



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT FOR AGING
AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

Commonwealth Council on Aging Best Practices Awards

The annual [Commonwealth Council on Aging's](#) Best Practices Awards recognize programs fostering social connectedness, livable communities, and community-based supports for older adults across Virginia. The Awards also serve to support and encourage programs that could be easily replicated, as well as those that work to help older adults age in place within the community of their choice. In making award decisions, the Council judges nominees on seven criteria, some of which include: community impact, potential for replication, innovation, outcomes, and promotion of aging within the community. Awardees may be non-profit organizations, universities, faith-based organizations, local governments, and programs sponsored by providers of aging services.

The Commonwealth Council on Aging's Best Practices Awards Program, which started in 2006, has been supported by [Dominion Energy](#) since 2012. Through Dominion's gracious sponsorship, the first, second, and third level Best Practices awardees receive both recognition and a monetary award. Specifically, in 2020, the First Place program received \$5,000, the Second Place program received \$3,000, and each Third Place program received \$1,000. The Council also shares information on each of the awardees throughout the Commonwealth, encouraging their replication.

This year, the First Place awardee was Staples for Seniors and Fido's Pantry, a program of the [New River Valley Agency on Aging](#) that offers food assistance to homebound seniors in rural areas and their cats or dogs. The program's mission is simple: eating should be a choice, not a challenge. Since launching the program in 2019, New River Valley Agency on Aging has served 248 seniors with necessary groceries each month. Fido's Pantry has provided monthly pet food assistance and supplies to 87 of those 248 seniors.

The second place award recognized [Jimmy's PetPals](#), a companion pet program developed at [Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital](#) to help individuals with dementia have a better hospital experience. PetPals are life-like robotic dogs and cats that pant, bark, turn their heads, wag their tails, purr, meow, and roll over. The impetus for the program was when a hospital employee provided a robotic companion pet to her father, Jimmy, the program's namesake, when he was struggling while hospitalized.

Two programs tied for the third place award this year.

The first, [Medication Safety for Older Arlingtonians](#), is a program of [Arlington Agency on Aging](#). Older adults receive medication safety education, assistance with Medicare and Medicare Part D prescription coverage and signup, information on the safe disposal of medications, and drug deactivation kits. The program advances the Arlington County's efforts toward realizing its Age Friendly Plan.

The second program to tie for third place was [Volunteer Solutions' Helping Hands Program](#), a program of [Fairfax County Area Agency on Aging](#). This program helps to de-clutter, organize, and perform intensive yard work for older adults and adults with disabilities, allowing them to age in place safely and with dignity. To date, the Helping Hands program has served 112 clients and prevented evictions for 11 clients.