

# STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Rural Aging Initiative 2017 - 2019



## MCGREGOR

### INTERGENERATIONAL CHORE PROGRAM BLOSSOMS IN RURAL AITKIN COUNTY

Pay It Forward was first piloted by McGregor KIDS PLUS-AGE to age, a Rural Aging Initiative social engagement partner site, in 2016. This intergenerational chore service connects rural older adults with local youth ages 12 to 18 to perform home maintenance tasks. Older people are better able to remain in their homes. Young people develop valuable job skills. An added benefit: reducing social isolation and increasing a sense of community and belonging for all ages.

How does it work? Older adults can request gardening, yard work, painting, shoveling, and other help at no charge. Middle and high school students gain valuable work experience, soft skills, and small stipends. Many older adults reciprocate for services by donating to or volunteering with KIDS PLUS.

"The older adults who are receiving services can interact with the youth and their adult supervisor," said Cheryl Meld, McGregor KIDS PLUS-AGE to age Coordinator.



"Community members of different generations meet, often for the first time. It's wonderful to see them get to know one another."

Pay It Forward has been a success in McGregor and, thanks to Rural Aging Initiative peer networking, inspired a similar program in Two Harbors, MN. Most exciting of all, Pay It Forward has since received a \$30,000 state grant to expand its intergenerational goodness into the future.

### PAY IT FORWARD BY THE NUMBERS

**1850+ Chore hours** per year provided to older adults

**45 Older adults** served per year

**11-14 Youth** served per year

**15-20 Older adults** per year gave back by volunteering for KIDS PLUS-AGE to age

**260 Volunteer hours** per year donated by the older adults



## CARLTON COUNTY

### AGING IN PLACE MADE EASIER THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

In rural areas like Carlton County, it can be extra challenging for caregivers and their aging family members to stay in close touch. An older person may reside in the country without neighbors nearby, or their adult children may have moved far away. The GrandCare™ System helps empower older adults to continue living with independence.

Through the Rural Aging Initiative, Volunteer Services of Carlton County (VCC) received a \$50,000 grant to purchase 20 GrandCare units. A large touchscreen unit installed in the older adult's home links with an app to their caregiver's computer or smart phone. Email, texting, and calls are easy to manage. One-touch video chat allows for more meaningful communication. With the addition of motion sensors, caregivers are alerted if their loved one has not been moving around the home as usual.

One of the most popular features is the digital photo slideshow. Older adults enjoy seeing the newest pictures of grandchildren and other family members, anytime they wish.

"All our clients who have used GrandCare would be at risk of placement in a skilled nursing facility," said VCC's Jill Hatfield, "if they did not have the system in place."

The VCC's experiences inspired the Itasca County aging services nonprofit, ElderCircle, to implement GrandCare, too.



## TWO HARBORS

### CREATING A "COMMUNITY OF GENERATIONS" IN LAKE COUNTY

What makes a place great for older adults? What about for young people? Two Harbors has figured it out. This town of 3,500 residents was honored by Generations United and MetLife Foundation as the 2017 Best Intergenerational Community.

Through the Rural Aging Initiative, Two Harbors has received AGE to age support, as well as strengthened its relationship with Community Partners-Two Harbors, a Capacity Building and Aging Innovation Program participant, to hold an array of intergenerational activities.

It was among the first sites to join the Northland Foundation's AGE to age Initiative in 2008, the Summer College Intern Program in 2012, and Reading Pals in 2016.

Two Harbors was also the first community to offer Tech-n-Coffee sessions, led by interns, at which young people help older adults navigate their digital devices.



It was through Tech-n-Coffee that Bob, a high school student, met with a retired social studies teacher.

"He helped me with my homework after I helped him get pictures from his phone to his computer," Bob recalled. "AGE to age allows for these connections to happen." It is connections like that which make Two Harbors a community for all ages to thrive!