



### Volunteer Appreciation Month 2026

Aging Ahead celebrated Volunteer Appreciation Month throughout April. With more than 700 active volunteers, there was much to recognize and celebrate. Many of our locations hosted appreciation events, while others honored volunteers with special treats and small gifts to express our gratitude for the time, talents, skills, and compassion they so generously give.

We couldn't do what we do without our incredible volunteers. They extend our reach, help us meet the needs of our communities, and enrich the programs offered at our centers. Their generous contributions of time are valued at nearly \$1 million—but even more meaningful are the personal connections they build, which enrich the lives of the older adults we serve.

Thank you to all Aging Ahead volunteers for helping Aging Ahead to deliver a difference!

### Volunteer Award of the Year

We are pleased to recognize Bob Vollmer as Aging Ahead's 2026 Delivering a Difference Volunteer of the Year. For more than 20 years, Bob has served as a Meals on Wheels volunteer in St. Clair, delivering thousands of meals along the way. As St. Clair Senior Center Administrator Shane Johnston said, **"Bob sees it as his mission to ensure every senior he comes in contact with is made to feel uplifted."** We thank Bob for his compassionate service and congratulate him on this well-deserved honor.



700 volunteers giving over



40,000 hours of service each year



*"Never have I experience such kindness. Each volunteer is a joy to greet. I love them all!"*

*"Thank you volunteers for keeping us fit, supporting our friendships, teaching us new information and celebrating with us!"*





## Senior Advocate Receives Washingtonian Award

Mary Wesche, a longtime older adult advocate and volunteer at the Washington Senior Center, received the Washingtonian Award.

Missourian Publisher Bill Miller Jr. presented the award to Wesche at the Washington Area Chamber of Commerce's Awards Gala. He called Wesche a **"senior citizen volunteer extraordinaire."**

**"Few, if any, have done more to improve the lives of seniors in our area than this person,"** Miller said. **"For years, she has dedicated her life to making sure seniors' voices are heard."**

But Miller said her record of volunteer service to older Missourians is what has truly distinguished her among her peers. Wesche began volunteering with Aging Ahead, the entity that operates the Washington Senior Center, in 2014.

The volunteer service at the senior center has blossomed into a number of other volunteer roles for Wesche on behalf of a variety of organizations that serve the senior community. Miller called her concern, commitment and advocacy for her fellow seniors **"truly remarkable."**

**"Whether volunteering at the Washington Senior Center, advocating for policy changes in the halls of our state capitol as a member of Aging Ahead's Silver Hair Legislature, educating those in nursing homes across this area as a VOYCE ombudsman for the Missouri Alliance for Long Term Care, or administering end-of-life-care at the bedside of the dying as a Hospice Volunteer, she has used her time and talents to make a difference for seniors,"** Miller said. In her remarks, Wesche said volunteering for groups of different ages has its own unique reward. **"Currently, seniors have taken priority, which is fitting as it is the fastest growing population and of which I now belong,"** she said.

Miller said the Lieutenant Governor got it right in selecting her for the prestigious award. **"Her concern, commitment and passion for making sure the rights and dignity of seniors are protected is unmatched,"** Miller said. **"Her quiet commitment to action and her so spoken confidence and desire to improve her fellow seniors' lives through exemplary volunteer service has earned her respect in Washington and across the state."**



## Renita Making News

Aging Ahead is proud to recognize Silver Haired Legislature member Renita Water for her dedication to older adults in our community. Renita recently received the Harvey A. & Doris Mae Hacker Friedman Award for Excellence in Service to Older Adults in St. Louis from the Washington University Center for Aging. With her award funds, she launched an intergenerational program connecting students from the Pattonville and Ritenour School Districts with older adults.

Renita was also honored by Circle of Care St. Louis with the Golden Trailblazer Award of the Year for her advocacy and commitment to helping older adults age safely and independently.

Thank you, Renita, for being such a wonderful advocate for older adults!

## SHL Advocacy Day

Aging Ahead was proud to support the Missouri Silver Haired Legislature's (SHL) Advocacy Day on March 9, 2026, bringing together advocates from across the state for a first-time collaboration with the Missouri Council on Aging (MCoA) and Missouri Association of Area Agencies on Aging (ma4). The event highlighted the power of partnership and the importance of ensuring older adults have a strong voice in legislative conversations.



Throughout the day, SHL members and advocates met with legislators to discuss issues impacting older Missourians and the communities they call home. Lt. Governor also addressed the group, sharing in meaningful discussion surrounding priorities that support healthy, safe, and independent aging.

Aging Ahead is grateful to everyone who participated and helped make the day impactful, as well as to MCoA and ma4 for their collaboration and shared commitment to advocacy. As planning begins for the 2027 legislative agenda, SHL continues working to strengthen its collective voice for older adults across Missouri.



### More Than Milk: How Dairy Keeps You Moving & Feeling Great

Research shows that dairy is key to lifelong bone health. It provides important nutrients that are necessary to build and maintain strong bones. For seniors, keeping bones strong is essential for maintaining mobility and independence, as this significantly lowers the risk of falls and bone fractures. Because of this, older adults need higher intakes of essential nutrients like calcium, dietary protein, and vitamin D compared to younger individuals.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that everyone age nine and above get three servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy per day to support bone health. Consider these ideas for meeting the guidelines for dairy intake: 1. Make oatmeal with milk instead of water, 2. Blend up a yogurt and fruit smoothie, 3. Prepare a salad or sandwich with cheese.

### Key Nutrients for Bone Health

**1** Calcium is essential for strong bones, as the skeleton contains 99% of the body's total calcium. A lack of calcium in the diet forces the body to draw it from the bones themselves, causing them to weaken. The easiest way to ensure adequate intake is through dairy foods.

**2** Protein is essential for building and preserving bone mass. Dairy foods are a good source of high-quality protein.

**3** To ensure calcium is properly absorbed and bones are correctly renewed and mineralized, the body requires Vitamin D. This is why many dairy foods have added Vitamin D—to enhance the body's ability to use the calcium they contain.



## GIVE STL DAY

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who supported Aging Ahead during Give STL Day! Thanks to the generosity of 23 donors, we raised \$1,465 to help older adults throughout our community age with dignity, connection, and independence. Every gift makes a meaningful difference by supporting vital programs like Meals on Wheels, caregiver assistance, wellness initiatives, and social connection opportunities for older adults across our region. We are truly grateful for your continued support and belief in our mission.



Adopt-A-Route | Support-A-Center | Support Family Caregivers

## Aging Ahead Champions Deliver A Difference!



Aging Ahead Champion Spotlight



### Assistance Home Care

For Allen and Sally Serfas, supporting Aging Ahead's Mission is deeply personal. As Sally's mother battled Alzheimer's disease, Meals on Wheels volunteers provided nourishment, comfort & meaningful connection for her parents when they needed it most.

Today, Assistance Home Care, a locally owned in-home senior care provider serving the Greater St. Louis & St. Charles areas, is proud to be a Champion of Supporting Family Caregivers! Allen & Sally encourage you to learn how your business or organization can Deliver A Difference by becoming an Aging Ahead Champion!

Proud Aging Ahead Champion of Supporting Family Caregivers

www.AssistanceHomeCare.com Available 24-7-365! Call: 314-466-3227



## Connecting Caregivers

We see you, we care about you and we're here to help! The Aging Ahead Community Options and Services Department is pleased to highlight programs that are available to support you and those you support. We will be featuring programs and services that are truly impacting the lives of caregivers. If you know of a program that has made a profound difference for someone in your life, please reach out to one of our offices below and let us know about it. We may highlight it in a future edition.

## SLU Launches Help Online Modifying the Environment (@HOME+) Program

Drs. Allison Gibson (School of Social Work) and Cara Wallace (School of Nursing) have launched a new SLU Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program initiative for @HOME+ (Help Online Modifying the Environment) for dementia caregivers. @HOME+ is a combination behavioral intervention for family caregivers of persons with dementia in the middle to late stages of the disease who are residing at home, and have at least one behavioral symptom (i.e., agitation, repetitious language, aggression, anxiety, etc.) that is bothersome to either the individual and/or their caregiver.

The training is focused on teaching care partners how to create the most suitable home environment for their loved one to decrease behavioral symptoms and maximize functional activity engagement.

The program is facilitated by social work faculty and healthcare profession students. The goal of the program is to provide a non-medicine tool for helping their loved one feel comfortable and stay active. All participants receive a free toolkit of supplies for the intervention, valued at \$100.

Families can participate in the program at home through virtual Zoom meetings, or in person at a site in the local community. Each session will have a specific focus:

- Session 1:** Behavioral Review ABC Model of Behavior  
Future Planning Values & Wishes
- Session 2:** Behavioral Individualized Intervention Plan  
Future Planning Resource Inventory
- Session 3:** Behavioral Environmental Modifications  
Future Planning Self-Care of the Care Partner
- Session 4:** Behavioral Intervention Continuation  
Future Planning Care Planning
- Session 5:** Behavioral Refinement and Maintenance  
Future Planning Care Planning
- Session 6:** Planning for Future Changes, Maintenance and Meaningful Activities

To learn more information, please complete the REDCap link <https://tinyurl.com/SLUcaringiver> or contact Dr. Allison Gibson at 314-977-3384 or [Allison.Gibson@slu.edu](mailto:Allison.Gibson@slu.edu). For those unfamiliar with Zoom, we can offer a practice session with one of our Saint Louis University students ahead of the first program meeting.

Aging Ahead continues to be a trusted resource for information. Our Community Options Specialists/Case Managers and Community Services Coordinators are here to help! Please contact us at the numbers below or by calling 1-800-243-6060  
 St. Louis County: 636-207-0847      Jefferson County 636-253-0558  
 St. Charles County: 636-579-0555      Franklin County 636-629-3143



## Senior Centers Farmers Market Program

The Farmers Market Program runs from May 1 through October 31 and is offered in partnership with MU Extension to assist with client registration. Through the Missouri Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, eligible low-income seniors age 60 and older living in participating Missouri counties can receive \$50 in annual benefits to purchase fresh, locally grown produce.

Interested seniors are encouraged to register in person at their local senior center, where staff can verify eligibility and provide information about additional Aging Ahead services. Agency staff will support on-site registration efforts throughout the season, with this year's focus centered on increasing voucher redemption to help ensure clients fully utilize the benefits available to them.



## Telephone Reassurance Program

Aging Ahead is excited to relaunch the Telephone Reassurance Program as part of our continued commitment to supporting older adults, particularly some of the most vulnerable clients we serve through Home Delivered Meals.

Telephone reassurance provides regular, purposeful outreach through guided conversations designed to assess well-being, identify emerging needs, and determine eligibility for additional services. During COVID, this program served as a vital way for our Agency to stay connected with clients.

This relaunch strengthens our ability to provide meaningful, intentional, and data-driven support while helping build trust, encourage engagement, and proactively identify concerns before they escalate. Staff will utilize guided questions during calls, document conversations, and build on discussions each week to support continuity of care and strengthen client relationships as we continue working toward incorporating volunteers into the outreach process.



## A Lifetime of Achievement, Now The Adventure Begins!

Aging Ahead recently celebrated the retirement of Janis Keith, Director of Community Engagement, after more than 14 years of dedicated service to the Agency. Jan began her journey in the Community Options department before stepping into the role of Director of Community Engagement in 2017, where she helped lead many of Aging Ahead's most meaningful outreach, advocacy, and fundraising efforts.

Throughout her time at Aging Ahead, Jan played an instrumental role in shaping the organization into what it is today. Most notably, she helped spearhead the Agency's rebrand from Mid-East Area Agency on Aging to Aging Ahead, helping create the identity and mission-driven voice that continues to guide the organization forward.

Jan was known not only for her leadership, but for the warmth and energy she brought to those around her. Whether through her welcoming smile, quick wit, compassionate spirit, or constant encouragement of staff, volunteers, and older adults alike, she made a lasting impression on countless people throughout the community.

***"I was lucky enough to first have Jan as my boss, and now as a friend. Her leadership style was rooted in empowering others and helping people recognize and grow their unique talents. She encouraged creativity, embraced big ideas, and led with genuine kindness and compassion. I learned so much from her over the years, and I only hope to lead others with the same grace, encouragement, and heart that she showed to so many of us."***—Kerri Gallagher, Community Engagement Manager

Jan recently relocated to South Carolina to be closer to her growing family and new granddaughter. While she will certainly be missed, her legacy of kindness, humor, passion, and dedication will continue to leave a lasting impact on Aging Ahead for many years to come.

## Grand Times Together

We're excited to invite friends and family members of Aging Ahead clients to join us and learn more about the Agency and the work we do.

The Grand Times Together gatherings are designed to help adult children, caregivers, and friends better understand the programs, aging services, and sense of community offered at each center location, as well as where their loved ones spend time throughout the week. The events aim to strengthen connections between the centers, our clients, and their families and caregivers.

### Summer Series Grand Times Together

- Ferguson Senior Center June 18<sup>th</sup>
- South County Senior Center July 16<sup>th</sup>
- St. Charles Senior Center August (TBD)

Registration is required and will be available on the website under the center page.



# JOIN OUR VIRTUAL 1 MILE AWARENESS WALK WEEKEND

SUPPORTING WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

AGING AHEAD

AGING AHEAD  
Supporting the journey.



  
**STEP 1:  
WEAR PURPLE**



  
**STEP 2:  
WALK 1 MILE**



  
**STEP 3:  
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Partner with Aging Ahead and register for our FREE Virtual World Elder Abuse Awareness Walk Weekend, Friday- Sunday, June 12th-14th. Friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers are encouraged to unite by wearing purple, walking 1 mile, and posting a selfie or group photo.

1. Wear Purple – Pick your favorite purple shirt.
2. Walk 1 Mile – Join communities across our four-county service area. Go for a short walk (or roll).
3. Share Your Photo – Take a selfie or group photo during your walk and post or email (info@agingahead.org).
4. Tag and hashtags – Do not forget to tag @agingahead and use the hashtags #MileInPurple, #WEAAD, and #Move4WEAAD.



To learn more and register for the walk, scan the QR Code.

