

**Waltham Connections for Healthy Aging**  
**Report on 2019-20**  
**12.10.19**

Waltham Connections for Healthy Aging has been working for almost three years to promote healthy aging in Waltham. We are a coalition of active older adults and public and private agencies serving Waltham seniors. We've been supported by a major grant from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation, other smaller grants, and contributions from local businesses. In terms of the WHO/AARP age-friendly framework, our priorities are inclusion, communication and information, social participation, civic engagement, nutrition, and access to services. Below we first describe this year's projects and activities and then share highlights of plans for 2020.

**Current projects and activities**

Food pantries in senior housing

After a year of pilots and planning, in March 2019 we launched monthly food deliveries to about 60 older adult residents of Waltham public housing. The pantries are a Connections collaboration of the Housing Authority, tenant leaders, the Greater Boston Food Bank, the Boston Area Gleaners, and the Council on Aging (CoA). On the second Tuesday of each month the Food Bank delivers palettes to the Grove Street housing site. They contain boxes of fresh fruit and vegetables and cheese plus two shopping bags of non-perishable items per participant. Volunteers and staff sort the items to the three sites, and Housing Authority trucks deliver to the Pine and Prospect Street sites. Some tenants retrieve their own food, and volunteers and staff deliver to those who can't do the pickup. With a \$5,000 grant from JF&CS we bought shopping bags, food for tenants not qualifying for the pantries, supplies suggested by tenants, and cabinets to hold the food and supplies. We also held community meals at three housing sites. Every week a food donation box at the CoA fills up, and this also helps stock the cabinets. We plan to continue the pantries in 2020 and to add a fourth site in the spring.

CoA Walking Club at Bentley

Connections has helped the CoA to grow its walking club through a collaboration with Bentley University. Late in 2017 Bentley opened its indoor track for senior walkers and the program soon moved to three mornings a week. A volunteer or staff member welcomes walkers and checks them in. So far, 260 seniors have walked with us. Average attendance is from 20 to 40 daily. If the track is closed due to bad weather or Bentley's need for the space, closing notices are sent out by the CoA's robo-call system. Since late 2018, we have held a Walk with a Doc program every other month to bring in an expert for a brief talk, Q&A, and walk with the expert. Speakers this year have included a specialist in GERD, a physiatrist, an oncologist, a nutritionist, and an expert in dementia-friendly services.

Translation of CoA monthly newsletters

In late 2018 JF&CS funded an eight-month pilot project to translate the CoA monthly newsletter into Spanish and Haitian Creole. In July 2019 the CoA acquired

State funds to continue the translations. The newsletters in all three languages are distributed by Connections volunteers and CoA staff to churches, agencies, businesses, and senior housing sites around the city.

### Inclusive parties

Sine 2017, Connections has held 7 social events aimed at inclusion of a cross section of Waltham seniors. This year we planned two large events at the CoA: a dance attended by 80 seniors with the Shriner's Swing Band in May, and a dinner for 150 seniors in the new parking lot in September. The Shriners brought expert dancers to demonstrate steps and then get seniors dancing. At the parking lot party, the Lions Club members grilled burgers and hot dogs, and music was supplied by a live jazz combo and a Latin DJ. CoA and Healthy Waltham staff worked with Connections volunteers to plan, set up, serve, and clean up. We reached out to immigrant, low-income and isolated seniors for both events.

### Latina outreach worker at the CoA

With grants from JF&CS (\$5,000) and Mt. Auburn Hospital (\$1,000), in November 2019 we hired a part-time Latina outreach worker/community organizer. She is an employee of Healthy Waltham (the grantee) but she reports to the CoA Director. Her job is to reach out to and connect with Latinx older adults, to bring them together to discuss and advocate for their needs, and to help develop programming and policy to respond to needs. She has already:

- Met with the Housing Authority about an informal needs assessment of Latinos in public housing,
- Started translating the CoA resource guide into Spanish,
- Set up hours two days a week at the CoA.
- Met with Springwell about help with SHINE and tax preparation in Spanish,
- Found an experienced teacher to offer Spanish classes for English speakers at the CoA and a bilingual volunteer to offer a CoA crafts class.
- Added Latino areas/markets to our newsletter distribution lists.
- Met with Connections' Latinx volunteers to discuss their views about her job.

We will introduce her to the community (in English and Spanish) in a Connections newsletter inserted in the CoA's January 2020 newsletter. Connections has developed an evaluation that will document the activities and impacts of the outreach worker.

### Communication and information

- Connections was invited to report on its inclusion efforts at the state-wide AARP conference at Holy Cross in June. We were one of three presentations to a room of about 50.
- Connections was featured on the Sally Collura's local cable TV show in June.
- Connections received the Sister Dorothy Cooper Award for Elder Services at the annual Neighbors Who Care dinner in November.
- A Thanksgiving local cable TV show on Food insecurity in Waltham featured the Connections senior food pantries.

## **New Initiatives for 2020**

Brandeis Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (BOLLI) class on Waltham history.  
Building on our ongoing work with BOLLI since 2017, Brandeis historian and BOLLI participant Dennis McCarthy will offer a 5-session BOLLI class on Waltham history at the CoA in spring 2020. This is the first time that BOLLI will offer a class off the Brandeis campus. We will reserve 15 of the 30 spaces for seniors who are not BOLLI members and not regular CoA participants. One goal will be to increase membership in BOLLI from Waltham. Cost will be \$75 with discounts available. The offering of the course was planned by staff from the CoA, BOLLI, and Healthy Waltham, working with Connections volunteer members of BOLLI.

### Senior Civic Academy

We plan to develop and offer a Waltham Senior Civic Academy to help Waltham older adults learn to be informed advocates. We've connected with the Age Strong Commission of Boston to learn from their three years of experience offering an academy. The curriculum helps seniors understand how government works, to meet public officials, and to encourage advocacy. We're in discussions with a possible funder.

### Waltham Healthy Aging Summit

The centerpiece of Connections' proposal for continuation funding from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation is a Waltham Healthy Aging Summit. To prepare for the summit we will help public and private agencies conduct self-assessments of policies and practices regarding healthy aging. We'll convene diverse older adults and agency representatives at the summit to discuss how we are doing as an aging friendly city and how we could do better. We have proposed hiring Haitian and Chinese outreach worker/organizers to bring these senior voices to the summit.