screenings, more foot clinics, yoga, tai chi, more open times and more trips. Some senior centers reported that they would like to add recreational activities like snowshoeing, kayaking, water aerobics, swimming, and hunting. One senior center mentioned that they would like to have a Medicare and insurance counselor on staff. Other centers mentioned that they would like to add a family movie night and mental

health/emotional support groups. Additional answers included: well-being checks, consistent congregate meals, onsite LNAs/RN, onsite psychology/counseling professional, more music performers, legal clinics, and a big-screen television for their center.

## **Internet Access**

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### **Is there internet access for staff and participants at senior centers?**

About 85% of senior centers offer internet service to their staff and participants, while over 7% only offer internet access to staff. Two senior centers reported not having any internet access whatsoever.

### **What internet providers do senior centers use?**

The most common internet service provider used by senior centers that responded to the survey was Xfinity, 28%. Both Consolidated Communications and Sovernet (Firstlight Fiber) tied at 12%.

### **What percent of monthly budgets go to paying for internet?**

Results from this survey item show that senior centers are not burdened by extreme internet service prices. Only two senior centers reported allotting over 9% of their monthly budget to paying for internet, while 48% reported that their internet costs were less than 5% of their monthly budget. Three senior centers reported that their internet was either free since they were in a town building or the cost was marginal since internet service was figured into their town's municipal budget.

### **How important of a role does internet access play in operating a senior center?**

72% of respondents indicated that internet access was "very important" to operating a senior center. 16% of respondents reported that internet access was "not important at all".

### **Do senior centers utilize a website or social media account?**

64% of respondents reported that they had a maintained Facebook account and 57% reported that they had a website. Two centers used Twitter, one used Instagram, one used Snapchat, and one had used Pinterest in the past. 11% reported that they used their town website. One center mentioned that internet service was not an issue, but that the equipment was.

## Meals

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### **Are meals offered at senior centers?**

88% of senior centers offer meals at least once a week. The most common day where participants are offered meals across the state is Wednesday at 63%. Both Tuesday and Thursday came in at 58%, followed by Monday, 52%, and Friday, 44%. Survey data showed that 13% of senior centers did not offer any meals. One senior center offers meals on the weekend.

### **How many meals per day are offered?**

Most senior centers offer only one meal per day, but most would like the option to provide more as congregate meals are often the most popular service provided by senior centers. Centers cited financial barriers as challenges in expanding their meal programs.

### **Do senior centers have contracts with Area Agencies on Aging to provide meals?**

Of all respondents, 67% indicated that they had a contract with an Area Agency on Aging (AAA). Of senior centers that reported they had a contract with a AAA, 29% had a contract with the Central Vermont Council on Aging (CVCOA), nearly 19% had a contract with Senior Solutions, 11% had a contract with Age Well, and 7% had a contract with the Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging. (Note that there are also senior centers who contract with the Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging, but no centers from that service area responded to the survey.)

### **How much do meals cost?**

Per Older Americans Act rules, a meal provider cannot require that a person age 60 or older pay for meals but must offer the person the opportunity to contribute to the cost of the meal. Most centers have a suggested donation amount for meals. Nearly 80% had a suggested donation from \$4 to \$5 for those age 60 or older. For those under age 60, 55% had a meal price between \$5 and \$6. There was some variation reported. For example, one senior center asked for \$10 a meal for adults, \$9 for those age 60 plus, but had a discounted price of \$8 for members. Another center had an all-you-can-eat dinner on Tuesday for \$8, but a regular suggested donation of \$3.50. Another senior center had pot luck meals that were free if participants brought a dish but asked for \$5 if not. For most of Vermont senior centers, donations supplement the cost of providing meals but do not cover total costs, and centers must fundraise to make up the difference.

### **Are there choices in meals, salad bars, meals for special diets or home delivered meals?**

Only 16% of returned surveys indicated that participants had choices in their meals, while only about 13% of senior centers had a salad bar. Most centers make some sort of accommodation for some special dietary restrictions. About 30% of senior centers offering meals reported that they made accommodations for diabetics, 28% for participants adhering to a gluten free diet, 24% for low sodium diets, and 16% said they offered pureed options. Other accommodations that less than 5% offer included: lactose intolerant diets, diets for diverticulitis, and vegetarian and vegan options.

About 40% of responding senior centers reported that they offered home-delivered meals and about 7% reported that they did not provide home-deliver meals but did offer a take-out option.

Respondents were asked to include how many delivery drivers they had and what their travel distance was. The number of drivers used ranged from 2 to 30 and travel distances ranged from 10 to 70 miles a day, with one senior center reporting that their drivers traveled a collective 420 miles a month delivering meals.

### **Do senior centers partner with local farms, grocery stores, or vendors?**

Close to 39% of senior centers partner with a local farm in some capacity and 58% partner with local grocery stores or vendors. Although they were not asked to elaborate, some senior centers indicated that they received donations from local restaurants and stores for their meal programs.

### **What kind of fundraising do senior centers do for their meal programs?**

Few respondents answered this question. One senior center generates revenue by running a staffed thrift shop and using the profits to fund meals and programming. Another senior center has a bag auction for the same purpose, while another has a bake sale and raffle.

## **Staffing**

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### **How many paid staff members are working at senior centers, what are their roles and how many hours do they work?**

10% of senior centers reported that they had six paid staff, and this was the highest number of paid staff reported. About 30% reported having two paid staff, the most common number reported. One respondent stated that they did not employ a single paid staff member. The most common paid staff positions are administrators and kitchen/food preparation staff. Most administrators do multiple jobs. Many of them help with transportation, meals, maintenance, activities, meals on wheels coordinating and volunteer recruiting, among other duties. The average number of hours that administrators work is 30 hours a week, although many reported working over 40 hours.

The average number of hours that kitchen staff work is 26 hours a week and 27 hours a week for activity personnel. Due to financial constraints, most staff members end up performing multiple job duties over numerous hours.

### **How many volunteers do senior centers utilize, how old are they, and how many hours do they volunteer?**

Most senior centers that responded have a volunteer base that ensure programs run smoothly and meals are served. In many cases, senior centers would not be able to operate without volunteers. The lowest number of volunteers reported was two and the highest was over 50. 74% of senior centers have a weekly volunteer base between 10 and 50 people. Most volunteers serve between 0 and 5 hours a week, while 45% and 36% volunteer between 6 and 10 hours and 11 and 25 hours a week, respectively. 26% of volunteers reported volunteering over 26 hours a week.

Most volunteers at senior centers are over 55 years old. Only two senior centers indicated that they had volunteers under 30 years old. The average age of volunteers at senior centers is between 65 and 75 years old.

### **How are volunteers recruited at senior centers?**

The vast majority of senior centers (96%) recruit volunteers by word of mouth. Many volunteers are recruited by senior center newsletters, 62%, and social media posts, 50%. Front Porch Forum has proven to be a decent volunteer recruitment tool with almost 42% of respondents reporting that they use the website for volunteer recruitment. Very few volunteers are recruited because of radio or television ads, 12%. Other forms of volunteer recruitment include newspaper ads, sign-up sheets at senior centers, and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

### **Do senior centers have a volunteer appreciation day or related event?**

Most senior centers, almost 75%, have some sort of volunteer appreciation event. This event varies from yearly recognition lunches or dinners to “thank you” notices in newsletters to observance of Volunteer Appreciation Day in April.

## **Transportation**

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### **Do senior centers provide transportation to and from their facilities?**

37% of senior center respondents reported that they provided transportation for their participants. 63% do not.

### **Are there regional transit stops at or near senior centers?**

54% of senior centers reported that there was a regional transit stop at or near their facility. There was not a significant correlation between having a regional transit stop at or near a facility and number of older Vermonters served annually; nor was there a correlation between a regional transit stop and the senior center budget.

### **How strongly do transportation barriers impact participation?**

Almost 52% of senior centers reported that transportation barriers impact participation “a great deal”, while 37% reported that it either impacts participation “a little” or “a moderate amount”. Both rural and urban areas feel the impact of inadequate transportation. When asked what the biggest challenges for their centers were, many senior centers reported that transportation issues, including parking, were a concern.

## **Publication of Programs and Activities**

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### **How do senior centers publicize their programs and activities?**

The most common method of publicizing programs and activities was through the newspaper and word of mouth, both 80%, followed by newsletters and social media at 72%, flyers/posters and Front Porch Forum at 68%, and senior center websites at 56%. Other methods of publicizing programs and activities were seasonal program guides, quarterly program schedule releases, and monthly calendars.

## **Challenges and Successes**

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### **What are the biggest challenges of operating a senior center?**

The most commonly reported challenges had to do with financing, transportation, and space. Many senior centers feel that if they had a bigger budget, they would be able to provide more programming, more trips, and more meals for their participants in addition to being able to hire more full-time staff.

Many senior center directors voiced concerns about their aging volunteer base and staff and worry about program sustainability. Many senior centers face challenges recruiting younger participants (age 60-70), while struggling to meet the needs of their oldest participants and an aging population as a whole.

Most senior centers reported challenges in publicizing their events, programs, and activities. One senior center mentioned that one of their challenges is in grant writing, a key aspect for senior center growth.

Most senior centers have participants who have extremely low incomes and worry that their suggested donations or membership fees deter participation.

### **What are the greatest successes?**

Nearly every senior center reported how amazing it is to see seniors out of the house engaging with peers. They love the laughter, comradery, and socialization that occurs within their walls. Successful senior center directors are proud of their reputation around their communities and as leaders in their field. Many senior centers have seen significant growth in recent years in terms of activities, participation, and meal attendance. Some senior centers have even expanded in recent years.

The senior centers that are able to provide organized trips are incredibly proud for their accomplishments and the lives that they've impacted.

The smaller senior centers love some of the things they've observed including: participant weight loss, improvements in behavior, and the growth of their centers.

## **Recommendations for Future Surveying**

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Future survey research regarding Vermont senior centers may benefit from a focus on:

- Further exploring exactly how senior centers partner with farms, grocery stores, and vendors
- Specific fundraising ideas and sustainability planning
- Senior center stigma and its impact on attendance
- Exploration of moving from physical senior centers to networks to cut costs and/or reach more seniors
- Promoting intergenerational programming
- Seeking to understand if there are people who want to be engaged but aren't being reached and why

Future exploration into these topics should focus on creating specific models for senior centers to follow.

For future surveying, researchers may wish to consider how to increase response rate. Given the age of senior center staff, online surveys may not be the best method, although mailed surveys were not always completed either. Perhaps there could be consideration, if resources allowed, for telephone or in-person options. It is possible that this survey asked questions that many senior center administrators were not able to answer, either because they had not kept track of relevant information or because they did not have time.

## **Additional Organizations of Interest**

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### **Community Senior Center**

The Community Senior Center (CSC) serves the towns of Huntington, Bolton, and Richmond. CSC is able to avoid some of the financial constraints that so heavily impact the functionality of a conventional senior center by removing the overhead of operating

a facility. Since the senior center is not relegated to a physical location, whatever funds they raise can go to paying instructors and renting local activity spaces. CSC has 501(c)(3) federal tax-exempt status, a board of directors, and has an AOB of about \$27,500, raised mostly by fundraising and participant donations. In terms of tracking participants, CSC has sign in sheets at each event and sends out a weekly newsletter to over 420 people. They do not have a system in place to track unduplicated seniors, but total activity participation combined is estimated at 600.

CSC is able to offer activities and programs through partnerships with local companies and organizations. CSC has formed partnerships with the Huntington Public Library, Huntington Town Clerk Office, Smilie Memorial Elementary School, Bolton Town Office, Bolton Valley Nordic and Backcountry Sports Center, West Bolton Golf Club, Alison's Aquatic School, Richmond Congregational Church, Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church, The Links at Lang Farm, and more. CSC has been able to offer participants skiing, golf, swimming, water aerobics, and coffee hours, but plan on offering more as their network expands. Martha Nye, Board Member and Volunteer Development Director, believes that their model offsets the fear of being labeled a senior by having to go to a physical senior center location and by promoting socialization, often inter-generational, within the community. Additionally, CSC participants who attend events at community places of worship may interact with groups of people that belong to congregations that may not have sought out activities at a more traditional senior center.

CSC still faces similar challenges to those of conventional senior centers, mainly transportation barriers and seasonal decrease in participation. The board of directors is working on finding out who they are not reaching and how best to reach them in the future.

### **Cares Groups**

Southeastern Vermont is home to eight non-profit organizations that provide older Vermonters and people with disabilities with a variety of health care and wellness support services. The eight organizations are: Chester/Andover Community Cares, Dummerston Cares, Grafton Cares, Guilford Cares, Marlboro Cares, Putney Community Cares, Westminster Cares, and the Windham Community Organization.

These largely volunteer-run organizations enable older residents to receive medical assistance or support without having to sacrifice their independence and move out of their homes. Each of these organizations differ in their structure, but most have a Board of Directors. Some Cares groups are directly affiliated with a foundation from which they receive funding, while others must go out and seek funding. Cares groups provide transportation for non-emergency health services and special outings, at-home caregiving, gardening, cooking, and some even provide home maintenance services. These organizations have fostered community connections, and many are promoting community socialization in the same way a senior center does. The Cares groups of Southeastern Vermont highlight an alternative grassroots model of local communities



working to meet the needs of neighboring older Vermonters. For more general information about the Cares Groups, watch this video:

<https://www.brattleborotv.org/windham-county-cares-helping-hands-vermont>.

## Acknowledgments

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**DAIL wishes to express our thanks and appreciation to the 28 senior centers who completed and returned the survey (in alphabetical order):**

Bayside Activity Center in Colchester, VT  
 Bellows Falls Area Senior Center in Bellows Falls, VT  
 Black River Valley Senior Center in Ludlow, VT  
 Brandon Senior Center in Brandon, VT  
 Brattleboro Senior Center in Brattleboro, VT  
 Bugbee Senior Center in White River Junction, VT  
 Castleton Community Seniors in Castleton, VT  
 Champlain Senior Center in Burlington, VT  
 Charlotte Senior Center in Charlotte, VT  
 Chelsea Area Senior Center in Chelsea, VT  
 Essex Area Senior Center in Essex Junction, VT  
 Forever Young Club in Poultney, VT  
 Franklin County Senior Center in St. Albans, VT  
 Good Living Senior Center in St. Johnsbury, VT  
 Greater Randolph Senior Center in Randolph, VT  
 Heineberg Community Senior Center in Burlington, VT  
 Islands in the Sun Senior Center in Alburgh, VT  
 Johnson Senior Center in Johnson, VT  
 Mad River Valley Seniors in Waitsfield, VT  
 Middlebury Parks and Recreation Department in Middlebury, VT  
 Montpelier Senior Activity Center in Montpelier, VT  
 Northfield Senior Center in Northfield, VT  
 Orange East Senior Center in Bradford, VT  
 South Royalton Area Senior Center in Royalton, VT  
 Springfield Senior Center in Springfield, VT  
 Thompson Senior Center in Woodstock, VT  
 Winooski Senior Center in Winooski, VT  
 Young at Heart Senior Center in Poultney, VT

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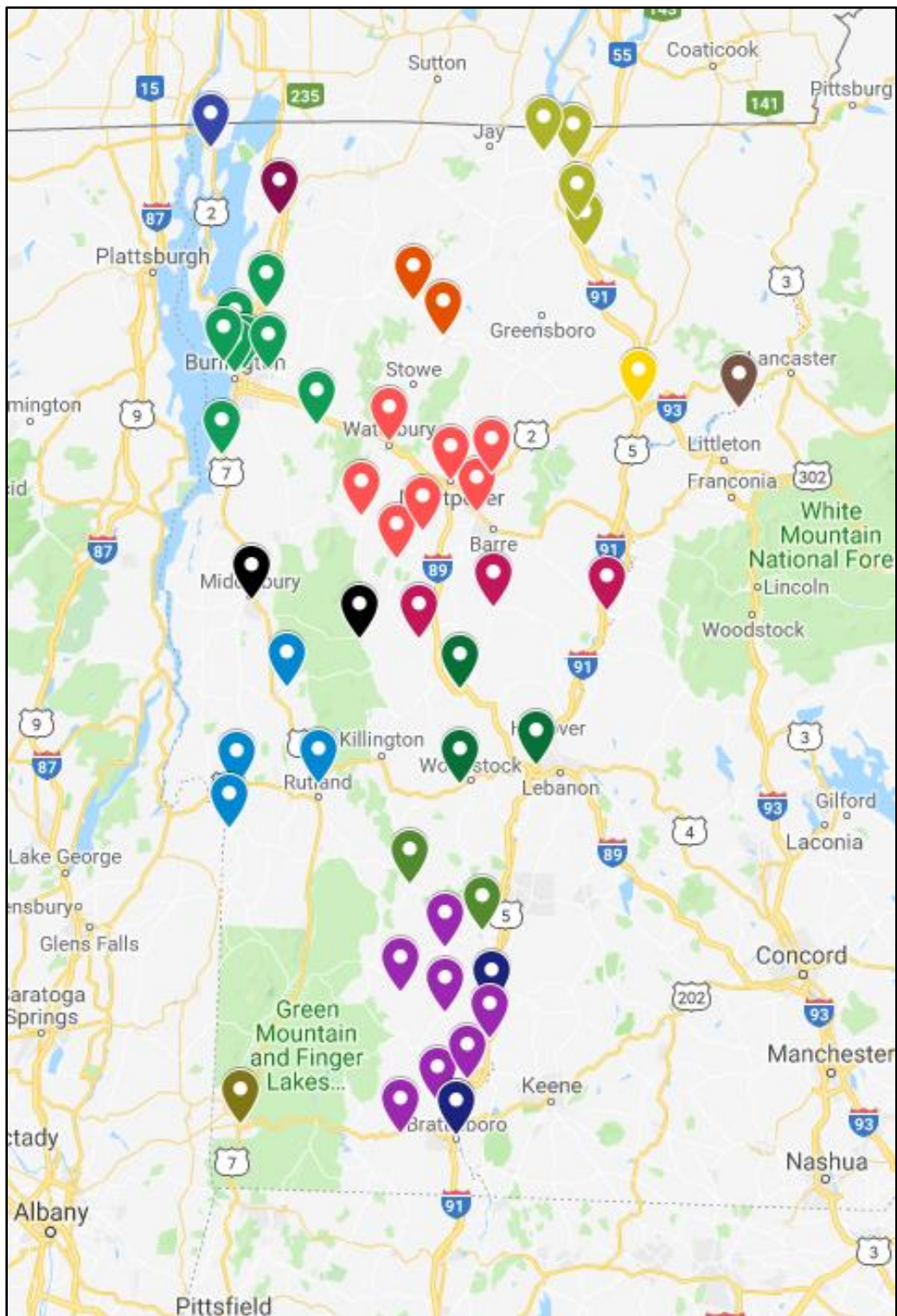
Much appreciation to Deanna Jones of the Thompson Center and Janna Clar of the Montpelier Senior Activity Center for their thoughtful review of both the initial survey and subsequent report.

Finally, a sincere thank you to Cameron Segal, DAIL's intern, who did the bulk of the work in developing, distributing, compiling and analyzing the survey. This project would not have been completed without his hard work, dedication and service.

**For more information about this survey, please contact:**

Angela Smith-Dieng  
State Unit on Aging Director  
[Angela.smith-dieng@vermont.gov](mailto:Angela.smith-dieng@vermont.gov)  
(802)-241-0309

**Map of Senior Centers in Vermont:**  
Color coded by county; Purple = "Cares Groups"



If you notice an active senior center missing from this map, please let us know.