

# ORGANIZATION:

Iowa Department on Aging in partnership with Heritage Area Agency on Aging



## LINN COUNTY INNOVATIONS IN NUTRITION PROGRAM

### ABOUT US

The Iowa Department on Aging strives to improve the quality of life and care of older Iowans through advocacy, planning, policy development and the administration and support of statewide programs and services that promote health, safety and long-term independence.

The Heritage Agency has been a department of Kirkwood Community College since 1973 and was designated by the Iowa Department on Aging to serve Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn and Washington counties. Heritage serves people age 60 and above as well as their families, communities, and governments. In addition, The Heritage Agency serves as an Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) serving adults 18 years of age and older with a disability through advocacy and options counseling.

### PROJECT PURPOSE

To develop an innovative, replicable service delivery model for congregate meals titled “Encore Café.” This café concept was designed to encourage older adults to participate in congregate meal programs. In particular, the project aimed to attract the younger sub-population of older adults called “Baby Boomers” who had a smaller percentage of participation in recent years.

### PROJECT LENGTH

- Two years

### KEY PARAMETERS

- **Population targeted:** Age 60 and older, persons at risk of hospital readmission, and/or malnutrition
- **Geographic setting:** Urban and rural
- **Service Delivery Setting:** Congregate nutrition program
- **Services offered:** Meal services, culinary demonstrations, nutrition education and wellness activities
- **Number of staff/FTEs dedicated to innovation project:**
  - Total number of dedicated staff: two paid FTE, one in-kind FTE Staffing Model (paid/unpaid, FTEs):**
    - One FTE Health & Wellness Coordinator to coordinate evidence-based and non-evidence-based health activities
    - One 0.5 FTE Encore Café Coordinator to manage the daily operations of the meal sites
    - One 0.5 FTE meal site coordinator for one Encore Café location
    - One FTE for volunteer labor (achieved through 12 volunteers)
- **Total grant funds received:** \$250,000
- **Total project period:** Two years (2017 – 2019)
- **Total funding leveraged from organization (cash/in-kind):** \$151,896 (State funding) project based on executed agreements

## PROJECT COMPONENTS

Congregate nutrition program site locations for this project were in a mix of rural and urban areas and included a community center, church, parks and recreation center, and a public library.

## SUCSESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

### Collaboration with New Partners

- The local grocery store used for catering had not previously worked with nutritional guidelines, and the staff had some difficulties adhering to the guidelines. Technical assistance (TA) to overcome barriers to adherence included TA from the Iowa Department on Aging and the purchase of food processor nutrition analysis software. Monthly meetings between the Heritage Agency on Aging and front-line staff helped to ensure successful project implementation.

### Contending with unanticipated client demand/participation

- Encore Café attendance exceeded original expectations. Therefore, the project team had to make adjustments to ensure that the food and beverage supply was sufficient to meet the demand and still fall within the project budget. Feedback and suggestions from volunteers helped to make these necessary adjustments by reducing unnecessary food and beverage waste. For example, volunteers observed that a large amount of coffee was wasted when each table had a pitcher of coffee and they suggested pouring the coffee table-side. Not only did this cut down on waste, but it also enhanced participant experience.

### Managing client expectations

- As the Encore Café popularity grew, participants began to expect the pilot to operate just like a restaurant. Sometimes participants wouldn't make reservations, wanted to take meals to-go, and wanted certain menu items offered. To help manage participant expectations, Encore Café developed and distributed a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) document to existing participants and were included the document in the new participant welcome packets. The FAQ explains: why reservations are recommended; how walk-ins are accommodated; and, explains the purpose of the café as a "pop-up" to provide an opportunity for older adults to socialize, in addition to enjoying nutritious meals; and, explains why "to go" meals are not an available option. Focus groups and listening sessions were also held to discuss concerns and improve programming.

## PROJECT IMPACT

- The innovation project made substantial impact on Heritage Area Agency on Aging, the participating communities, and the service region. The project impacted many older lowans through the grant cycle by increasing food access to at-risk older adults, increasing access to health education, and improving community resources for older adults by opening four congregate meal site locations with evidence-based programming. The Encore Café addresses systemic issues in traditional congregate meal programs in order to bridge the gap for younger and older generations of older adults. Modernizing nutrition programming is imperative for the sustainability of congregate meal programs.

### Increasing access to nutrition services

- Prior to the grant, the existing Central City location served 2,703 meals in FY2017. During grant year one, 6,908 meals were served in three pilot sites. During grant year two, 10,440 meals were served in four pilot sites— representing a 66% increase in meals served over year one and a 208% increase in meals served from pre-project implementation.
- While the initial proposed grant application was limited to three locations, a fourth location was opened due to client demand, successful community support and collaborations from the City of Marion and other community partners.
- Over the course of the project, 708 participants were provided 19,693 pounds of supplemental food and produce, and referrals to Heritage Agency on Aging services.

## Marketing and outreach

- In total, four billboard advertisements were donated, 34 news stories aired on local television stations, one feature article was printed in the regional newspaper, weekly menus were printed in two local newspapers, and one ValPak mailed advertisement reached 50,000 residents.

## PROJECT IMPACT

### Local community support

- An in-kind match of \$118,298 was generated from several small businesses, the City of Marion, and the catering department of the local grocery store. Additionally, 12 volunteers contributed to \$33,593 of in-kind volunteer labor. The total of \$151,896 of in-kind support surpassed initial expectations, and all partners pledged to continue support past the grant.

### Voluntary contribution rates

- Prior to project implementation, Heritage Agency on Aging's average contribution rate was \$2.25 per meal. During the course of the project, the average contribution rate per site averaged \$3.90 per meal in year one and increased to \$3.95 per meal in year two representing a 76% average increase in contributions per meal. This increase allowed Heritage Agency on Aging to reserve Older American Act funds for other meal sites and innovations.

## ADVICE FOR PEERS

It is recommended that organizations allow for flexibility and be prepared for unanticipated changes - both successes and challenges. During the course of project implementation, there were many changes that weren't originally planned for in the development of the grant project. For example, in response to unanticipated success and participant demand, a fourth pilot site location was opened and the local YMCA became a partner for evidence-based programs. Without flexibility, these successful community partnerships wouldn't have developed, and fewer consumers would have been served.

