

## THE MARK OF

# SUPPORT

Our Older Americans Act and Kent County Senior Millage partner network is made up of 70 different services, and it is these services that make an unequivocal and lasting difference in a client's life. No matter if this support lasts years or is an essential one-time interaction, it leaves a lasting mark. To capture this, we chose to focus on two of our priority services; meals and transportation. Though all services make an impact, these two services are within our top utilized services every year showing they make a world of a difference.

**1,134,689 MEALS AND 34,629 RIDES WERE PROVIDED THROUGH OLDER AMERICANS ACT FUNDING ALONE**

### THE POWER OF A MEAL

We never want a participant or caregiver to have to wonder where their next meal might come from. Congregate meals and home-delivered meals are vital services that provide nutritious meal options throughout our nine-county region.

To highlight this importance further we decided to take a closer look at long-time meals partner Mason County Central Schools (MCCS). MCCS is unique in that it operates out of a middle school kitchen and brings much-needed meals to a rural county. They provide meals for the three senior centers (Ludington, Scottville, and Tallman) in addition to delivering about 130 home-delivered meals a day. As Mary Ann Nielson, Senior Meals Director, explained, it is more than a meal, they serve a vulnerable population and by getting a meal each day these individuals are receiving an essential need they wouldn't otherwise have. It is this that allows them to stay living in their own homes.

These meals provide a balanced diet, yet a meal often goes further than nutrition. At congregate meal sites these meals provide the vital socialization that is necessary for wellbeing and emotional health. For those that receive the home-delivered meal option, their meal delivery person becomes a vital point of contact. Dropping off the meal is the person's daily check-in and a relationship is built from this visit. MCCS staff members shared why they do what they do, oftentimes citing the close relationships they form with their clients as the most fulfilling part of their role.

## THE POWER OF A RIDE

When someone does not have access to transportation options, their world is as small as the rides loved ones are able to provide or the one bus on their route. Seniors that are no longer able to drive are granted freedom and accessibility from a ride.

Kent County Community Action (KCCA), a partner through Ridelink, offers senior transportation service throughout Kent County. Director of KCCA, Susan Cervantes, explained that transportation is a common thread in solving issues related to poverty. At KCCA their goal is to help eradicate this and their transportation services for seniors helps them to maintain their independence. In 2019 they provided 27,000 rides to such things as medical appointments, shopping trips, and social outings with friends. Susan explained that these seemingly regular, everyday trips are vital, as they are what makes older adults feel like they are still an active and engaged member of the community.

A unique aspect of KCCA is that their transportation service is predominantly utilized by monolingual seniors who only speak Spanish. KCCA works to make their transportation accessible, having a driver that speaks their language and makes riders feel comfortable and accepted.



### WHY A MEAL MATTERS

"I can eat when I am hungry and know I have meals coming while my daughter is away in Florida. Before I started receiving meals I would drink a cup of coffee and forget about it, now I can't wait for Nancy (my delivery person) to arrive. The meals are good and hot. I've enjoyed them and I've enjoyed everybody that's come through my front door with the program.."- Connie Walker



### WHY A TRIP MATTERS

Aruna Kamara, Transportation Project Supervisor at KCCA, emphasized the importance of a ride for their clients, "I see how impactful it is clearly on their face. When they see a bus pull up—knowing they can get to where they need to go this time—their face lights up."