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options for independence

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# THE GOOD LIFE

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## Age & Dementia Friendly Community Awards Support Local Innovation

By Jason Molony, MSW, Age & Dementia Friendly Program Director



Jason Molony

The rural communities of Franklin County and the North Quabbin are places of deep beauty, strong bonds, and self-determination. They're also home to a significantly greater proportion of older adults than the rest of the Commonwealth.

Indeed, Franklin County has a larger proportion of people over 65 than Florida, and 60% more older adults than children under 18. At LifePath, we believe this is a strength—making our community an extraordinary place to live, work, and grow older. But we also know there's room to grow when it comes to how our communities support older adults and people living with dementia.

For 50 years, LifePath has been helping individuals age with dignity and comfort. Along the way, we've launched innovative programs and built new models of care and connection. Our Age & Dementia Friendly Community Grants are the latest example of this innovation. These grants provide direct funding and other forms of support to local groups for neighborhood-level projects that improve quality of life for older adults and people living with dementia. Often the best solutions don't come from outside—they come from within the community itself. In the first year, 11 organizations were awarded funds:

- **Mass in Motion/Age Friendly Conway Committee**

Supporting the creation of a home repair resource portal for older adults and an on-demand senior transportation service, improving access to daily needs, events, and social opportunities.

- **Shelburne Senior Center**

Enhancing caregiver support and the Memory Café program by providing entertainment, speakers, and a comprehensive caregiver resource brochure.

- **Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust**

Installing ADA-compliant benches along the Alderbrook Trail to improve access for older adults and those with limited mobility.

- **Leverett Library**

Installing a dementia-friendly "Happy to Chat Bench" to foster connection and intergenerational conversation.

- **Northfield Senior Center**

Expanding the Memory Cafés to offer free meals, performances, and additional sessions, providing inclusive welcoming experiences for people with memory loss and their caregivers.

- **Rowe Council on Aging**

Increasing access and connection through the purchase of equipment to support cultural and fitness programming for people of all abilities.

- **Greenfield Housing Authority**

Supporting older residents with social programming and memory support, and adding two customized computers for resident use.

- **Town of Athol**

Creating accessible outdoor seating adjacent to the Athol Senior Center and North Quabbin Regional Veterans Center.

- **Village Neighbors**

Expanding dementia-friendly services in four towns through caregiver education, volunteer training, transportation support for older adults, people living with dementia, and caregivers.

- **Town of Ashfield**

Increasing civic engagement through the purchase of assistive listening technology for use at civic meetings and other events at Town Hall.

- **Greenfield Council on Aging**

Supporting volunteers in the development of The Greenfield Neighborhood, which will provide transportation and other services to promote aging in place.

Award amounts ranged from \$2,000 to \$3,000—modest investments with the potential for big impact. We designed the program to be as accessible as possible, with a streamlined application and reporting process to make participation feasible for groups with limited staff or resources. The result? A wide pool of applicants representing the passion and creativity of our region. These awards are supported with funding from the Point32 Health Foundation and the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Network, a project of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG).

Applications were reviewed by a team of older adults from our local communities and aging services professionals. This reflects the Age & Dementia Friendly initiative's commitment that decisions for older adults be made by people with lived experience—people who understand firsthand what's needed to make our communities more supportive and inclusive for everyone.

Awardee Colleen Letourneau, Director of the Northfield Senior Center, says "The Age & Dementia Friendly Community Grant will offer the Northfield Senior Center the opportunity to continue our Memory Café for the benefit of our participants experiencing cognitive changes and their care-partners to attend a fun, failure-free, and supportive Café. Participants will enjoy lunch, a musical performance, or an activity. The benefits of

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such an offering have been proven to decrease isolation, loneliness, and decline for both partners. We are so grateful for this grant."

"We are grateful for LifePath and their Age & Dementia Friendly grant for allowing

us to support our elderly and disabled housing residents at the Elm Terrace Housing Community in Greenfield," Jack Redman, Greenfield Housing Authority's Executive Director, said. "With this grant we will be able to create unique opportunities for social inclusion within our housing community by purchasing two computers and securing digital navigation support through community partnerships."

Whether the focus is caregiver support, dementia awareness, access to transportation, or promoting intergenerational connection, each project funded this year aligns with one or more of the eight domains of livability identified by the AARP Age-Friendly framework. Together, they form a powerful tapestry of local leadership, community spirit, and practical action.

"We are grateful to these organizations who have stepped forward to partner with us on making our community more age and dementia friendly," said Lynne Feldman, LifePath's Associate Executive Director. "These initiatives are the culmination of deep work and commitment by residents, local organizations, and our valued funders."

We're proud of what's taking shape—and we're just getting started. Funding is in place to offer another round of Age & Dementia Friendly Community Grants in 2026 and 2027. If you have an idea, we hope you'll apply. Keep an eye on [LifePathMA.org](http://LifePathMA.org) for updates and deadlines.

Finally, if you're someone with lived experience—whether you're a caregiver, someone living with dementia, or simply an older adult who cares deeply about your community—we hope you'll consider serving as a grant reviewer in future cycles. Your insight, voice, and perspective are essential to making sure these grants continue to reflect the priorities of older adults in every corner of our region. For more information about being an Age & Dementia Friendly grant reviewer, email [jmolony@lifepathma.org](mailto:jmolony@lifepathma.org) or call (413) 829-9198.