

**Annual Report FY 2024**

**Annual Town Meeting, Spring 2024**

**Prepared and submitted by Betsy Kelly, Senior Outreach Coordinator, April 2024**

**SUMMARY**

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 SOC position is now an 18 hour/week employee position with another 3-4 hours per week as a contract worker for her work on the Community Connect email. The SOC reaches out to seniors in River Forest: connects them 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 Oak Park and River Forest Townships to 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 SOC provides a vital role in getting older adults 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). Although, she is piloting a HomeSharing Program which will be a bit of a different role, in terms of matching older adults with other adults who are looking for more affordable housing. *Refer to the FY2024 Annual Report from Township Senior Services Director Pamela Mahn for details on the direct service programs provided from the main office and the number of River Forest residents served.*

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).**

**I. Continued Progress with Programming, Including HomeSharing Pilot; Collaboration with Government and other Groups; and Outreach**

In addition to the new initiatives in FY 2024 described above, the SOC focused on three traditional areas: Programming initiatives 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, and to foster friendship and educational enrichment for the older adults.

(Gather-Discover-Engage includes Coffee Monday, Craft and Chat, Film Lover Fridays)

**a. Total No. of Jointly Funded Programs FY 2024=**

Gather- Discover-Engage\* = 34

CSAYL = 31

**b. Total Attendees FY 2024=**

Gather-Discover- Engage\*\*= 246

CSAYL = 733

**Gather-Discover-Engage:**

**Craft and Chat\*:** People have to sign up in advance to get a spot. This is currently offered on a quarterly basis and because it is so popular will be offered every other month in **FY2025**.

**Adult Coloring Club:** Was discontinued because it was not popular Games was temporarily added for a short time, but did not get much traction either.

**Film Lovers Friday:** gets about 4-10 folks; small crowd, but worthwhile program.

**Coffee Mondays:** has between 6-12 folks attending (SOC is trying to increase the numbers by posting flyers in buildings) Some of the talks this year: Compassion and Choices/End of Life Options Coalition; CUB (Citizens Utility Board), Downsizing, Medicare Fraud and Scams, Medicare and prescription drug changes, Crime Prevention, Cantata Adult Life Services and their Take2 Program (creative in home care), Center for Disability and Elder Law(CDEL), Triton College (RSVP and LifeLong Learning Programs), Supportive Living for older adults)

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

Most popular programming: OP/RF Gangster Talk got a large Crowd [*although he ended up not sharing a lot and encouraged people to take his tour*] (70); Portrayals of famous people, Talk about famous women comedians (because tied in with a book program through library), Cooking Demonstrations, Steve Darnall (Radio) and Music performances get a large crowd.

**Yoga\***: good turnout seems to be 13-20 folks; they need to register. Seems like it would be nice to have 2x/month, but the library feels 1x/month is good.

*\*Both Yoga and Craft and Chat are popular and are the only programs you need to register for in advance.*

## 2. Other Programming Provided by RF Township

- **Celebrating Seniors Week** went well, but required a lot of SOC's time; Besides nominating a lot of the honorees, a lot of time was spent editing and organizing the 60 over 60 nominations (finding seniors, editing narratives and working with the CSW folks to make sure everyone was contacted, pictures received and posted, so Nomination page looked consistent). CSW group seemed to be spread thin and things seemed to be a bit rushed at the end. Many programs overlapped, which wasn't always so beneficial. SOC planned events with River Forest Park District, the Library, OP Township and local community groups (Elevate PT, Fire Dept) . We also opened up Mahjong and SOC offered an educational session on HomeSharing. SOC also updated the list of all the Seniors that have been honored over the years, so we don't ask people who have already been nominated. Helped coordinate the Super Senior Event since OP Township was down staff.
- **HomeSharing Pilot:** SOC has the forms ready, potential background check org., and has met with various groups doing homesharing. SOC has also met with a few older adults inquiring about homesharing, as a "host" or potential "guest". Hosts were either not ready, not a fit for the program (ie. needed more care or had other guests in their home) or had second thoughts, concerned about personal space. There are more folks, all ages, looking for more affordable housing("guests"); SOC needs to spend more time doing outreach looking for "Hosts"; possibly having an event where people who are doing homesharing talk about their experiences, to normalize; SOC will highlight more in the Township Email and distribute flyers at different locations; Hopefully we can make a few matches in the coming year. It would be nice to work closely with a housing organization, so people can get on other waiting lists. **Age Friendly River Forest**, a temporary Commission through the Village did a survey (2023) showing that older adults want to age in place and would consider adding an Accessory Dwelling Unit (25%) or would share a room with someone (24%) [See survey [here](#); starts on page 6: go to p.31 of the survey or p.36 on website to see Housing Section] SOC and Supervisor have met with the Village or answered questions about HomeSharing on several occasions. (partially due to change of staff) to confirm that this program follows zoning and safety rules. Village does not seem to be fully onboard.

- The Township offers **Mahjong** every Thursday from 1- 3pm. We continue to have a group of players coming in on Thursdays. We have a core group of about 12-16 folks attend regularly and have formed close relationships getting together outside of Mahjong as well. (for arts and crafts events, line dancing at Triton, volunteering) They reach out to each other when someone misses a class to check in. They also love their teacher Liz Ziehl, but when she is not able to come they now know how to play and can teach new players. We had a luncheon catered by Opportunity Knocks to celebrate the new year and hope to do this again in the future. One of the women started volunteering with Opportunity Knocks as well.
- **Pickleball** is offered at the RFCC for older adults through a collaboration with the River Forest Park District. This is very popular and the Park District oversees this program (Kelly Frank) Last year when this started SOC was told from some interested older adults that it is mostly for current players and not beginners (beginners don't always feel welcome). SOC spoke with the teacher and Director of Programming and they said they would make sure to offer beginner classes as well.
- **Oak Park River Forest Township:** The Benefits Counselors started to come to our office on Wednesdays in May to offer assistance to RF Seniors, but due to staff turnover they had to cancel. (Prior to COVID SHIP Counselors came out from the township to help with Medicare questions, but due to staff issues this stopped being offered). (SHIP Counselors often have a waiting list, so RF Township reached out to other Medicare/Insurance folks to help answer Medicare questions)
- **LOSS** continues to meet at RFCC. Cathaleen Roach, the past SOC is involved with this group and has said there is a real need for this and the numbers joining the group are increasing.

## **B. Objective 2: Ongoing Initiatives (incl. with Local Government and Other Entities):**

**River Forest Public Library:** see above.

**Age Options:** had speakers come to our Coffee Mondays to talk about Medicare and Senior Benefits; Also SOC spreads the word about their services and legislative breakfasts.

**Oak Park Township:** SOC volunteered at a couple of their Holiday Luncheons. The Township Continues to offer great programming- some with waiting lists. The SOC attends monthly Senior Committee meetings as the RF Township liaison; The SOC provides information for their quarterly News and Views; SOC continues to spread the word about services, programs and volunteer opportunities. SOC also participated in the Intergenerational RFP process. Benefits

Counselors from Oak Park Senior Services provided counseling at our office on Wednesdays for a few months and they organized the Super Senior/Secretary of State Event during Celebrating Senior Week, hosted by the River Forest Township and RFCC.

The SOC connected the Township with Tocarra Danials (who does Silver Sneaker Programming in the area) who started to offer A Zumba Gold Class this year at the Oak Park location (due to limited space at the RFCC) The OP Township was able to offer the program through a grant, so they did not have to go through the Silver Sneaker Program. (This is a popular class because the teacher already had a large following. Laura Valcour, the Programming Director is offering a lot of great programming: Pathways to Health Programming (ie. Tai Chi for Arthritis), Line Dancing (teacher from Triton) and Painting Classes (teacher from Slow Fire Ceramics) and continues to offer Bingo.

**North West Housing Partnership (NWHP):** The Townships and Villages partner with NWHP for our repair program and CAPABLE programs. SOC posts flyers at Buildings with large numbers of seniors (NORCS) about their programs; continues to advertise in emails. They have and will continue to speak at Coffee Mondays about their repair and CAPABLE programs. (they spoke at the Oak Park Township location during their “lunch and learn” and Celebrating Seniors Week)

**Village of River Forest:** The Village continues to publicize our programming in their e-news, although nothing yet about HomeSharing. The Township collaborates with them and North West Housing Partnership for our Home Repair and CAPABLE programs. The Age Friendly Commission completed their report about the older adults in River Forest, which mentioned collaborating with the township around Housing initiatives. SOC had discussions with them while working on the report.

**RF Fire Department:** We have been in touch and will continue to spread the word about ICE Packets. The Township supported them at an ICE Packet Event at the Celebrating Senior Event at the Sheridan. They also spoke at a Coffee Monday about Home Safety.

**RF Police:** Officer Ransom and Officer Megan Drake presented at our Coffee Monday on Frauds and SCAMS and safety. Moving forward Megan Drake is our Senior Safety Officer.

**LOSS:** continues to meet at the River Forest Community Center every 3rd Monday; The previous SOC helps host these meetings for families and friends who lost someone to suicide.

**Grief/Support Groups:** SOC publicized Grief Support Groups through Grace Lutheran and Grief Share as well as the Support Groups that the Township Offers (including Memory Cafe).

**Triton:** SOC continues to reach out to the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) to help publicize their volunteer opportunities as well as their Tax Counseling service and SOC also spreads the word on their Life Enrichment Classes and dining programs. Triton spoke at two of our Coffee Mondays.

**Other River Forest Colleges:** The Township and Dominican School of Social work offered a 4 week Reminiscing Class to Older Adults in the community. SOC participated in a focus group with Concordia to discuss upcoming potential classes/offerings to older adults. As mentioned above, SOC spreads the word about programming, classes, volunteering opps and dining programs at Triton.

**Arbor West Neighbors (AWN):** SOC continues to partner with AWN on the Community Connect Mail she sends out (paid half time from RF Township and volunteer hours for AWN) She is still in close contact with the group and was on the Advocacy Committee until recently. SOC let's people know about Arbor West Neighbors if they want to make connections or get more involved in the community. She posts their events in her emails.

**The Sheridan:** RF Township receives money from the Sheridan (\$10,000/ year Impact Fee was promised to the Township during development of building) This year the money went to our mailing as well as toward a new Senior Van. (going forward the money will also go to funding home repair/accessibility projects around RF seniors homes that the Repair Program is not able to do) SOC has met with staff at the Sheridan for different programming, but there seems to be a lot of turnover and because of this staff is very busy.

**Forest Park Cultural Trips and Programs/Mohr Center:** SOC continues to spread the word about their events/trips in her emails. She attended their yearly Health Fair to let community members know about Community Connect Mail as well as Township Services open to other communities (including Mahjong, Dole Center Active Adult Program and Library events)

**Park District of Oak Park/Dole Center:** Continue to spread the word about their programming, specifically Dole Centers Active Adult Program, open to older adults in neighboring communities. They are currently hosting the Bridge players that used to come to RFCC; the group had very specific guidelines of when they were able to play and the RFCC did not have the availability for the full three hours due to other programming in the building. Bridge group will move to America House in Oak Park.

**River Forest Park District:** We partner with the park district to offer pickleball at the River Forest Community Center. We also collaborated with them for programming during Celebrating Senior Week. Our Mental Health Administrator's mom is now teaching classes (Meditation and Drumming) at the Depot.

**Celebrating Seniors Coalition:** (see above) SOC did a lot this year around Celebrating Seniors Week. The group was very bare bones and needed a lot of help with the 60 over 60 organizing. She also helped with the Super Senior/DMV Event. The Oak Park Township Senior Services office had some turnover. She continued to partner with the Park District, Fire Dept. and the Sheridan as well as the Library for programming. We also offered Mahjong and the SOC reached out to Elevate Physical Therapy to do a Fall Prevention event and she held a Q &A for those interested in HomeSharing.

**Opportunity Knocks:** Opportunity Knocks is just down the hallway from River Forest Township and SOC posts volunteer opportunities with them and this year they catered a luncheon we had for the Mahjong group. One of our players has also started to volunteer with them.

**Senior Citizen Services Coordinated Council (SCSCC):** SOC and supervisor are members of this group. It is mainly a networking group for people to let others know about the services they provide to older adults.(mostly for profit groups) SOC occasionally attends their monthly meetings. They have a resource guide with everyone's information which has been useful.

**Dementia Friendly Group:** Disbanded: There used to be a group that met regularly during COVID (Lydia Manning who was at Concordia at the Team lead the meetings) to talk about Dementia Friendly initiatives in RF, but this is no longer meeting. (last year they did a couple of trainings in the community)

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

- SOC's prime source of outreach is through the **River Forest Township Monthly email** (sent to over 700 older adults (70+ more from last year) with a 70-75% open rate) and **Community Connect Email** (sent to 658 (150+ from last year) with a 60-70% open rate) These emails are sent out via Constant Contact letting people know about township programs as well as other programs taking place in the area.
- Our **website** was updated in November of 2023 and SOC worked with webdesigner to input all the Senior Services information. This will be ongoing.
- We sent out a **mailing** to all River Forest residents in January 2024 to make people aware of programming through Senior Services. (this has been in the works for quite a while knowing that residents (from various surveys) were not aware of Township Services.
- SOC Continued outreach to buildings with a high number of older adults living in them. Have contacts in buildings to help post flyers etc. Distributes flyers about programming at the township, library and village.

- SOC continues to reach out to various buildings to see if they are interested in learning about township services. Besides posting flyers, SOC has offered to come talk about services the township provides.
- River Forest Township participated in the **LemonAid** Event this year. Chris Hauri asked us to host the Conversation Station in front of her house where older adults can come sit and converse. We had a booth with our information. (We did get some foot traffic, but there was no “Conversation Station” due to rain); but we hope to continue to participate next year.
- The **Nineteenth Century Charitable Association** asked SOC to speak at one of their events with AWN, specifically about the Community Connect Mail she sends out.
- Met with Cantata Adult Services in Brookfield to learn more about their innovative HomeCare Program (spread the word to RF buildings) about this as an option.
- SOC continues to include information in the Townships Quarterly **News and Views**.
- SOC continues to prepare senior packets for Township Assessor.
- River Forest Township Supervisor forwards information to the Village of River Forest to include in their E-news.
- The SOC works with the adult librarian at the River Forest Library to plan programming throughout the year. She is in charge of getting speakers for Coffee Mondays, the first Monday of the month.
- Receive ongoing calls from the community providing consultation and directing older adults to the appropriate person at the Township office or other resources when necessary, whether it is a question about transportation, housing, support groups, ICE Packets, volunteering or something else.
- Staffed a table at **Mohr Center’s** (Forest Park) Health Fair to spread the word about Community Connect Mail as well as River Township Services and other services open to Forest Park Residents (including spreading the word about the Park District of Oak Park’s Active Adult Program, open to all communities)
- **HomeSharing Outreach:** Received a few inquiries from “Hosts” but either they are not ready, don’t have the space, or it is not a good fit, based on their needs. Many more potential “guests” are looking for a place to live. The Community of Congregations



continues to post our HomeSharing flier in their emails. Met with Senior Home Share (Sarah White) in Lombard to learn about their programming (more of a group home setting, but they are interested in homesharing similar to our pilot as well); Met with the New HomeShare Person (Valerie Ross) at Pathlights to talk about their programming; met with Sharing Home Group consisting of different people that have home shared in some capacity; attended a HomeSharing Coalition group in California, different organizations doing a lot of great things around homesharing. Advertise in emails, RF mailing as well as website and flier distribution.

## II. New (Programming) Initiatives in FY2024:

- SOC targeted Senior Buildings that have a lot of older adults in them by going through all the PINS from the Assessor's Office. SOC could also see where the older adults live throughout the community. This will be helpful when distributing information to buildings and to determine how many older adults live in their own homes for homesharing. She also made a contact or two in each building to help post information.
- As mentioned above, we were asked to participate in the **LemonAid Fundraiser** this year and the plan is that RF Township/Senior Services will continue to be part of LemonAid going forward. They wanted us to host a Conversation Station, for older adults to come and relax and converse (in Chris Hauri's yard)
- **Reminiscing Project with Dominican University.** Dominican's School of Social Work did a 4 week Reminiscing program with older adults from the community. It was mostly older adults reminiscing and students asking questions. Overall older adults were pleased with the program and planned to continue writing/telling their stories. (Memoir Writing is always a popular program and often offered through Arbor West Neighbors)
- **OP Township Senior Services Benefits Counselors** started to come in on Wednesdays Unfortunately this ended after a couple months because they were short staffed.
- Annese Piazza, a Medicare Specialist, worked with River Forest Township when there was a long wait to see a SHIP Counselor during open enrollment. She is a member of the community who worked with Supervisor and past SOC and is committed to sharing unbiased information with older adults.
- SOC met with Op Township Senior Services Director and new Committee Chairs of the Senior Services Committee to talk about their plans for the upcoming year.

- Met with the Senior Services and Youth Services Committees to review Intergenerational RFP. Only one group applied for the grant and it was not a well thought out proposal. The plan is that next years RFP will have specific expectations/requirements and a concrete definition of what is considered an Intergenerational Program. More time will be spent on outreach as well.
- SOC Introduced Tocarra Daniels, a Silver Sneaker Zumba Instructor to OP Township Program Coordinator. Currently Township is paying for classes.
- Mahjong continues and is going strong; very nice friendships forming and folks are doing things together outside of Mahjong- other activities, trips, shows etc; looking after each other when someone doesn't show up. (unfortunately one of our Mahjong players passed away in March)
- We got our Mailing out to all RF Residents. This was in the works for quite a while, so we are happy to finally let the community know what services we offer to older adults in River Forest.
- As mentioned above as well, we have a new website that is up and running and SOC worked on the Senior Section.
- Arbor West Neighbors (AWN): Continue to spread the word about AWN Meetups and their programs that are open to the community. Spoke with members of AWN at the 19th Century Club and was part of AWN's Housing advocacy group until recently.
- Opportunity Knocks hosted a luncheon the Mahjong group had to ring in the new year and one of our members is now volunteering with them. We will make sure we continue this partnership.
- Attended Mohr Centers Health Fair to spread the word about our programming and partnerships open to those outside of River Forest (Mahjong, Dole Center Active Adult Program) and Community Connect Email.

### **III. Future Programming/Initiatives**

- Coordinating an Event in May with the River Forest Fire Dept., the Sheridan and Elevate Physical Therapy to talk about Home Safety, Fall Prevention and distribute ICE Packets.
- Update current **College Brochure** about the offerings at Dominican, Triton and Concordia (since things are always changing) (also include on our website)

- **SHIP Counselors** will be starting back this April and will come out 1-2 Fridays/month.
- Plan a **Housing Tour**, specifically around creative housing options, like ADU's, and 2-4 flats in OP and RF in partnership with Arbor West Neighbors in the Fall. (talk about needed zoning changes in River Forest) (Following up on housing forum and Village survey)
- **HomeSharing:** SOC will continue to do outreach! And be more targeted (talk to local realtors, outreach to individual congregations) Hope to have 1-3 matches this year. Once we have one homeshare in the works we will confirm we have the best "background check" company (currently planning to go with American Apartment Owners Association through recommendation from another HomeShare program- Impact money from the Sheridan will go towards this) SOC will plan a talk at the library and post more flyers and distribute around town.
- Do more outreach to older adults who have not downsized; Connect with the Village (Trustee Vasquez) regarding the Age Friendly survey and work together to help older adults age in place, with homesharing being a possible option for some. Work in collaboration with Oak Park Regional Housing Center, OPRF Township Senior Services and NW Housing Partnership to help residents age in their community.
- Use **Emergency Funding** Money as well as **Impact Money** from the Sheridan (impact money will be used for background checks for HomeSharing) Supervisor said that Emergency funding can also be used toward making seniors homes more accessible. (ie. to cover what North West Housing Partnership cannot from Home Repair and CAPABLE programs) It is clear that people want to age in place (whether making their home more accessible, modifying their home by creating an ADU or possibly homesharing).
- If there is time over the summer, SOC may do a final project with Professor Julie Bach from **Dominican University School of Social Work** before she retires this year. She would like to do another Intergenerational Program with her students. SOC suggested having an Intergenerational Panel, a discussion across the generations to see our commonalities, interests, concerns and how we can work together.
- Will confirm that River Forest Township is doing the *Conversation Station* at **LemonAid** again this year.
- Will continue to have **Opportunity Knocks** cater future events and spread the word about volunteer opportunities with them.

- Schedule more meetings at Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCS) [River Forest does not have senior buildings, (besides the Sheridan)] with NW Housing Partnership to get the word out about their wonderful programs (as well as the other township programming) and the creative homecare/share program through Cantata (Take2) The main OPRF Senior Services office is in discussion with Cantata too (trying to make the cost more affordable) [where people in the same building can share a caregiver/home health aide]
- Pickleball and Mahjong will continue [bridge moved to the Dole Center and I believe in the new year will be moving to America House in Oak Park]
- Continue to Spread the word in my emails and when I talk to local seniors about all the Township has to offer, Dole Center/Active Adult Programming, both Libraries programming, Arbor West Neighbors (AWN) Meetups and other programming, 19th Century Clubs offerings, Mohr Centers trips and Exercise Programs, Roos Center
- Celebrating Seniors Week will not be happening this May due to not enough help.
- SOC also realizes she has to be realistic about what she can do with the limited amount of time job permits. Priorities will be ongoing partnerships/collaborations, HomeSharing Pilot and monthly and bi-monthly emails. Supervisor knew that SOC took the position because she wanted to focus on HomeSharing and Affordable housing.