



**Calendar Year 2022 Annual Report  
Waltham Connections for Healthy Aging  
March 2023**

Waltham Connections

Waltham Connections for Healthy Aging (Connections) has been working with Waltham older adults, agencies, and officials for six years to make Waltham a better place for older people to live. We use a community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) approach that involves seniors in (1) gathering information about how Waltham does well and could do better to promote healthy aging, and (2) taking action on findings. Connections is not a legal entity. It operates as a program of Healthy Waltham, our fiscal agent. This report covers Connections activities in calendar year 2022, including brief summaries of activities leading into 2022 and inclusion of some early 2023 activities.

Summary of 2022

Much like those around us, Waltham Connections spent 2022 coming out of pandemic restrictions and getting into more face-to-face activities. Highlights included:

- The Waltham Healthy Aging Summit, held on May 20 at the CoA with 32 seniors and 16 agency staff. Action on immigrant outreach, intergenerational programs, and benches at bus stops were prioritized.
- Two more Welcome to the Digital Age (WDA) classes at the CoA – one in May-June and one in October-November, both with 12 learners.
- Hiring two new CoA outreach workers for immigrant seniors – a Latina in June and a Ugandan in September.
- Exploration of new intergenerational initiatives, leading to a partnership with the River School in Weston for a Sages and Seekers program to start in early 2023.
- Organizing support for benches at downtown bus stops, including presentations to the Waltham Disabilities Services Commission.
- Resumption in October of the CoA walking program three mornings a week at the Bentley fieldhouse, including plans to bring back the “Walk with a Doc” program.

We also acquired second years of funding on two Springwell grants that supported WDA and outreach. And we found and hired a new Program Manager.

### Funding/Support

The primary funding for Connections comes from our third grant from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation: \$100,000 for two years that started on July 1, 2020. With the uncertainties of the pandemic, Tufts has let us use the funds at our discretion, including going beyond two years. With grants from other sources (AARP, CHNA 18, Springwell) to help support activities since 2020, we have been able to preserve Tufts funds well beyond the two years. At the start of 2022, we had more than \$88,000 in Tufts funds available. As of the end of the year we still had \$63,000.

During 2021-2022 we had two Title III federal grants through Springwell: \$8,500 to support CoA outreach to immigrant communities and \$10,000 to support the WDA program. Both grants were renewed in October 2022 and now run through September 2023. We have used Tufts funds to meet matching requirements of the Title III grants.

The primary use of Tufts funds during the year was to support the Connections Program Managers, both of whom have been Brandeis Heller School Masters students. The first Manager, Elizabeth Letvin, graduated in the fall. She helped train the new Manager, Calah McQuarters, who started in September.

During 2023 we plan to explore continued funding for current programs (and perhaps new ones). If we are successful with new funding and continue to spend Tufts funds at the rate we did in 2022 (about \$25,000), we will have that funding through CY 2024.

### Management/Operations

Connections is led by a Coordinating Committee consisting of the CoA Director, Marybeth Duffy, the representative from our fiscal agent Healthy Waltham, Maria DiMaggio, four Waltham seniors (Kathy Kuhn, Betsy Leutz, Walter Leutz, and Laura San Juan), and our Program Manager. The CC meets every two to three weeks.

2022 was the first full year with the Program Manager position. The PM works about a day a week and has taken on a series of management and communications roles: organizing focus groups for the Summit, coordinating the Summit, helping with WDA enrollment, collecting and reporting performance data for the Title III grants, organizing the work and communication on benches, and scheduling and leading other meetings. The Manager has reduced the management time of senior volunteers.

### Programs

- The Summit

The purpose of the Waltham Healthy Aging Summit was to take stock of Connections' efforts to date, assess current needs, and bring together diverse seniors and agency staff to

discuss what to work on next. The Summit was in our original plans for our 2020 Tufts grant, but the pandemic delayed the start by a year.

To prepare for the Summit, in February and March we held seven listening sessions (focus groups) with a total of 87 Waltham seniors. Groups included seniors answering an announcement in the Council on Aging newsletter (one in English, one in Spanish), residents of the Mill Senior housing (one in English, one in Mandarin), Ugandan immigrants (in English and Luganda), residents of Pine Street senior public housing, and participants in Connections' 2021 Waltham Senior Civic Academy. We asked participants how Waltham supports healthy aging, how it could do better, and in what area(s) they would be interested in getting involved.

The listening sessions identified a range of important issues in healthy aging – many of which Waltham does well with, and others where Waltham could do better. We brought issues in three areas to the Summit:

Outdoor spaces: Return benches to bus stops on Moody and Main Streets. Create more outdoor activities for seniors, e.g., fitness stations, walks. Clean up after dogs, birds, and people along the river downtown.

Inclusion: Bring more immigrant seniors into the CoA and other services and activities. Key public and private programs should speak and write in the main languages spoken by Waltham seniors: English, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, and Haitian Creole.

Intergenerational programs: Find more ways for seniors to connect with high school and college age youth. Both youth and seniors could benefit from such connections.

Participants: Forty-eight people attended the Summit. They included the Connections Coordinating Committee, which created the Summit and led the program, and an additional 28 seniors, including seniors from Spanish-speaking and Ugandan communities, and residents of subsidized housing. Two city council members attended. Fifteen agencies were represented, including Springwell, Mt. Auburn and Newton/Wellesley hospitals, the Mazie Mentoring Program, JF&CS, Bentley and Brandeis Universities, WATCH, Mill Housing, Africano, the Waltham Land Trust, the Waltham Housing Authority and two City departments: The Library and Parks and Recreation.

The Summit began with a plenary session describing Connections and the findings from the listening sessions. This was followed by breakout groups in the three issue areas. After lunch there were plenary reports from the breakout groups. We were able to gain commitments from both seniors and agencies to continue working on the three issues. An

Issue Brief on the listening sessions and a full report on Summit can be found on our website.<sup>1</sup> Waltham Cable TV covered the plenary sessions.<sup>2</sup>

- Welcome to the Digital Age (WDA)

During 2022 we were able to continue to offer the Welcome to the Digital Age (WDA) program, which began in late 2020 with funding from McLean Hospital (through CHNA 18). The WDA program offers free Chromebook computers and a year of free wifi (plus free training in how to use both) to Waltham seniors who cannot afford them. Starting in October 2021 we received a one-year grant of \$10,500 in federal Title III funding for WDA through Springwell. The grant was renewed in October 2022. The WDA program is offered in collaboration with Tech Goes Home (TGH), which for a per person fee has provided Chromebooks and hotspot wifi connections. In 2022 we became a TGH partner, and we now receive Chromebooks and hotspots from TGH without a fee.

A major goal of WDA has been to help reduce isolation of seniors during the pandemic. Twelve seniors participated in the May-June 2022 training (20 hours in 10 sessions) and another twelve participated in October-November. Trainings were conducted in English with Spanish translation, and about half of the participants throughout the program have been Spanish speakers. More than 50 seniors have now graduated and kept their Chromebooks.

We pay lead instructors (one English and one Spanish) a stipend per session for recruitment, enrollment and teaching. We also have 4-6 assistants per session (English and Spanish speaking), some of whom receive small stipends. The Program Manager and senior volunteers help with marketing, enrollment, administration, and reporting.

- Immigrant Outreach

Waltham has a long history of welcoming immigrants, and focus groups of immigrant seniors convened by Connections have found that to still be true today. We conducted focus groups in Spanish in our original study, as well as in 2017 and 2022 (for the Summit). We conducted focus groups of Ugandan immigrants in 2017 and 2022, Chinese (in Mandarin) in 2017 and 2022, and Haitians (in Creole) in 2017.<sup>3</sup> All of the focus groups found that immigrant seniors felt welcome in Waltham, but we also found that very few used (or even knew about) the Waltham Senior Center.

To address this shortfall, Connections has obtained grant funds to employ outreach workers. The workers have been paid by Connections (via Healthy Waltham), but they are based at the CoA, report to the CoA Director, and work closely with other CoA staff.

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<sup>1</sup> [Walthamconnections.org](https://walthamconnections.org)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wcac.org/government/government-events/healthy-aging-summit-5-20-22>

<sup>3</sup> Reports are on our website: [walthamconnections.org](https://walthamconnections.org).

The first Spanish-speaking outreach worker started in late 2019 with funding from JF&CS. Although the position was scaled back in March 2020 when the pandemic hit, the worker left a model for the job, as well as a Spanish translation of the CoA resource guide.<sup>4</sup> She also continued to work virtually during the pandemic. She answered the CoA's Spanish inquiry line and emails until we hired the second outreach worker in August 2021.

The new worker was funded first by Connections funds alone and then by a \$8,500 grant from Springwell/Title III. The second worker was in the position through February 2022. There was four-month gap before the third Latina outreach worker began in July 2022. In late August 2022, a Ugandan outreach worker was hired. The Springwell grant was renewed in October 2022, which gives us this outreach funding through September 2023.

The new Latina outreach worker is a senior and long-time Waltham resident. She has a history with Connections – including serving as manager of the 2021 Civic Academy, lead Latinx instructor and recruiter for the WDA, and as a member of the Connections Coordinating Committee. The new Ugandan outreach worker is younger Ugandan immigrant. She has community work experience through her long-time position with Africano, a Waltham-based Ugandan community center. Outreach to Ugandans is important since Waltham has one of the largest Ugandan populations in the U.S. Both outreach workers work approximately 8 hours a week in CoA outreach.

Outreach to Latino seniors: A recent review of the CoA's Latinx outreach efforts (including the new Latina worker's first five months (July-November 2022))<sup>5</sup> found that CoA's efforts to include more of Waltham's Latinx seniors has been persistent and increasingly successful. Seniors have been reached through events, the newsletter, and outreach workers. And they have been connected to outside services and programs (legal, housing, benefits counseling, protective, social, web access, and more). Increasingly they are participating in senior center programming, both existing (e.g., exercise programs) and new for them.

The new Latina worker is playing an important role in solidifying this work. Current Springwell funding for the position runs through September 2023, supplemented by Tufts funds. The hours paid by the grants do not cover all the time the worker is putting in to connect with and address the needs of the many new seniors. Perhaps Connections should consider whether budgets allow hours to be increased. Also, the City of Waltham should consider whether this work is important enough to include in the CoA budget.

Outreach to Ugandans: A review of the first five months of the Ugandan outreach worker's efforts finds that she is seeing some distinct needs among Ugandan seniors, and the CoA is just learning about them and starting to address them.<sup>6</sup> The new Ugandan outreach

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<sup>4</sup> Initial Report on Latinx Outreach Worker at Waltham Council on Aging, April, 2020

<sup>5</sup> See website for report: Report on Latinx Inclusion Efforts by the Waltham Council on Aging: 2017-2022

<sup>6</sup> See website for report: Report on early work of the Waltham CoA's outreach worker

worker started with very limited personal knowledge or experience with programming for seniors. She does, however, also work for Africano, a Waltham large community center serving Ugandans.

Like many other adult Ugandans, many if not most Ugandan seniors continue to work in caregiving occupations, as well as in providing childcare to family members and other working families in the community. The widespread pattern of continuing to work makes it difficult for seniors to come to CoA programming during weekdays. Successful Ugandan seniors who retire often return to Uganda, since living is cheaper there.

The worker has reached out via Ugandan community events and media, including appearances on Waltham's Ugandan cable TV channel, speaking at Ugandan churches, presenting on a Bantu podcast, and presenting at several large community dinners. She also helps staff Africano's semi-weekly food pantry, which serves about 60 families. She has posted the CoA newsletter and Resource Guide on social media platforms used by the Ugandan community, including the Africano website, WhatsApp, and others. Some postings have been in Luganda. In all of these settings she seeks out Ugandan seniors and also encourages others with seniors in their families or friendship circles to contact her.

These efforts have led to inquiries from seniors, family, and friends. The most common areas of interest for help so far are transportation to medical appointments and shopping, benefits counseling from SHINE, help with the approaching tax season, and help finding work. A good number of inquiries have come from seniors who do not reside in Waltham, which has led to discussions of setting up strong referral ties to neighboring CoAs.

In January, the worker established a relationship with Family Access of Newton (FAN), which provides help to families and children. The worker's initial contact was to see if there might be jobs there for seniors as caregivers, but the discussion of seniors' other needs led to plans for a Sunday afternoon FAN presentation at Africano to Ugandan seniors who care for youth.

- Intergenerational Initiatives

At the May Summit, one of the breakout groups discussed an issue identified in the listening sessions: intergenerational activities. The participants felt that these can benefit seniors, younger adults, and the community. All felt they wanted to see more intergenerational activities in Waltham and agreed to be part of an ongoing intergenerational programs planning group.

Since the Summit, the group has been meeting monthly. It consists of committed CoA members, Connections volunteers, and several agencies, including Bentley University Service Learning, and the Mazie Mentoring Program at Waltham High School. Connections volunteers have been taking the lead in organizing monthly meetings.

The planning group has been learning about a national program called Sages and Seekers, which provides training and support. The program can be part of students' academic curriculum, or a community service opportunity. We learned that the Rivers School in Weston has an active program, and members of the group attended a planning meeting. After the discussion, Rivers invited us to be part of their program, which begins in April. The Connections Program Manager and the committee identified seven seniors who committed for the 7-week program. Each will be paired with a Rivers School sophomore.

The Connections intergenerational group plans to continue to collect information on volunteer intergenerational activities in which Waltham seniors already participate, e.g. Waltham Arts Council. Over time, we could create a resource guide. We are also discussing a volunteer fair at the COA to introduce Waltham seniors to volunteer opportunities.

- Benches

The outdoor spaces group at the Summit decided to focus on bringing back benches to bus stops in downtown Waltham along Main and Moody Streets. Participants said that many benches were removed because unhoused people were sleeping on them. Several participants spoke to the hardship the lack of a place to sit caused them and other people with mobility limitations.

After the Summit a small group of seniors continued to meet, and with the help of the Program Manager, created a partnership with a Brandeis student disability group. In September, the seniors and the Brandeis group both wrote letters to the head of the Department of Public Works, with a "cc" to the Mayor, asking to talk about how benches could be restored.

The Mayor asked us to meet with the Waltham Disability Services Commission, which invited us to present to their monthly meeting. We did so four times (via Zoom) in November, December, February, and March. The Commission asked for more detail about the need for benches and the potential costs. We developed a report<sup>7</sup> that was submitted to the Commission before the February meeting. The report included a literature review on the importance of benches, the lack of benches at downtown bus stops (only 7 of 29 stops have them), and the type and cost of the benches Waltham has. We also found support for the initiative among the Chamber of Commerce and the three Ward Council members serving the affected areas. After the February meeting we learned that the City has six of the removed benches in storage. We have heard that others have been installed in other locations around town. We hope to continue to work with the Commission and the City to help decide where to put additional benches, what type of benches to purchase (with a bar in the middle to prevent sleeping?), and how to pay for them.

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<sup>7</sup> The Case for More Benches in Downtown Waltham. On the [Walthamconnections.org](http://Walthamconnections.org).

- Walking Program at Bentley

When the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, we had to suspend the CoA walking program that Connections helped to develop in 2018 at the Bentley field house. Seniors were walking for a one-hour period three days a week. At the height of the program in early 2020, 70 seniors walked one day.

As the pandemic drew down in late 2022, we asked Bentley if we could restart the program. They agreed, and the program resumed in October. A senior volunteer from the CoA takes attendance all three days. The lists are entered into the CoA database so that participants can be informed via robocalls from the CoA if there are changes or cancellations, e.g., due to a special event at the field house. Near the end of the year we contacted partners at Newton-Wellesley Hospital to re-start the popular Walk with a Doc program, whereby a clinician comes to give a short talk on a health-related topic and then walk with the seniors to answer questions.

- Bentley consultation class

In the summer of 2022, the Professor for a Bentley graduate Management Consulting class asked if Connections would be their client for the fall. We agreed. It involved working with five teams of students who would create recommendations concerning finance, fund raising, staffing, marketing, and operations. A senior member of the Connections Coordinating Committee and the Program Manager attended classes every few weeks, and the CC member also answered questions from each team posted on a website weekly. The class's recommendations were brought to the Coordinating Committee. The recommendations offered insights into what Connections could be doing in marketing/fundraising and operations if we operated like a larger and more conventional non-profit. At this point, we are too lean and under-resourced to implement many of their recommendations.

### Summary

In many senses, Connections got back on track in 2022. The highlight was the May Summit, which re-connected with seniors through the March focus groups, their participation in the Summit, and in follow-up teams working on inclusive outreach, intergenerational activities, and bringing back benches to bus stops. Affiliated agencies were also involved in this deliberation and work.

The CoA now has Ugandan and Latinx outreach workers. The bench group is working with the Waltham Disabilities Services Commission. The intergenerational team has connected with the River School for intergenerational connections. The WDA team offered two new classes, and a refresher/intermediate class in the spring of 2023 has garnered wide interest. Walking at the Bentley fieldhouse is back. And we hired a new Program Manager.



Two rounds of federal Title III funds from Springwell were critical for the outreach and WDA funding, and also helped us conserve funds from our long-term Tufts grant. However, in order to be able to continue current initiatives (and perhaps launch new ones) we will need to find stable sources of long-term funding.