

MINUTES
COMMISSION ON AGING
Virtual

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

Present: Frances Bond, Don Gabriel, Natasha Iheme, Jim Lightner, Lou Marino, Roy Moreland, Mabel Murray, Marlene Siegel, Sherita Thomas

Absent: Lisa Budlow, Fred Murphy, Al Muehlberger, Sheila Roman

Staff: Donna Bilz, Dayna Brown, Kim High, Phyllis Myers, Laura Riley

Public: Will Feuer

I. Start Time – 9:05 a.m.

II. General Update – Chair

- COA meetings will continue to have BCDA updates on what the department is accomplishing and what the focus is; Employee Spotlight will continue as well.
- COA members were asked to reach out to Laura or Dayna if they have suggested topics or speakers for BCDA events and programs.
- COA members are to send suggested Agenda items or topics to Phyllis at least 2 weeks prior to a meeting. They could be placed on the agenda for the next meeting or a future meeting.

III. Approval of the Agenda and Minutes

- Agenda and Minutes approved as submitted

IV. BCDA Employee Spotlight

Donna Bilz, Program Coordinator, Senior Centers

- Donna oversees the evidence-based programs for BCDA.
- “Stepping On”- this class meets for seven weeks, 2 days a week, 3 times per year; the class empowers older adults to carry out health behaviors that help to reduce the risk of falls, improve self-management and increase their quality of life.

- Guest experts are invited and they include: an expert on vision, pharmacist to talk about medication, a police officer to discuss pedestrian safety, physical therapist, shoe expert from Van Dyke and Bacon, a hearing loss expert.
- “Move with Balance” - this class aims to improve balance and brain function; a chair-based class done by coordinated movement activities that are combined with movements and cognitive skills. These 1 hour classes meet 2 times a week for 12 weeks. The goal is to strengthen the integration of sensory, motor and vestibular systems in order to decrease the fear of falling, prevent falls and increase safe participation in daily activities.
- “Tai Chi Quan” - this class also meets 2 times a week for 12 weeks and emphasizes weight shifting, postural alignment, coordinated movements, and synchronized breathing. Tai Chi movements help with balance and strengthening.
- “Enhanced Fitness” – this class meets 3 times per week for 12 weeks. It is a group type exercising class using soft ankle and wrist weights while participants interact socially.
- “Bingocize” – a 10 week class with 3 different modules – nutrition, exercise and fall prevention - played as a bingo game, participants get health information, learn about falls prevention and nutrition.
- “Fit and Strong” – the class meets 3 times per week for 8 weeks and is a 90 minute class developed for those with osteoarthritis. Participants exercise for 60 minutes and participate in a group discussion for 30 minutes.
- In addition to the Falls Prevention Program classes Donna also manages Chronic Disease Self-Management classes.
- Classes are free, but donations are suggested.

Kim High, Occupational Therapist

- Kim oversees the Senior Home Safety Services programs which includes in-home safety assessments, falls prevention and the Baltimore County Age-Friendly Upgrades for Seniors (BCAUSE), the home modification and home repair program.
- The difference between physical therapy and occupational therapy is physical therapy focuses on the lower extremities and occupational therapy focus on the upper extremities.
- In Home Safety Assessment – as seniors want to remain in their homes and age in place, there could be some decline in their functional abilities. An assessment is performed to provide people with resources, interventions to help maintain a level of safety to remain independently

and safely in their home. Kim's role is to look at the home's environment to see if their medical condition is having an impact and she makes recommendations based on her findings.

- Fall Prevention Program – cluttered homes, or low functioning motor skills can cause falls in older adults. This program looks at ways to help reduce the risk of falls such as adding hand rails or grab bars throughout the house, getting rid of area rugs and adding equipment to transfer in and out of the shower safely. Based on the assessment, Kim may refer clients to Donna's programs.
- BCause – the program assists older adult homeowners with minor home repairs and modifications to their home to improve their safety and quality of life. Participants have to be a Baltimore County resident and homeowner age 65 years or older and they have to meet certain income requirements. The 4 partner agencies that actually perform the work are Civic Works, Dundalk Renaissance, CHAI and Rebuilding Together. They repair things such as windows, flooring, roofs and heating and air conditioning units. There is currently over 200 people on the waiting list.

V. Old Business

- COA will continue to focus on being advocates for the Department of Aging and supporters of the work, be educated on the programming and be a voice for our constituents, continue to visit Centers and share what is learned and provide feedback.

VI. 2022 BCDA Events and Projects

- 2022 BCDA initiative – “Cultivating a Brighter Tomorrow”
- It is an extension of 2021's “Rooted in Resilience”
- BCDA has formed a Committee to begin planning events and monthly topics for the new initiative
- Ethel Rasmussen will be starting work on the Senior Solutions Conference soon and will be sending emails to find out if anyone is interested in being on the planning committee.
- Due to the rise in COVID-19 cases and BCDA staffing shortages, also because of COVID-19, senior centers are closed again and will be re-opening on January 31, 2022. At one point Baltimore County had a 38% positivity rate, but it is now down to 18%.
- The annual Volunteer Recognition will be held this year in combination with the Concert in the Park event.
- Planning to have Expo in person at the Fairgrounds this year. The COA will be asked for ideas when planning starts.

VII. New Business

- Marlene and Mabel would like BCDA, in collaboration with the COA, to develop a presentation or workshop that helps seniors understand what to expect when a repairman is called.
- It was suggested to possibly get a list with recommended repairmen or companies. Sherita suggested the Maryland Better Business Bureau because BCDA is a government agency and it may not be legal to endorse specific companies.

VIII. BCDA Staffing Update

- BCDA vacancies include Human Resources Analyst, Center Connection Specialists, Maryland Access Point Supervisor, and Tutoring Program Coordinator.
- Staff that are soon to be leaving – Innie Neun from Overlea, Julie Lynn from Bykota and Sara Shanklin from the Ombudsman office.
- Dayna encouraged COA members to have anyone they know that is looking for a job to visit the Baltimore County website.

IX. Director's Updates

- BCDA staff is back to teleworking. Staff will return when the Executive Order and/or Mask Mandate expires.
- There is mandatory weekly testing for all County employees who are not vaccinated.
- BCDA has been active in handing out at-home COVID-19 test kits to anyone who needs one. They were done via drive thru at various senior centers. They can also be picked up at Baltimore County Public Libraries. The County anticipates handing out 100,000 kits by the end of the month.
- The Legislative Session in Annapolis has begun. Dayna is the BCDA Liaison. Any COA member interested in seeing some of the Bills that effect older adults can contact Dayna for a list that is provided by the Maryland Association of Area Agencies on Aging.
- BCDA is supporting a Bill that is setting criteria for the next Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging which outlines looking for someone who has a background in Aging services and understands older adults and the Older Americans Act.
- BCDA is in the middle of the County budget process. Laura goes to the County Executive (CE) and asks for funding above last year's budget for

special projects. COA members can have their input by attending the CE's Town Hall meetings where the CE gives an update as to what is happening in the County and then he turns it into an open forum to allow residents to participate.

- BCDA has a new Digital Inclusion Coordinator, Vishnupriya Desai. Her background and Bachelor's degree is in Information Technology and she just recently got her Master's degree in Aging Services. She is working on finding funds to create classes for people who need digital education and is also working with the Baltimore County's Digital Inclusion committee. To date, BCDA has given away 140 tablets.

X. Meeting Adjourned at 10:20 a.m.