The Loneliness Initiative

Organization Name

Adult Enrichment Centers

City, State

Rock Hill, SC

Brief Description

The Loneliness Initiative is a card-making program for neurodiverse and older adults.

Intervention Type

- Arts and Creative Expression

Population Served

- Older Adults

- Adults Living with Disability

Geographic Population Served

- Rural

- Urban

Organization Type

- Other Community-Based Organization

Partners Involved

- Arts groups

- Caregiver groups

- Faith-based organizations

- Senior centers

- Housing provider/Senior housing

Funding Source

- Foundation/private grant

Description

Program Description

Through the Loneliness Initiative, neurodiverse adults and older adult program participants create cards for homebound older adults. The Adult Enrichment Centers partnered with local faith-based and state agencies to identify 250 isolated homebound older adults to receive the cards. Creating the cards is a multi-day process that involves planning, drawing and painting, selecting cards to be reproduced, adding messages to the cards, and mailing or delivering them.

Older adults who receive the cards like knowing that they are being thought of, and members who create the cards enjoy helping others. The Loneliness Initiative also hosted three in-person parties for participants to meet.

Partners

By partnering with a local Presbyterian church, the program received a list of homebound older adults who consented to receive cards and notes. The Council on Aging also provides a list of older adults receiving Meals on Wheels who may be isolated and alone. The Rock Hill Housing Authority provided similar lists and allowed the program to host in-person events.

Outcomes

Neurodiverse members participating in this program benefit by gaining a sense of purpose, improved mental health, and additional practice with their art skills. The praise from participants also confirms that the program is fully achieving its goal of ensuring people are seen and remembered. Following the program's success, the program added an additional 50 older adults to the mailing list. Staff are also adding holiday plans to the program in 2024.

Lessons Learned

Create and procedurally maintain an updated database with names and addresses of recipients. Preparing premade art cards that can be used if art projects do not turn out as a backup is helpful. Program administrators should be prepared to assist participants

with writing or using stamps. The number of artists participating and number of people receiving cards should be measured as outcomes. The program may be expanded to include birthday cards, sympathy cards for families who lose a loved one, and get-well cards for illness or hospitalization.

Resources Needed

To operate a program like the Loneliness Initiative, it is important to develop relationships with other organizations (e.g., Area Agencies on Aging) to obtain lists of lonely or isolated older adults and receive consent to share their contact information. Necessary supplies include paper and art supplies, such as pencils, watercolors, markers, stamps, and ink; envelopes; and stamps. Staff time is also needed to work with artists and manage the program.

Contact Information

For more information on this program, contact: Samantha Kriegshauser, CEO, Adult Enrichment Centers (Rock Hill, SC) at samanthak@aecenters.org.