**Ideas for Addressing Mental Health Needs**

1. **Training for staff and volunteers**

[Mental Health First Aid for Older Adults](https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/about/)  is a **high-level evidence based** education program which introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adults over the age of 65. The class would be great for staff and volunteers who work directly with older people, to help them identify who might need help and how to find appropriate support strategies.

**Dan Muxfeld** from Journey Mental Health Center is the Coordinator for Mental Health First Aid Training and is willing to bring the training to your agency. His contact information:

Phone: (608) 280-2566

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***Goal idea:*** *In order for staff and volunteers to learn how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness, the Aging Unit will provide MHFA course by Dec. 31 2019 with a minimum of 75% of staff and volunteers will complete the course and become certified.*

1. **Campaign to raise awareness of mental illness/mental health and fight stigma**

Make It Okay is a free, easy-to-use resource to build awareness of mental health issues and fight stigma. <https://makeitok.org/> Click on **Take Action** for the well-developed toolkit which includes a lot of different outreach materials and everything you need to give a presentation about mental illness/mental health and more.

***Goal idea:*** *As a way to raise awareness about mental illness, the Aging Unit will host 3 mental health presentations in 3 different locations using the Make It Okay materials, and a pre/post-test will show that 75% of attendees increased awareness of mental illness.*

1. **Friendly phone call program**

Utilize volunteers to make weekly calls to people who are lonely and unable or unwilling to participate in programs. Or create a program in which home-bound folks call other home-bound folks.

***Goal idea:***  *By the end of 2019, in order to provide more socialization for people who have difficulty getting out in public, the Aging Unit will find 3 volunteers to make weekly calls to at least 15 older adults who have been identified as needing increased socialization. After 8 weeks, 75% of participants will indicate that the calls have been helpful.*

1. **Utilize and enhance existing programs to focus on mental health**

Many of your existing programs lay the groundwork for supporting and promoting mental health. When writing goals, emphasize the mental health aspect. For example, increasing the number of senior dining participants could be framed as decreasing isolation by decreasing the number of people eating meals alone. Increasing the number of volunteer drivers could be framed as increasing opportunities for socialization as evidenced by more trips in the community.

**Senior Nutrition Program:**

Start a dining buddy/companion program as a way of increasing the number of people who are receiving socialization. Measure success by the number of new people attending the meal site. Or if the companion program is for HDM participants to have a “dining buddy,” measure success by the number of shared meals each month.

Have a presentation about mental health/loneliness and then an Invite-a-Friend-to-Lunch day to encourage participants to reach out to neighbors and friends who may be lonely. This may be the start of a Dining Buddy program.

Support positive thinking by providing Words of Encouragement (GWAAR has available) or Positive Thought/quote of the of the day or week for both Senior Dining and HDM.

Connect with 4H clubs, scouts, church youth groups, day care centers, etc. to create small “gifts” and utilize HDM drivers to drop them off along with their meals.

***Goal idea:*** *In order to provide more connections with the community, the Aging Unit will collaborate with 4H clubs, scouts, church youth groups, day care centers, etc. to create small cards or “gifts” which will be delivered with the meals at least twice in 2021, with 80% indicating feeling connected as a result.*

Use a small delivery route, (2-4 meals) for HDMs with the focus of spending at least 15 minutes talking with the person at each delivery.

***Goal idea:*** *As a way to decrease isolation for home-bound seniors who live alone, 2 HDM drivers will deliver only 3 meals/day and spend a minimum of 15 minutes visiting with each person at delivery (with their permission). After 1 month, at least 80% of those who received the extra time will give positive feedback about the experience.*

**Caregiver Support**

Many caregivers struggle with mental health issues – focus your caregiver support on promoting activities and resources to help them reduce anxiety, depression and isolation.

***Goal idea:*** *As a way to help caregivers reduce anxiety, the Aging Unit will host a presentation about relaxation, stress reduction or similar topic for all of the support groups for one month by August, 2019. At the following support group, 75% of caregivers who attended will indicate that they used something they learned to reduce stress that month.*

**Healthy Aging**

Try a class centered on mental health such as Healthy IDEAS, PEARLS or Lighten Up. Contact Angie Sullivan for more information.

Exercise is known to increase mood. Encourage the use of [Go4Life](https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/) materials for older people and caregivers, even for home bound seniors. Start with a “class” to distribute free books and demonstrate how to do the exercises, then have a follow up class in a month and ask for feedback to evaluate effectiveness and encourage continued use.

Start a walking club – on a trail, in the mall or at a community center. You could frame the goal as a way to increase mood or decrease isolation and poll participants to determine effectiveness.

Help participants get internet access ([www.everyoneon.org](http://www.everyoneon.org)) and train participants how to use a tablet with Sip & Swipe or the app “[Easy tablet help for seniors](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/easy-tablet-help-for-seniors/id855402889?mt=8)”. The goal could be to increase opportunities to connect with the larger community and measure effectiveness by polling participants a month after the training.