

ANNUAL REPORT

2020



Branch County Commission on Aging
65 Grahl Drive, Coldwater, MI 49036
www.burnsidecenter.com
517-279-6565

BRANCH COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING

MISSION STATEMENT

The primary mission of the Branch County Commission on Aging is to establish and provide services for older adults by encouraging, promoting, and safeguarding the rights and abilities of our older adults so they may enjoy maximum health, well-being, and independence.

VISION

To become the primary focus (not the sole focus) for older adult activities in the county through the establishment of the senior center and by partnering with other agencies whose goals will complement the Commission on Aging's mission.

VALUES

The Commission believes the State's philosophy of "no wrong door" and to that end will provide access, information, and referral for any service to older adults that may be required throughout the county.

The Commission will partner with other agencies to maintain a presence throughout the county.

The Commission will solicit and promote volunteerism through the older adult community to expand its services and provide those older adults who volunteer with a sense of worth and accomplishment.

The Commission will strive to provide outreach and services to those older adults whose needs for services are the greatest.

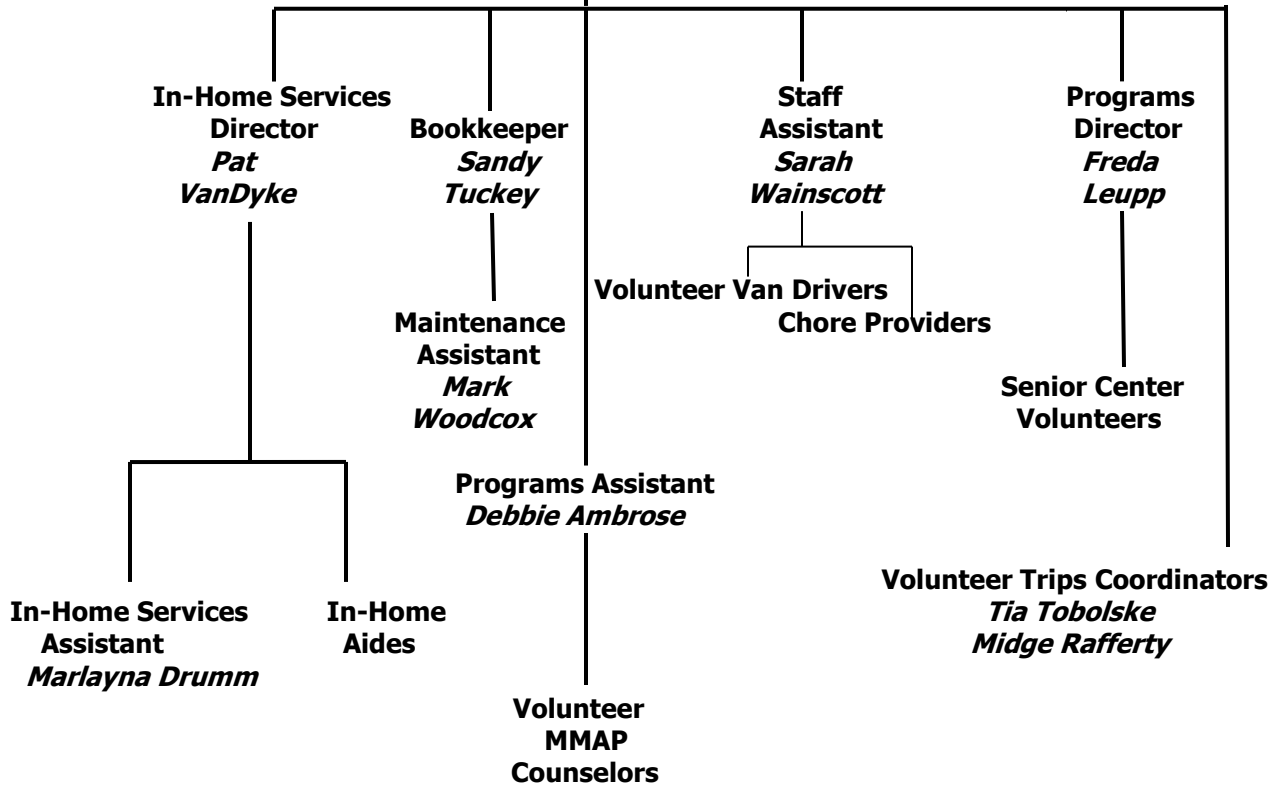
The Commission will seek and facilitate cooperation and consensus of action through our partnerships with community agencies and governmental bodies in all areas where our missions are convergent.

BRANCH COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING 2020 STAFF

Branch County Board of Commissioners

Branch County Commission on Aging
Board of Directors

Executive Director
Amy Duff



BRANCH COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Established by action of the Branch County Commissioners

James Webb – Chairman
Janis Olney – Vice Chairman
Betty Kurtz – Secretary/Treasurer
Gordon Gentry
Dave Smoker
Paul Meredith
Don Thrasher

Commissioner Ted Gordon – Liaison from Branch County Board of Commissioners

The Board of Directors represents the older adult population of Branch County. Monthly meetings in 2020 were held at 65 Grahl Drive, Coldwater or on Zoom, on the third Tuesday at 3 p.m.

2020 STAFF

Amy Duff – Executive Director
Pat VanDyke – In-Home Services Director
Marlayna Drumm – Assistant In-Home Services Director
Freda Leupp – Programs Director
Sandy Tuckey – Bookkeeper
Sarah Wainscott – Staff Assistant
Debbie Ambrose – Programs Assistant
Tia Tobolske & Midge Rafferty – Volunteer Trips Coordinators
Mark Woodcox – Maintenance Assistant
A staff of eighteen in-home service aides

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020 was a historic year and one we will not soon forget. The COA started off the year on track to expand programs and services, but things quickly halted when the COVID-19 pandemic began in mid-March. This changed things to a year of learning.

In 2020, we learned how to work from home and how to hold virtual meetings. The MMAP office learned how to meet with seniors over the phone instead of in-person. Our In-Home Services Department made wellness check phone calls to the majority of our clients during the beginning of the pandemic. They learned how to perform screening checklists and work with a mask on when they returned to caring for clients at home. Our medical equipment loan program learned how to do contactless drop-offs and pick-ups. And as the year continued we learned how to hold small group activities with strict COVID protocols so we could re-engage with at least some of our seniors.

It was a rough year as we missed seeing our patrons and clients face-to-face. And we mourn the loss of many who passed away during 2020. But I am proud to report that most of our services to seniors continued in some form throughout the pandemic. Seniors who required care at home still received that care. Seniors who needed a ride to a medical appointment got that ride. And seniors who needed equipment to remain living at home were able to borrow it from us. We miss our activity groups; especially the exercise room patrons and the card players. But we are hopeful that we will get to see them in 2021.

There were a few positive things that came out of our pandemic experience in 2020. One was the creation of a new program called Senior Phone Pals in collaboration with the Area Agency on Aging 3C and Pines Behavioral Health. This program pairs a Pines mental health professional with seniors who would like some support over the phone. This program will continue in the future as well. Another positive thing that came out of the pandemic was recognition on the state and national level of the difficult and important work that Direct Care Workers (like our In Home Services workers) do on a daily basis. The disproportionately low wages for these workers came to the forefront in the pandemic and legislation was passed to offer them "Hazard Pay" in the form of an extra \$2/hour. This idea of increasing wages for Direct Care Workers has gained further traction and will be continued into 2021 and possibly made permanent.

We are hopeful for a return to normal in 2021 and the opportunity to re-engage with as many Branch County seniors as possible.

Respectfully,



Branch County Commission on Aging
Executive Director

SENIOR CENTER ACTIVITIES

The Burnside Center is well-known in the Branch County community for its many activities. In 2020, we had to suddenly stop activities in mid-March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some activities quickly switched to Zoom, like the exercise classes. But many, like card playing, remained on hold for the rest of the year.

In the fall, some activities were brought back with strict COVID protocols including limited class size, mandatory mask wearing, screening checklists and temperature checks, and social distancing. Bingo, quilting, and guitar lessons were examples of classes that were able to resume.

One activity we were able to try for the first time in 2020 was a drive-thru health clinic. In the fall we hosted a drive-thru flu shot clinic in a partnership with Ascension Borgess. 51 individuals received their flu shot safely in their own cars at our clinic.



PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

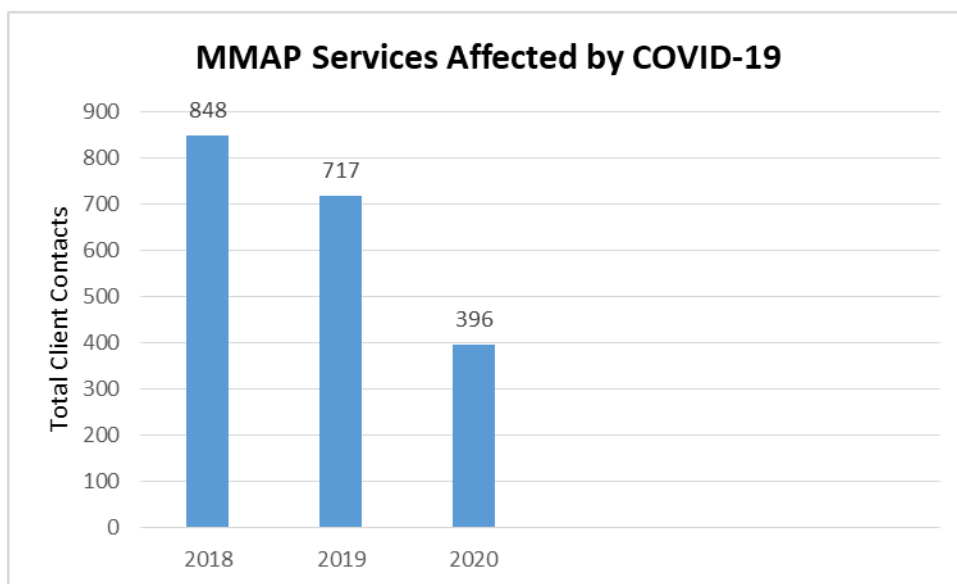
INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

Information and referral services for older adults can be obtained by calling the Center. The information available is a directory of housing, food assistance, medical services, prescription assistance, and transportation, as well as various other services. This information source is kept current and includes local, state, and national resources. Information and referral at the Commission on Aging is provided by volunteers at the front desk and MMAP counselors, as well as by staff.

MEDICARE/MEDICAID ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The MMAP (Medicare Medicaid Assistance Program) office continues to thrive. In 2020, the MMAP office was staffed by a part-time paid coordinator and three part-time volunteer counselors. The coordinator and counselors offer free appointments to Branch County residents to help them with any challenges or concerns they may have regarding Medicare and Medicaid eligibility and services. This includes help understanding, comparing, and enrolling in the new Medicare Part D prescription plans available annually at open enrollment October 15th through December 7th.

In 2020, 396 client contacts were recorded. The number of clients accessing MMAP services varies from year to year—often influenced by what is going on in terms of state and/or federal changes to Medicare, Medicaid, and the insurance system in general. In 2020, the number of client contacts was affected by COVID-19 constraints to phone appointments. Though phone appointments only were offered during the 2020 open enrollment period, it was a successful experience for both MMAP volunteers and clients. Because of this, the MMAP office will be offering clients a choice of phone or in-person appointments during the 2021 annual open enrollment period.



MEDICAL VAN TRANSPORTATION

The medical van transportation program is a valuable service for Branch County seniors. This service is supported by grant funds as well as millage funds and donations. COA owns a 2016 Dodge Grand Caravan for use in this program. COA also has a cooperative agreement with the Branch County VA office for use of their wheelchair ramp van if that type of transportation is needed.

The vans are driven by volunteer drivers who pick up older adults at their homes, transport them to medical appointments, and return them to their homes. A donation to COA is suggested but is not required. The vans travel outside the local area as far away as Fort Wayne, Ann Arbor, Kalamazoo, Lansing, and other locations. Many seniors find it a great relief to have someone else navigate for them in larger cities they are unfamiliar with. In 2020, the vans traveled a total of 8,248 miles during 203 trips. The number of miles and trips was nearly half of what was completed in 2019. This service was available throughout the pandemic; however, many medical providers switched appointments from face-to-face to telemedicine or simply postponed them to the future. COA volunteer medical van drivers were included in the first wave of those eligible for the vaccine. A new in-depth protocol for COVID safety was instituted in this program including riders must be in back of the van to give distance to the driver, everyone wears masks, ventilation was increased by cracking windows and/or turning on the fan, and the surfaces of the van were sanitized before rides, after rides, and also periodically using the Center's new sanitation gun.

HEALTH AND FITNESS

One of the big draws to the Burnside Center is exercise programs. This is something that people missed immediately when we had to close. Our exercise instructors were interested in trying to teach virtually so we started that on Zoom.

Before the pandemic we had 52 people participating in our weights class. 29 of those continued when we switched to Zoom. Before the pandemic we had 45 people participating in in Step in Motion. 19 of those continued on Zoom.

The Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program, which is a partnership with the Dr. Robert W. Browne Aquatic Center in Coldwater, continued in popularity before the Pandemic started. 26 people were participating before the shutdown. We are excited to resume this class as soon as we are able to.

KINSHIP CARE

The kinship care program is for grandparents raising grandkids and for other adults who are raising related children. This is a joint venture with the Branch Intermediate School District Early Education program and the Branch County Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.

This educational support group typically meets monthly. Dinner and child care are always provided in order to make it easier for caregivers to attend. This program is supported by state grant funds. Some meetings feature a speaker on a topic of interest, and other meetings offer time for caregivers to network and support each other. In 2020, this group averaged 16 adults and 16 children attending the meetings in January, February, and March. After the pandemic started, this group was put on hold. Staff maintained phone and text communication with the families and helped connect them to resources, as needed. Zoom meetings were offered but were not desired by group members.

CHORE PROGRAM

The chore program helps seniors with occasional heavy-duty or high-energy jobs in the home such as leaf raking, snow shoveling, window washing, cleaning of attic or garage, etc. The Commission on Aging pays independent contractors to complete this work for seniors. This service is supported by federal grant funds and millage. In 2020, 63 hours of service were performed. This is less than half of what is usually done. This program was put on hold when the pandemic first started because it is a less critical service. Leaf raking was allowed in the fall with a new contactless protocol.

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT LOAN CLOSET

The Branch County Commission on Aging maintains an inventory of clean, gently-used durable medical equipment which is available on a long-term loan basis to Branch County residents who have a need for it. Types of items commonly available are walkers, wheelchairs, shower chairs, commodes, toilet risers, and canes. This service is supported by grant and millage funds, monetary donations, and donations of equipment. The Commission on Aging loaned out 94 pieces of equipment in 2020. This service was available throughout the pandemic however requests were very slow at the beginning. We used a contactless pickup and drop off procedure with extra emphasis on sanitizing of the equipment. Over time, the requests picked back up and the year ended almost at the same rate as last year.

IN-HOME SERVICES

In-home services is the Commission on Aging's most well-known and far-reaching service. In-home services provides older adults the option of remaining in their own homes for a longer period of time. The housekeeping, personal care, and respite care received from one of the 18 aides employed by the Commission assists not only the senior but the family caregivers as well. With the respite service, aides provide primary care for older adults which allows their caregivers an opportunity to take a break. There was an average of 162 clients per month in 2020 receiving in-home services. Assistance is provided to clients with a limited number of hours per week in order to assist a larger number of Branch County clients. In 2020, the Commission on Aging performed 7,700 hours of homemaking, 897.50 hours of personal care, and 1,445.5 hours of respite for Branch County seniors.



COVID-19 had a large effect on our operations in this department. At the start of the pandemic, services were reduced down to only those clients who absolutely could not survive without them. This took us down to about 30 clients for a few months. As restrictions loosened we re-started services for all clients that felt safe having an aide visit their home. This department went through a complete procedural overhaul to meet the new COVID-19 safety guidelines. The aides have been using masks, gloves, sanitizer, and also submit all forms to their supervisor in a contactless drop-off system outside of the building.

The toll that COVID-19 took on seniors in our community was evident as the pandemic continued into the fall and winter. Our caseload went from a high point in February of 182 clients to a low point in November of 136 clients. Not all of these clients passed away from COVID-19, but it is fair to say that the existence of the pandemic led to social isolation,

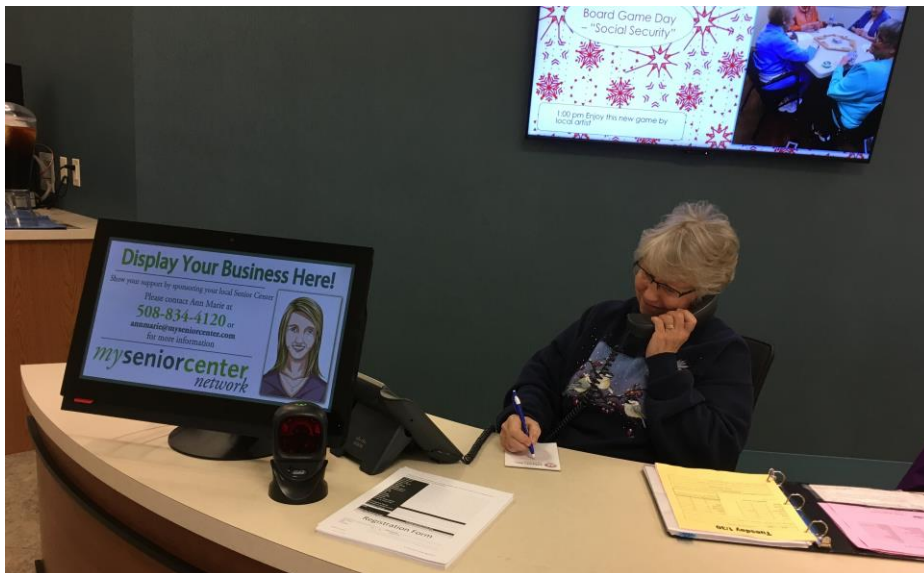


depression, less effort spent on maintaining health, and ultimately more clients passing away than we have ever experienced before.

VOLUNTEERS

The Commission on Aging could not accomplish its many achievements each year without the help of our dedicated crew of volunteers. COA provides the Branch County area with a constructive way to utilize the vast array of talents and skills that our older adults possess. The Commission on Aging normally uses volunteers for answering the phones, instructing almost all of the classes, assisting other seniors with Medicare questions, taking seniors to medical appointments, and a number of other jobs.

After the pandemic started, we had two volunteer exercise instructors who led classes on Zoom. Our MMAP volunteers worked over the phone. And four of our medical van drivers continued to take Branch County seniors to the doctor with new COVID protocols.



FUNDING

The Commission on Aging is funded by a variety of means.

The majority of funding, around 80%, is comprised of millage funds. The operational millage is in place from 2020-2024 at .4908 mills. The building millage is in place from 2021-2030 at .25 mills. The Commission on Aging receives several state and federal grants to support the services it offers to Branch County seniors. The COA is also graciously supported by individuals and businesses through donations.

BUILDING AND GROUNDS

Renovated in 2016/2017, the Burnside Center has over 14,000 square feet of activity and office space for the Branch County Commission on Aging. The Center is all one level with no stairs, includes wide hallways for ease of movement throughout the building, has ample handicap accessible parking, and utilizes many interior windows to highlight the activities going on throughout the building. The Center is conveniently located in Coldwater, off of N. Michigan Avenue.

