

## **Annual Report FY 2021**

### **Annual Town Meeting, Spring 2021**

**Prepared and submitted by Betsy Kelly, Senior Outreach Coordinator, April 2021**

#### SUMMARY

For almost six years, since June 2015, River Forest Township has funded a part-time Senior Outreach Coordinator (SOC) position to further assist its local older adults. Betsy Kelly was hired in mid June of 2020 as an independent contractor; a position that Cathaleen Roach filled for close to five years. The position has been a 15 hour/week position. The SOC reaches out to seniors in River Forest, connects seniors with the appropriate referrals and collaborates with various groups to offer programming to older adults in the area.

A central goal of this part-time position is to “get the Resident to the resources” by providing access to and awareness of vital human services provided by both River Forest and Oak Park Townships to our local River Forest Seniors. These include increasing awareness of local programs available to seniors like: Care Management, Home Delivered Meals, Transportation, SHIP (the Senior Health Insurance Program) Counseling, Caregiver support and more. The River Forest Township provides a vital role in getting elders to local resources, (as distinguished from being an actual service provider due to the small size of the Village and our access to broader funded programs for seniors). *Please refer to the FY2021 Annual Report from Township Senior Services Director Pamela Mahn for details on these programs and the number of River Forest residents served.*

***(don't have to talk about changes due to covid- their report will mention)***

Other identified purposes for the SOC position include the traditional three main areas, described in the earlier Annual Reports: 1. Programming; 2. Collaboration with other local entities; and 3. Senior Outreach (via written communication, publicity and other means).

NOTE: THIS WAS AN UNUSUAL YEAR OF COURSE DUE TO COVID AND WILL BE REFLECTED IN THE REPORT. CURRENT SOC HAS ONLY BEEN IN THE POSITION SINCE COVID STARTED. PROGRAMS WERE EITHER ALTERED, CANCELED OR MET VIA ZOOM. Betsy started her role with the township in June, three months after COVID.

#### **New Additions to SOC duties this FY2021:**

1. Weekly Community Connect Mail
2. Headphones with individual playlist for people with Memory Loss
3. Started Circle of Friends Group via Zoom. Trying to reach isolated older adults, especially during COVID.
4. Attended various meetings around Isolation and the Digital Divide, including Joining new Groups/Collaborations: Senior Citizen Services Coordinating Council (SCSCC) and Make Room at the Table (MR@TT) as well as Arbor West Neighbors(AWN) Advocacy Committee and a new Age-Friendly Neighborhood Group(either Township Supervisor attends or SOC)

I. Continued Progress with Programming; Collaboration with Government and other Groups; and Outreach

In addition to the new initiatives in FY 2021 described above, the SOC focused on three tradition areas from previous years: Programming initiatives for lifelong learning and health and safety; collaboration with other local entities; and senior outreach.

**A. Objective No. 1: Programming**

1. Programming co-funded with River Forest Public Library and
2. "Other" Independent of RF Township senior programming

**1. River Forest Library Programming Co-Sponsored with the Township:**

RF Township enjoys and celebrates a special working relationship with the River Forest Public Library. Together, they co-sponsor programs and evenly split costs for educational and other enjoyable programming directed at seniors. These programs are designed to help alleviate isolation in seniors, and to foster friendship and educational enrichment for the older adults.

SUMMARY TOTALS FOR ALL JOINT PROGRAMMING WITH RF LIBRARY:

- a. **Total No. of Jointly Funded Programs FY 2021= 36 (13 programs were cancelled at the beginning of COVID and Film Lovers Friday was cancelled indefinitely due to COVID)** [and not counting Memory Cafes- assume this is through OP Township]

Gather- Discover-Engage*	= 26	
CSAYL		= 10

- b. **Total Attendees FY 2021= 569**  
Gather-Discover- Engage\*\*= 249  
CSAYL= 320

**Gather-Discover-Engage:**

Numbers are lower than previous years due to Covid and cancellation of programs early on and then not as many attendees virtually/call-in vs. in-person.

**Coffee Mondays:** There was a great turnout around talk about Voting information and when we had more than one speaker talking on a related topic, including information on Volunteer Opportunities. Coffee Monday was in person in March, cancelled in April and May and then was held over Zoom starting in June 2020 through March 2021 (with the hopes of starting again in person outside in the library's garden in May of 2021)

**\*A new Craft and Chat Event** was added in January which was very popular- seniors would pick up their craft supplies along with instructions at the library and then would meet on Zoom to

do the craft together. The 12 spots for this sold out quickly and there were not a lot of spots due to purchasing the art materials. We may want to look into this moving forward and increasing our budget for this so more slots can be available. This was a very creative initiative during COVID that worked out well. The SOC can always be available to pick up and deliver supplies. [this is a program we may want to look into as being a hybrid program moving forward for those that are able to meet in person as well as those that cannot get out or prefer to do from home.]

COVID stopped programming abruptly to begin with but then forced us to become creative with online/call-in programming and looking ahead, ***Zoom should always be an available option even after programs are back in-person, for those that cannot get out of their house due to a variety of reasons from weather to rehabbing at home after a recent hospitalization.***

\*\* As mentioned above ***Film Lovers Friday was cancelled*** due to COVID, but also ***Social Stitching, which soon became Social (Distance) Stitching*** did not see a big turnout- the participants missed getting together in person and did not want to get together over Zoom (typical turnout was 3-5 people over Zoom; Meghan did hear that some of the participants were meeting in each others backyard at least early on, but then a few did still gather virtually).

#### **(CSAYL) Celebrating Seniors all Year Long:**

Pre-Covid- the *Harriet Tubman Living History* was a big hit, although a bit costly it sounded like a worthwhile event( 27 in attendance). After Covid, many programs were cancelled early on, but then programming continued via Zoom. People loved the *Talking Statues* (33 in attendance at the first talk and 46 at the second); the book talk, *From Miniskirt to Hijab* with author Jacqueline Saper had a good turnout (38 attendees) the book talk with author Linda Gartz *Redlined: A Memoir of Race, Change and Fractured Chicago* also had a good turnout (38 people) and the *Christmastime in the City* talk with Clarence Goodman (57 people). Although music events were very popular pre-COVID there were no Virtual Music Programs. The cooking demonstration surprisingly did not have a large turnout. During COVID the Authors discussing their books/race relations and Historical/creative talks were popular.

## **2. Other Programming Provided by RF Township**

Celebrating Seniors Week was cancelled due to COVID (May 2020 and will be cancelled May 2021 as well) The previous SOC spent a lot of time and effort preparing in January and February.

Pickleball- was on hold due to COVID, but is now opening up.

#### **New Programming/Initiatives:**

- **Community Connect Mail:** In an effort to reach out to isolated older adults during the pandemic, the new SOC had been reaching out to older adults as well as agencies that

work with older adults, including social workers/doctors at hospitals and clinics, homecare agencies, senior housing in Oak Park, River Forest and Austin with information about online/call-in programming. Many local and national programs have gone online. SOC reaches out to various groups to share their information about educational events, exercise, meditation, podcasts, movies, gardening tips etc. She also informed people on the most recent vaccine updates and other community news. She started doing this weekly mailing through a grant she received as a consultant for Arbor West Neighbors(AWN)and has continued the email now from the RF Township in collaboration with AWN.

- **“Alive Inside Playlists/Headphones”** offering- through an earlier grant that the SOC received before starting at the township she received headphones from Alive Inside Foundation as another way to reach out to isolated older adults, specifically those suffering from dementia. Music has a very powerful connection to those with memory loss. The music is able to bring back memories from earlier times. The SOC reached out to caregiver groups, the Dementia Friendly RF email list, Belmont Village as well included a flyer in the RF Library’s memory kit. This year she worked with Belmont Village and created 6 headsets for residents as well as 4 headsets for community members. At Belmont Village an activities staff person worked tirelessly with individual residents trying to figure out their favorite songs, often with family members' help. More people took interest, but were not able to follow through for various reasons.
- **“Circle of Friends”** The SOC went to many meetings around isolation and older adults, including meetings around technology and older adults to figure out how best to reach this population during COVID. She also talked to a few local adults about what they missed most. The common theme seemed to be that people didn’t necessarily miss their meetings or groups for the activities, education/stimulation, but they missed seeing their friends/ connecting with others (who often were at the groups). One of the meetings the SOC went to was about the Circle of Friends, “a group that was Developed by scholars/practitioners at the Central Union for the Welfare of the Aged at Helsinki University in the early 2000s. It is a group rehabilitation model for older people, who experience loneliness from time to time or perhaps every day.” This presentation was put on by the University of St. Louis Hospital Division of Geriatric Medicine who was implementing the group in St. Louis. [One of the great benefits of Zoom was being able to attend meetings in different states]The aim of the group is to alleviate and prevent loneliness. The program connects isolated older adults. A group of 5-8 older adults meet weekly for 12 weeks and talk about various topics (arts/culture, health/wellness, writing/reflecting) with the main focus being on creating relationships. The hope is that these relationships continue after the twelve weeks. The SOC went through training in November and December. The group is supposed to have two facilitators. The SOC asked Barb Bodner\* from AWN to help her facilitate. We started our first pilot group via

Zoom in February with 6 members. The SOC advertised, researched various topics and we were ready to start our first group in early February.

\*Barb Bodner organized the group Great Neighbors, a one on one friendly visitor program, which wasn't getting the support it needed from Little Brothers/Friends of the Elderly, so she was hopeful to work on another endeavor that reached those that wanted connection. The current SOC mentioned that Great Neighbors should stress how the program was mutually beneficial (to both parties).

## **B. Objective 2- Ongoing Initiatives with Local Government and Other Entities:**

**[Things looked a lot different this year with COVID- most yearly events were put on hold]**

Additionally, the SOC and Township Supervisor spent some of FY 2021 assisting and collaborating with the OP Township, Village of RF and other local and Chicago area agencies.

The Township Supervisor as well as the past SOC were great about introducing the new SOC to various people/ groups that she would be working with and she continued to build on those relationships.

**OP Township: (most programming moved online) See Oak Park Township Report.** The SOC attended monthly Senior Committee meetings as the RF Township representative and gave updates about what we were doing and received support from the committee; The staff at OP Township has been very supportive and helpful to SOC as well. SOC provided information for their quarterly news and views; RF Township Supported Memory Cafes which moved online during Covid; SOC delivered meals 2x/month;. SHIP and Medical Lending Library: spreading the word about these programs, although new protocols in place. No representatives at RF Township this year due to COVID. The OP Township has been helpful around assisting with technology for Circle of Friend Group. A couple of adults were having a hard time connecting with the group and the Township was able to provide grandpads (a tablet with a 4g hotspot included) to them, providing a much higher quality wifi service than the affordable wifi from comcast or AT&T.)

**RF Village:** Township Supervisor and previous SOC at the beginning of the pandemic worked closely with the Village to start the Volunteer Care Corps. Headed by Helen Kwan, the Volunteer Corps recruited many volunteers to help those seniors needing assistance with shopping, errands and masks during this time. Current SOC has been in touch with Helen Kwan during the pandemic. The previous SOC was also involved with "Getting the Count Out"/Census work. The new SOC and Township Supervisor presented to the RF Age Friendly Collaborative about past surveys that have been done to reach out to older adults; The SOC also reached out to the group later to inquire about as well as suggest "housing questions" for the survey.

**RF Fire Department:** The past two years the Fire Department had an open house and the Township helped distribute ICE packets (there was no open house this year due to COVID) although we still let people know about ICE packets and did pass out a few.

**RF Police:** SOC asked Officer Ransom to talk at our Coffee Monday group about ID bracelets as well as inform people about SilverAlert, a way police across communities can alert each other about an older adult that has gone missing. The partnership with OP and RF Police Department for safe disposal of medication programs I believe was put on hold during Covid.

**LOSS:** a group that the previous SOC hosted for those near River Forest was on hold initially but then became virtual through Catholic Charities during the pandemic.

**Grief/Support Groups:** SOC publicized Support Groups through Grace Lutheran and Loyola Medicine Hospice as well as other help hotlines (through IL Dept. on Aging) and resource numbers in weekly and monthly emails.

**Triton:** SOC reached out to the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) to help publicize their volunteer opportunities as well as their Tax Counseling service. They also were invited to speak at a Coffee Monday.

**Concordia:** Township Supervisor reached out to Concordia's Counseling Group to make sure they were still offering their Meaningful Wellness Groups. They eventually did have groups in November and December which the Township helped publicize. We also advertised lectures; *(unfortunately due to a change in administration, Dr. Lydia Manning, a well respected professor had to move on from her position)* so we will see how our relationship changes moving forward. The Gerontology Department will still be a part of the school. We will see if there is a change in focus with the new administration. Lydia is still very active in various Aging Committees in the community. **(see Arbor West Neighbors)**

**Arbor West Neighbors:** ***Walking Group*** is on hold; The ***Memoire Group*** that the previous SOC collaborated with AWN and Concordia halted due to COVID, but still received an award from the Illinois Township Association of Senior Services Committees. This Memoire Program started in the Spring, but was a culmination of other workshops/ programs leading up to this. RF Township Supervisor also received an award for programming.

Arbor West Neighbors started a ***Neighborhood Age-Friendly Collaborative*** across four communities after a gentleman wandered out of a nursing home and was unable to be found until it was too late. The group formed so communities work closer together on issues that we are all concerned about. Township Supervisor or SOC will represent RF Township at these meetings. SOC started ***Circle of Friends*** group(mentioned above) in Collaboration with AWN as well as ***Community Connect Mail***.

**Dementia Friendly Meetings:** Attended monthly meetings until January when they were put on hold due to Covid and inability to train restaurants and businesses around being Dementia Friendly. This is not restaurants/business's focus at this time. During Covid the group was working on their website and SOC helped provide resources as well as they reached out to their network about the headphone program.

**Sounds Good! Chorale** went viral for those who wanted to attend. SOC publicized in Community Connect.

**Age Options:** spreading the word about their health and wellness programs as well as their Choir....

**YMCA:** The SOC helped promote their Healthy Aging Pilot Program as well as a couple of their online events.

**Aging and Disability Resource Consulting:** In the past the RF Township publicized the twice-monthly free consulting opportunities at the River Forest location. These were on hold due to Covid (see OP Township report)

**Thrive:** SOC attended and spread word about Thrive's Suicide Prevention training and also spread the word about their various other Thrive talks.

**Forest Park Cultural Trips** put on hold during Covid and Denise Fulmer who took Seniors on many exciting trips in the past is no longer with the Mohr Center.

Reached out to the **Park District of Oak Park/ Dole Center** about their Active Adult Program. Spreading the word about this great opportunity for RF residents.

**River Forest Park District:** spreading word about the Community Garden.

**Triton/Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) :** spreading the word about their Tax Counseling Program and Volunteer Opportunities.

### **C. Objective No. 3- Outreach/ Communication:**

When SOC first started Township Supervisor and past SOC introduced/connected her via email and in person to all the partners she would be working with.

SOC reached out to her email list to see how she could help at this time; she received some responses, mostly appreciation for reaching out; some needed help making an appointment for the vaccine, some requested to be connected to online/call in programming, a couple requests for ICE Packets; others needing a Zoom tutorial.

**Speaking Engagements:** SOC, RF Township Supervisor and OP Township Director spoke at the **RF Village Age Friendly Collaborative** about our services as well as gave an overview of past surveys that have been taken in the community since the group is putting together another survey for older RF residents. (so they don't repeat anything that has already been done.)

SOC spoke to **Oak Park Temple's STAR** group; Spoke at the **Senior Citizens Services Coordinating Council** (SCSCC) and **Coffee Monday** meetings about RF Township Services. RF Township Supervisor, OP Township Supervisor and SOC also met with the **Sheridan**, the new Assisted Living/Memory Care Facility to let them know about our programming and let them know about other people/organizations to connect with as well. They will be a great community partner (willing to provide community space, programs and volunteers...) SOC also met with two new **RF Township Board members** to talk about her role.

Attended regular monthly SCSCC (new membership), OPTSS Committee, Dementia Friendly (until put on hold in January) AWN Advocacy meetings as well as ongoing meetings on Isolation and Digital divide meetings.

Prepared senior packets for Township Assessor visits with seniors to pass out to seniors they meet with.

Updated the Senior Services section of the website (with help of Jeff Belmonte) with changes in services during COVID as well as upcoming programs

Reach out through monthly email as well as Community Connect Mail to older adults

Provide Programming information to Christopher Fox and Yazmin Morales at OP Township for the quarterly News and Views.

The SOC works with Meghan O'Keefe at the River Forest Library creating or distributing promotional posters and outreach materials for all co-sponsored events.

Received calls from the community directing them to the appropriate resource whether it was questions about voting, transportation, ICE Packets, volunteer opportunities, OP Township referrals.



## **II. New Initiatives for FY2021 with Township SOC and Others:**

Community Connect Mail (mentioned above in Programming)

Circle of Friends (mentioned above in Programming)

Attended various meetings around isolation and the digital divide. SOC joined a group called Make Room at The Table which put together a list of ideas people can do during the holidays for themselves and others to keep busy and feel less isolated during the pandemic. This was circulated in Community Connect and the River Forest monthly email (it was also posted in the Chicago Tribune). This same group is how she found out about Circle of Friends (through an online training by University of St. Louis Hospital- the benefits of Zoom!)

RF Township joined the Senior Citizen Services Coordinating Council (SCSCC) a networking group of professionals in Chicagoland that work with older adults. A lot of good contacts to tap into for Coffee Monday Speakers. One of the members already reached out and asked to help plan a few upcoming Coffee Mondays.

Received Dementia Leadership training with RF Township Supervisor as well as Director of OP Township Senior Services.

Dementia Friendly Committee: reached out to their contacts to see if they wanted to be part of the headphone program

RF Library: has memory kits for adults suffering from Dementia and their caregivers and they included information about headphones in the kit.

Oak Park Township and Village of Oak Park and River Forest Township and Village of River Forest Repair Program in collaboration with Northwest Housing Partnership is almost ready to move forward (see OP Township Report)

Connected with Dole Center/ Park District of Oak Park's Active Adult Program and had them come talk at one of our Coffee Mondays to let RF residents know about this great resource (\$50/year for most of their programming- lapidary art, ceramics, weaving, computer room and other events)

**III. Future Programming/Initiatives (Including Programming that didn't take place this year) *The hope is to continue the programming that took place in past non-Covid years, although we may need to ease into programming as it was.***

Celebrating Seniors Week will most likely return (SOCs role is to plan some of the programming and select, invite, interview, photograph and write biographies for the "60 Over 60" honorees which is also included in the annual Resource Guide)

Continue with ongoing Yearly events: Rotary Club Event, Fire Station Open House in October, Cultural Trips through the Mohr Center.

Bring Back Film Lovers Friday (when appropriate) as well as other initiatives with the Library (Caregiver Panel and Scam Series that were put on hold due to Covid)

Continue with the Craft and Chat Events with the Library.

A possible Circle/ Breathing Program with Susan Lucci and ML Waltfeld. They spoke at a recent Coffee Monday and we talked about future programming with them.

Digital Divide: continue to research best virtual platforms for older adults who need assistance attending events online (Uniper, Grandpads, affordable wifi options)

Collaborate with the Park District of Oak Park's Active Adult Program and continue to promote their programs.

SOC would like to reach out to Opportunity Knocks as well as other groups in the building to talk about possible intergenerational programming.

SOC hopes to collaborate with the Sheridan, the new Assisted Living/Memory Care Facility on a program with the Headphones.

Hope to do a mailing in April or May to all the RF homeowners to let them know about our programs with the library and OP Township as well as Circle of Friends and to see what their interest is in other potential programs. Would also like to gauge their interest in homesharing.

Re-look at Community Connect Mail and use it more as a tool to connect people with each other (individuals/ communities) since most people will want to be getting back out to in person events.

Re-look at the offerings for older adults at the three colleges in the area.