

Harpswell Aging at Home 2021 Annual Report

Introduction

Harpswell Aging at Home (HAH) is a volunteer-led nonprofit organization committed to helping residents thrive while aging at home. It has grown from an initial assessment of the needs of older Harpswell residents in 2015 that identified a variety of challenges.

On the basis of that assessment, HAH developed plans and programs to provide information, mobilize volunteers, create connections and partnerships that meet present and emerging needs of older residents. Some committees work with volunteers and local partners to provide food and socializing opportunities, transportation, home repairs, help with household chores, access to resources, and health and wellness activities. Other committees, such as the communications, finance and fundraising, volunteer management, and evaluation/policy committees, provide administrative support. The Steering and Executive Committees provide overall coordination and planning. In principle, HAH seeks to collaborate with other agencies serving older adults, using volunteers to extend their services to Harpswell clients.

By 2021, HAH had developed several successful programs. But the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and its restrictions on social contact required major changes in how those programs could continue. This report will summarize our activities in 2021, how they had to be altered to respond to the pandemic, and what we hope to do in 2022.

HAH Organization

HAH is incorporated as a public corporation in the State of Maine. It is largely staffed and run by volunteers, but since 2019 it has also contracted with two part-time consultants to help manage our growing volume of work. HAH receives grants and financial contributions through the fiscal sponsorship of the Holbrook Community Foundation. It decided to seek 501(c)3 status in 2022, in recognition of its growing programs and need for financial support.

Since its inception HAH has worked closely with the Harpswell Select Board and the Town Administration. The Town has provided meeting facilities, administrative help, and some financial support. A Select Board Member, the Town Administrator and our State Representative are ex officio members of the HAH Steering Committee. HAH also works closely with local and regional partner organizations to expand their activities with older adults in Harpswell.

HAH is largely organized around committees of volunteers, many of them older adults themselves. In 2021 the service committees focused on Food, Health and Wellness, Home Helpers, Home Repairs, Resources, and Transportation. Other Committees provide governance and support to the organization as whole. They include the Steering and Executive Committees and the Communications, Evaluation/Policy, Funding and Finance, and Volunteer Management Committees. The governance and support Committees will be discussed in this section, and the service Committees in the next.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is HAH's governing board. It has 18 members, including HAH's officers, its Committee Chairs, and representatives of the Town and State governments (ex officio). It met monthly to discuss HAH's activities, emerging issues, and overall policy and strategy for HAH. The Steering Committee met on Zoom because of the pandemic to discuss policies and programs. It has been a forum for discussion of the pandemic's challenges as well as its implications for the future work of HAH. In 2021 welcomed several new members as some new officers took on leadership roles and others stepped down.

Executive Committee

The Executive committee has six members, including the Steering Committee Officers (co-chairs, treasurer, secretary). It met monthly, also on Zoom, to discuss issues, agendas, governance questions, and strategy and policy issues. It advises the Steering Committee and develops agendas for Steering Committee meetings.

Communications Committee

The Communications Committee builds wider awareness of HAH's activities. In 2021 the Committee published a variety of articles and advertisements in the Harpswell Anchor. It also published community calendars as well as newsletters for the food programs. The HAH website and social media have been important

ways to share information with the community during the pandemic. It shared a wide variety of videos, Facebook posts, and newsletters over the year. The Committee also successfully recruited a new Chair this year, after several years of operating without one.

In 2022 the Committee hopes to recruit new members, to effectively manage its transition in leadership, members and workload, to improve its data storage and capacity, to educate volunteers on Google Drive, to implement Constant Contact as a database and email program, and to provide continued leadership, counsel and creation of HAH's communication strategy, marketing approach and materials. Its external focus will be on expanding awareness of HAH across the community with videos, mailers, website and community newsletter distribution. It will also work to build deeper relationship with committee chairs, to support volunteer appreciation events, and to evolve information sharing through the Volunteer Newsletter.

Finance and Fundraising Committee

The Finance and Fundraising Committee assesses and meets the financial needs of HAH. It prepares the annual budget and tracks revenue and expenditures. It also works with the Holbrook Community Foundation, our fiscal sponsor, to reimburse volunteers for HAH expenses. It seeks contributions, fundraisers, and grants to support HAH programs. In 2021 we received grants for \$2500 and \$5000 from Bowdoin Common Good Fund and Maine Women's Giving Tree to support our Meals in a Pinch program. Although community events and fundraisers were greatly restricted again this year due to the continuance of the COVID pandemic we did receive proceeds from a real estate open house and from sales of the book [Harpswell Sea and Land through the Lens](#). We had a very successful year end fundraising campaign kicked off with a generous \$10,000 matching grant from the Merriconeag Fund. The community response to this effort was nothing short of amazing.

In 2022 the Committee hope to resume fundraising activities such as community dinners, concerts and restaurant fundraising benefits, though these will most likely not happen until fall. Merriconeag Fund has already committed to another matching grant opportunity in late 2022. At this time there are no plans to seek grant funds.

Evaluation and Policy Committee

The Evaluation and Policy Committee put together a report on the survey, focus groups and telephone interviews designed to evaluate HAH's impacts during its first five years in 2021. That evaluation was shared with various constituents interested in our progress. The Committee also helped design and manage HAH's strategic planning process to update our 2018-23 plan and produce Committee goals and strategies for 2021.

In 2022 the Committee will help design and manage HAH's 2022 strategy planning process, drawing on the evaluation report as well emerging information about the pandemic and its impacts on the Town. The Committee will continue to liaise with the Maine State Legislature about policies on older adults, particularly with respect to affordable senior housing. We hope to learn about and perhaps influence the development of those programs. It will also work with the Town Comprehensive Plan Task Force to shape the Town's ten-year update of its comprehensive plan with an eye to its future support for older adults as a central element of the emerging population.

Volunteer Management

The Volunteer Management Committee identifies and matches potential volunteers with the needs of HAH Committees. Because of the pandemic the primary mode for recruiting volunteers has been through the HAH website and by individual initiatives to find ways to help their neighbors. Potential volunteers are interviewed by the coordinator to explore their potential fit with HAH activities. Many of the opportunities in 2021 have been to cook or deliver meals for the food programs. New volunteers have also worked with home repairs, transportation and seniors connecting. Many volunteers have sought ways to lighten the effects of the pandemic this year by helping out with new initiatives.

In 2022 we expect to continue to work with our neighbors virtually, but we also hope to recruit more staff to support programs that are ramping up as the pandemic subsides.

HAH Programs

HAH has six streams of activity that serve older adults in Harpswell. Some have been largely stopped by the pandemic; others have continued in modified form; some have expanded or diversified their work because of the pandemic.

Food Team

The Food Team makes food and socializing opportunities available to Harpswell's older residents. Year Two of the pandemic tested the Team's resolve and creativity in providing support to food and socialization opportunities to older adults in Harpswell. The continued risks of indoor gatherings limited the possibilities for Lunch with Friends, but the program held a number of outdoor events (Snacks with Friends) in different areas of Harpswell. The Meals in a Pinch Program (which includes emergency food delivery) served on average 45 people on a biweekly basis. During 2021 the program provided approximately 4500 meals through these programs, with support from more than 150 volunteer cooks, community groups and local food agencies, such as the Merrymeeting Gleaners, the Harpswell Community Garden, and others.

In 2022 the Food Team plans to continue its programs for food and socialization and adapt them as the demands of the pandemic evolve. It will continue to work with the Merrymeeting Gleaners and the Harpswell Community Garden on produce Sharing Tables, support its Cooking Groups, launch Cooking at 43 Degrees North, and increase intergenerational activities. It hopes to develop a sustainable committee structure, to continue its collaborations with other HAH committees. The Committee also plans to provide for safe food handling practices, to develop recycling and composting strategies, and to work with other community agencies to meet the needs of those aging in Harpswell.

Health and Wellness Team

The Health and Wellness Team supports older residents to learn about and use opportunities for socializing, education, safety, and other activities. In 2021 the pandemic blocked some of our past activities, such as education and safety offerings that required bringing people together.

On the other hand, some of the Team's programs expanded during the pandemic. The Neighbors Connecting Program of regular phone calls to isolated seniors invested 570 hours by 15 callers in calling 21-25 Callees. The Team organized more than 650 hours of volunteer time for other programs for homebound seniors, such as raking leaves, delivering potted gardens, providing floral centerpieces, delivering holiday gifts, providing educational programming for Harpswell TV, and passing on cheery notes from community members and drawings from nursery and high school students.

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In 2022 the Team hopes to expand the Neighbors Connecting Program and to reinstate programs stopped by the pandemic, such as the flower delivery, the adaptive tool table and educational offerings. Depending on the availability of more volunteers to spearhead activities, other programs have been proposed as well.

Home Helpers Team

The Home Helpers Team offers older adults assistance with household chores, from indoor cleaning tasks to outdoor yard work. The Team hoped in 2021 to expand both its volunteers and its client base, but the pandemic made indoor work difficult and frustrated hopes to increase the Team's client base and volunteer support. While it was possible to do some outdoor chores using both adult and student volunteers, developing a systematic home helpers program has been very challenging.

In 2022 the Team hopes to develop a more systematic program, perhaps in partnership with other agencies, to respond to what appear to be continuing needs for some sort of home helpers program.

Home Repairs Team

The Home Repairs Team continued to provide Harpswell older adults with services to make home environments safer, warmer, and drier, in cooperation with the Town of Harpswell and Habitat for Humanity/7 Rivers and with the support of a Community Development Block Grant. These services include a variety of repairs identified in an initial home audit that identifies safety issues, home improvements, facility upgrades, energy efficiencies and home entrance and egress adjustments. The Team has limited its services in response to the pandemic requirements since both clients and Team members are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. After the state restrictions were lifted, the Team began working on external repairs that did not require close contact with homeowners, and on inside projects with volunteers and clients who could meet protocol requirements for inside work.

In spite of these challenges the Team served 29 Harpswell homeowners with 33 home repair projects involving 2119 volunteer hours. The team also supported two other projects for Habitat7Rivers. Testimonials from homeowners suggest that the goals of making homes "safer, warmer and drier" are being met; the

requests for further work from prior clients suggest that they approve the quality of work done.

In 2022 The Home Repairs Team hopes to return to both indoor and outdoor activities as the problems posed by the pandemic are alleviated. The Team continues to have a reliable group of volunteers, and it implemented a transition in leadership in early 2022. It has also been exploring innovations grounded in past experience, such as construction of modular ramps that can be easily disassembled at one house and re-assembled at another as needs for them change. It hopes in the coming year to expand the demand for its services as well.

Resources Team

The Resources Team provides information to older residents about resources and support services. In 2021 the Team continued to conduct home visits or phone calls for 15 Home Repairs applicants who requested information about available resources. In addition, 17 residents requested referral information or support unrelated to home repairs. The Resources Team continues to play a key role in coordinating efforts across many HAH programs. The Resources Team this year established a partnership with the Harpswell Emergency Medical Service to refer residents with a “slip and fall” event for HAH support services and home repairs to prevent falls. Three referrals have been made in 2021. The Team also worked to help vulnerable residents and their families to access available medical and professional services. The Team also worked to provide information and resources to support families of individuals with dementia.

In 2022 the Resources Team hopes to increase referrals for “slip and fall” events and other older adult needs. They expect to visit all recipients of home repairs services, to strengthen their links to area medical and professional services, and to continue to work closely with the Town Office staff.

Transportation Team

The Transportation Team provides volunteer drivers and informs Harpswell residents about the availability of free rides from the Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) of People Plus in Brunswick. During the initial surge of the pandemic, rides, drivers and distances driven all declined, but during 2021 they all began to increase again. The Team had 11 drivers at the start of the year but was up to 14 by the end of the year. This amounts to one quarter of all VTN drivers. Overall miles driven was slightly down over prior years since most driving for part

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of the year was to pick up groceries. Harpswell residents accounted for 346 trips for almost 7,000 miles in 2021. Harpswell riders came from all the different regions of Harpswell. In its first six years HAH volunteers have provided almost 3500 rides for more than 57,000 miles (around the world twice!).

In 2022, the Team hopes to expand awareness of VTN and increase both rides given and miles driven as the restrictions imposed by the pandemic are loosened.

Challenges for the Future

In 2021, HAH wrote and adopted its first set of bylaws and decided after thoughtful consideration to apply for its own 501(3)(c) designation from the IRS. If approved, this new status will provide HAH with a degree of independence for fundraising and for growth in new directions. Another goal for 2022 is to complete a redesign of the HAH website to streamline its use and provide updated access for our own committee members as well as outside users. In conjunction with a new IRS designation as our own not-for-profit corporation, the new HAH website will have the ability to accept online donations which will simplify giving for our donors and streamline internal record keeping.

The challenges posed by the pandemic for the last two years have been huge, but as the COVID numbers decline in Maine, we hope to ramp up our in-person activities. We will continue to follow state and federal guidelines to protect all our Harpswell neighbors but look forward to resuming the activities for socialization. We realize how isolating the pandemic has been, so indoor events to bring people together is a major goal for 2022.

We will continue to recruit new volunteers especially for leadership positions, and expand our work with high school and college students for more intergenerational volunteer activities. As new activities are adopted, we may change the configurations of our current committee structure to meet new needs and workloads. For example, the need for technical help was highlighted by our 2020-2021 evaluation assessment, and Health & Wellness Committee responded with a trained volunteer who has gone to several seniors' homes and helped with computers, I-Pads and phone issues. This work may continue to grow and move into a different committee's oversight.

As previously mentioned, the success of our first challenge campaign has opened the door to many new possibilities for HAH expansion such as more socialization programs, work on housing needs for Harpswell's seniors, increased partnerships

with the Town of Harpswell and other local organizations and improved communications through better shared information technology. At the committee level, we will study these possibilities and possibly implement trial programs to see which will have lasting and meaningful effects in our town.

From the handful of far-sighted volunteers in 2015 who birthed the idea of HAH, the organization has grown to over 350 active community members. Its vitality is measured by the enthusiasm and commitment shown in the past year with new volunteers, a remarkable fund raising response, and a movement toward new structure and initiatives designed to further our important mission of helping Harpswell people thrive in their own homes as they age.