

Santa Barbara County 2021 CSAC Challenge Executive Summary

Senior Holiday Phone Bridge Line

Overview:

The Santa Barbara County Department of Behavioral Wellness led Community Wellness Team ran a Senior Bridge Program to provide support for older adults through the holiday season.

Challenge:

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, seniors have been among the most vulnerable of groups. Not only for physical health reasons, but also for their mental health. Many studies report that loneliness among older adults has increased significantly over the past year. In addition to the current stressors of living life in a pandemic, and the social isolation being experienced by older adults, many older adults may also be living in a senior living environment which is not permitting family visitors even if socially distanced. Loneliness and social isolation for older adults have a deep emotional impact, sometimes leading to depression and anxiety and can even have a significant impact on their physical health.

Solution:

The Santa Barbara County Department of Behavioral Wellness led Community Wellness Team developed the Senior Bridge Program to provide support to older adults through the holiday season, and beyond. Those interested were able call the Community Wellness Team at 805-364-2750 and sign up for just one call or for regular friendly phone calls from volunteers from Hospice of Santa Barbara. Services were available in English or in Spanish language. Outreach on this program was targeted to Senior Adult living facilities, through media and through a variety of other mechanism. Santa Barbara County believes that we truly all in this together, and with that knowledge, we will get through this together with making sure no senior had to go through the challenges of the holiday season and COVID alone.

Innovation:

Holidays can be lonely times of the year for older adults who may not live near their families. Holidays carry memories and for many, naturally feel like a time when family should be around. During the 2020 year with the impacts of the pandemic and social isolation, many seniors were not able to be surrounded by family as they normally would be, due to the safety considerations aimed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Not being able to look forward to time spent with family over the holidays can have a profound impact on the mental health of older adults who are already feeling isolated. With broad based and targeted outreach to share the information of the Senior Holiday Phone Bridge Line, interested seniors were screened and then paired with volunteers who could best individually meet their needs.

Results:

The Senior Holiday Phone Bridge line remained active throughout the entire holiday season. Seniors were offered options of frequency and time of day for their regular calls. On average, one weekly check in all was preferred and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes in length. Nearly 30 additional community members reached out to the line to volunteer for

a future activation. As the cadre of volunteers through Hospice of Santa Barbara was abundant, community volunteers were not needed, but reinforced not only the value of seniors receiving calls, but the desire of the community to be connected and engaged in a manner of helping.

Replicability:

The Senior Holiday Phone Bridge Program can easily be replicated for other holidays or seasons of the year, within Santa Barbara County, or in another county. Within Santa Barbara County, a list of community members interested in serving as voluntary callers has been retained. If there is an interest in replicating in another county, outreach flyers, press release or database is available to be shared. This program was a great success and easy to be replicated.

Program Contact:

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OPTIONAL SUBMISSION:

Letter to Seniors [English](#) [Spanish](#)

[Holiday Phone Bridge Program Flyer](#) (English/Spanish)