

NewBridge Madison Cultural Diversity Program

Since the mid-1990's, NewBridge (and NESCO before our merger) has received a grant from Dane County Human Services to provide culturally specific programming. The parties involved in the initial development of the cultural diversity program determined these funds be used to serve Black, Brown and Hispanic older adults living in Dane County. This grant is put out for bid every five years and our agency has been awarded it each cycle. Providing culturally specific programming for Black, Brown and Hispanic older adults has been an integral part of our agency's mission for over 25 years. Over the past two decades the focus of the grant has been health, wellness, socialization and building community.

Historically this program has been underfunded and understaffed. Ten years ago, Dane County provided \$38,533 in funding for this program. Additional funding from the City of Madison and United Way helped cover the remaining operational costs. Since the early 2000's the Cultural Diversity program was comprised of two, .5FTE staff to provide services county-wide. Staff conducted two culturally specific programs and a multicultural Bingo each month. However, this was still not enough to keep up with the growing aging population. Staff needed additional support to meet the increased demand for activities. In 2019, Dane County increased funding by \$40,000 (to \$78,289) to enable both positions to become 1 FTE's.

But we soon found that the pay rate we could offer was not competitive within the non-profit industry. As a result, it took longer to hire staff for these positions. It also increased the frequency in turnover as staff were leaving after a couple years for better paying job. From 2021 to 2024, Dane County gradually increased the level of funding to \$167,851 enabling us to increase salaries, add a couple part-time staff and help cover other operating expenses for this program.

The types of programs we have provided the past two years (and are continuing) include memory support groups, Bingo, ESL class, writing and poetry classes, art classes, exercise classes, dance classes, mental health and wellness groups, falls prevention class, music group, sewing groups, cultural celebrations, computer class, cooking classes, Overture theatre shows, financial planning classes, medical power of attorney and wills assistance and attending the annual Black Women's Wellness fair. Many participants are from Madison and Fitchburg as these communities have the largest concentration of Black, Brown and Hispanic older adults in Dane County. A number of participants live in other communities (Belleville, Brooklyn, Middleton, Sun Prairie, Waunakee, Verona) in Dane County. We coordinate some program times in conjunction with the county nutrition dining site meals. Program staff are able to connect the older adults in need of assistance with personal needs or issues (housing, energy assistance, food, home chore services) to the Senior Focal Point area where they reside.

The majority of older adults in the cultural diversity program need transportation to attend our activities. The Dane County Specialized Transportation program provides us with additional funds, \$32,141, to help supplement the cost of transportation for participants to these

activities. To help alleviate the growing cost of transportation NewBridge has divided our programming into two regions (west/south and east/north), offering activities for Black, Brown and Hispanic older adults in each region to address rising transportation costs. In 2024, NewBridge was awarded a grant to purchase a 14 passenger, wheelchair accessible bus as another means of transportation.

In general, since merging to become NewBridge, our agency's approach has switched from having three large in-person groups each month to providing 2-4 smaller events each week as well as a few larger events over the course of the year. This has significantly increased the number of opportunities for older adults to be engaged. Our overall program numbers were impacted by COVID for two years when participants felt comfortable enough to return to in-person activities.

Outside of the COVID years we have exceeded our contract goals in number of activities and direct service/programming hours each year for both the Hispanic, Black and Brown older adult programs. The number of activities held for Black, Brown and Hispanic older adults have been fairly even the last five years. 2024 being the exception. In Sept. of 2023 our Black Cultural Diversity Activities Coordinator, who is well connected in the community, left us for a higher paying job opportunity. There was no way financially we could meet her request for a salary increase. We also knew it would be virtually impossible to replace her. We ended up hiring a enthusiastic but less experienced staff person with limited connections. It took awhile for her to develop the trust and respect of her elders and to develop relationships within the community. This impacted the number of activities and participants for Black and Brown older adults in 2024.

Over the last decade, there have been more Black and Brown participants than Hispanics in our cultural diversity activities program. Our previous Black Cultural Diversity Program Coordinator planned more large events resulting in fewer activities overall. In 2023, we achieved our goal of serving 250 unduplicated participants overall. While our Black and Brown participation took a temporary step back last year due to a staff departure, our Hispanic numbers are gradually increasing.