

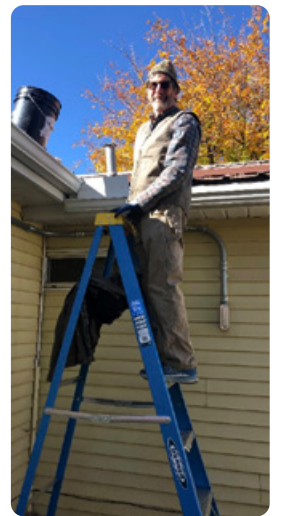
2024 Annual Report



North Fork Senior Connections

Finding Solutions to Help Seniors Age in Place

P.O. Box 1738 Paonia, CO 81428



Letter from our Board Chairman



Welcome to year five-going-on-six of North Fork Senior Connections. You and I are part of a small army of dedicated

volunteers who regularly reach out into the North Fork Valley community to support our aging senior population. And though I am one of those seniors, volunteers—people with a strong desire to help their neighbors—come in all ages with a wide variety of skills they can contribute: families, groups of friends, work mates.

We share one goal: to help older adults stay connected with their hometown communities and remain active and engaged participants. Take it from me — the older you get, the more you come to rely on your ability to help others, and to be helped in return. That’s part of the connection.

This report will acquaint you with the many ways in which we’ve carried out that mission and attempted to grow the organization over the years, but know that it would not happen without your participation, and especially your continuing financial support. Like other local non-profits, we apply for and receive grants, but we also rely to a great extent on individual contributions, no matter how large or small.

Help us to continue to improve the quality of life for North Fork Valley adults 65 and older by creating opportunities for community involvement and personal connection.

Best wishes for the coming year and thank you,
Bruce Woodside, Chairman of the Board



Board of Directors

Bruce Woodside, Chair
Bonnie Eisenberg, Vice Chair
Brad Thacker, Treasurer
Faye Sullivan, Secretary/Volunteer Manager
Marsha Brezonick, Paonia
Wanda Gofforth, Crawford
Carol Jaques, Paonia
Mark Sullivant, Hotchkiss
Laura Lee Yates, Program Manager

Each member of the NFSC Board contributes in their own invaluable way. Vice-chair Bonnie Eisenberg has volunteered 300 hours in 2024 as acting Operations Manager, including researching & applying for grant funding. Four of our Board members are registered drivers for Neighborly Rides. When in a pinch for a volunteer, staff called Treasurer Brad Thacker over twenty times, and he never said no! Every Board member gets involved on our Service Saturdays, whether it’s raking leaves, scouting recipient’s properties, or making food for the celebratory lunches. Secretary Faye Sullivan, who’s worked with many boards, says “I have never seen a board so active and involved! The NFSC Board really stands behind the organization and the role it plays in the lives of our local elders. Every member except myself is a senior, which makes their contributions that much more impressive!” With heartfelt gratitude we said goodbye to long-time Treasurer Jenn Lukesh, and welcome wonderful additions Wanda Gofforth from Crawford, Mark Sullivant from Hotchkiss and Carol Jaques from Paonia.

2024 Events and Programs

The North Fork Valley offers gorgeous scenery and a peaceful lifestyle, but rural areas face a higher incidence of social isolation. Evidence-based studies illustrate the negative impact of too much “alone time” on physical and mental health, all too evident in our elder population. The National Institute on Aging warns that social isolation in seniors can increase the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer’s disease, and even death. NFSC is fighting back, determined to keep our community elders active and engaged.

Program manager Laura Lee Yates, based out of the Paonia Senior Center, is the smiling face of North Fork Senior Connections. Her job role primarily focuses on combating social isolation and includes scheduling and facilitating all our programs, supporting community lunches, chatting with our seniors and ensuring the most important information is included in our monthly newsletter, which reaches the homes of over 400 newsletter recipients each month.

Service Saturday is a keynote endeavor, held each spring and fall in Crawford, Hotchkiss, and Paonia to help older adults age in place. Teams of volunteers rake leaves (31 bags for one disabled senior!) or prepare flowerbeds for planting, install or winterize swamp coolers, clean debris from gutters, and perform various outdoor chores to ease the lives of local elders. It’s become a truly multi-generational event, and the homeowners look forward to the interaction, especially with the kids who participate alongside their parents.



Master Gardener John Valentine resumed his **Path of Least Resistance Gardening** series, working closely with a group of seniors who wanted to grow their own organic produce. Valentine generously provided six lucky participants with permanent raised beds and taught them how to construct drip irrigation systems. We want to honor his generosity.



“I may be the ringleader, but it’s the wealth of experience and big hearts that our volunteer presenters bring to their offerings that truly enrich the lives of the elder community.” Laura Lee Yates, NFSC program manager.

Wednesday afternoons the Memoir group “**Writing Your Life,**” spearheaded by multi-talented Yuri Chicovsky, continued to gather in Paonia, while Meg O’Shaughnessy generously facilitated the popular **Here & Now Meditation** gathering each Thursday and the illuminating **Death Café** in September. Most Monday mornings, in collaboration with the Paonia Senior Center, local experts imparted their knowledge on a wide range of topics during the **Coffee Klatch**, whether sharing health and nutrition tips, exercise, community engagement or just plain fun while all enjoyed hot beverages and snacks. The lively **Book Club** met on Tuesday afternoons to discuss great reads old and new, while singer/songwriter Ellen Stapenhorst offered a monthly **Song Circle**, inspiring local seniors to raise their voices and lift their spirits. The quilters of the **Silver Threads Sewing Circle** brought cheer and color to Paonia Senior Center, where their creations enliven the walls.

The Feldenkrais method has been around for decades, but local practitioner Jessi Hastings brought **NeuroMovement** classes to the North Fork Valley, helping local elders discover safe ways to revive well-worn bodies and establish new neural pathways. **Artful Aging**, in conjunction with the North Fork Creative Coalition, facilitated creative expression through pottery, yoga, painting, storytelling, mosaic,

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basketmaking and ensemble singing. World travelers shared their experiences through photos, tales, and music, with **Armchair Travel** transporting their elder audiences to Africa and Peru. NFSC closed out 2024 with gusto, featuring a volunteer appreciation potluck and lots of music, including caroling, a performance by the North Fork Freedom Chorus, and a lively session of reimagined holiday songs by Hillery McCalister.

For the housebound, social interaction with the volunteer driver who delivers their **CSA** of organic produce or delicious soup & artisan bread may prove as valuable as the nutrition. We want to remind our local elders that they're not alone, and that despite new hurdles, the aging process brings its own rewards.

Volunteers



What would we do without them? This year our volunteer efforts increased by 20% with the addition of **Faye Sullivan** as volunteer manager. Faye received her MBA with a focus in nonprofit management and brings her generous, ‘can-do’ attitude and a passion for feeding the North Fork. Our new **Soup Program**, which she spearheads with co-chef Chrys Bailey, features biweekly quarts of superior organic taste and nutrition provided to local seniors who find cooking and/or shopping daunting. Many of the same volunteer drivers who transported **CSA** produce for thirty weeks during the heat of harvest season now deliver soup with a smile, undeterred by winter’s icy roads.

Last year we activated **Neighborly Rides**, with a small but generous team of volunteer drivers who provide much-needed transportation for North Fork elders to anywhere in Delta County. This year they logged **60 hours and 1500 miles**, driving senior passengers to: doctors’ appointments, surgeries & physical therapy; buy groceries; pick up a car at the mechanic; take a sick animal to the vet...

Our newest endeavor—successful thanks to Faye’s recruiting efforts, especially through social media—brings **Handy Helpers** to senior householders with fix-it needs beyond their own capabilities. Our **Service Saturdays** in all three communities were better than ever, including new and younger volunteers, especially after Taya Jae interviewed Faye and program manager Laura Lee Yates for public broadcasting station **KVNF**. On those spring and fall days alone, volunteers contributed almost 500 hours!

*Special thanks to **John Valentine**, who formatted our monthly newsletters and this annual report.*

Pope Paul VI told us: “Nothing makes one feel so strong as a call for help.” We all want to remain independent regardless of age, but sometimes we need the assistance of others. NFSC volunteers from ages four to eighty-four got the jobs done, making a difference in the lives of local elders by **donating more than 1300 hours** of their time!

Collaboration

It's hard to believe this was ever a derogatory word. What would we do without them? Nonprofits abound in the North Fork Valley, and our combined efforts make this a special place to live. The **Blue Sage Center for the Arts** presented a wonderful series of free ENGAGE! programs for elders through a generous grant from Next50, including illuminating Chautauqua actors like the amazing woman who portrayed civil rights activist Rosa Parks. The community-owned **Paradise Theater** offered monthly films chosen for the elder community, with free admission and refreshments. **Delicious Orchards** helped us fundraise through their Friday concert series, each benefitting a different nonprofit, while the adorable munchkins of the **Kids Pasta Project** served up another great lasagna dinner to the accompaniment of a quartet of talented local Celtic musicians playing at the **Creamery Arts Center**.

As we continue our fight against food insecurity, gleaners from **UpRoot** as well as **Colorado Farm & Food Alliance** deliver seasonal organic fruits and vegetables from local farms and orchards which we disperse to appreciative elders. Another 30-week CSA delivery of produce from **The Living Farm** brought fresh & fabulous produce delivered straight to the doors of 31 appreciative seniors by friendly volunteers. Valley chef **Chrys Bailey** has been instrumental in facilitating our new Soup Delivery program.

Hopewest of Delta County brought their skilled facilitators to comfort those dealing with grief through their Mending Hearts programs. **North Fork EMS** not only provided a fabulous Health & Wellness Expo and continued to offer their uber-popular SAIL classes in each North Fork community but brought informational presentations from paramedicine professionals to Paonia and Crawford, easing the difficulty of obtaining quality healthcare for an aging population. **Region 10** has a new director, Brian Bowler, and we look forward to working with him in the future.



We continue to maintain our shared office space at the **Paonia Senior Center**, where we hold much of our programming as well. In addition to our collaboration on the Monday morning Coffee Klatches we've joined forces to strengthen the Thursday catered lunch program, which features local restauranteurs and caterers who provide delicious low-cost meals to community elders. This year we began a new collaboration with **Delta County Libraries**, who provided teaching space for NeuroMovement instructor Jessi Hastings. One of our volunteers, who'd long been unable to lift his arm above his shoulder now has full extension! The **Paonia Elementary Kindergarten** students of dedicated teacher Jodi Simp-

son make the holiday season special with their handcrafted cards, warming hearts across the generations.

A favorite new partnership is the passion project of young **Rylee Lopez**, shown with Carol Sikora of Living Springs Farm. Lopez wanted local elders to feel cherished, and worked with grower Sikora to assemble Mason-jar bouquets for several dozen aging recipients, delivered monthly by our volunteer drivers. Studies show that flowers help reduce feelings of isolation & improve short-term cognitive memory. A bouquet thrilled one senior to tears: she hadn't received flowers for thirty-five years.



Grants and Donations

NFSC would like to extend deep gratitude to our foundation partners for their continuing support. This has been a challenging period for us financially and these grantors have made it possible to extend our outreach and engage more North Fork Valley elders. We couldn't accomplish our mission without their generosity.

To each and every individual donor: your contributions, large or small, keep NFSC moving forward, helping local seniors age in place with dignity and vitality. We are so fortunate to share a caring community!

- Next 50 Initiative
- Western Colorado Community Foundation
- West Elks Community Fund
- Rocky Mountain Health Foundation
- El Pomar Foundation
- Anschutz Foundation
- Alpine Bank
- DMEA



Membership

Members of all ages are the beating heart of North Fork Senior Connections. Generous individuals who donate their time and/or money to benefit others keep the elder community vibrant, reminding us we are all Coloradans at different stages in our lives. Just as our society aims to ensure no child is left behind, we believe it's important that nobody is forgotten just because they've left the workforce or sent their children out into the world. Seniors are the wisdom-keepers, living history that helps all of us learn from the past and reach toward a better future for everyone.

We often speak of "paying it forward," with the knowledge that aging is a natural yet challenging process. Younger members offer abilities they may take for granted that can make a dynamic difference in the lives of Valley seniors. With our new, locally-designed website, user-friendly software for informing volunteers of needs, and a streamlined membership process, it's easier than ever to **Get Connected!** Visit our new website nfseniorconnections.org and become a member today.

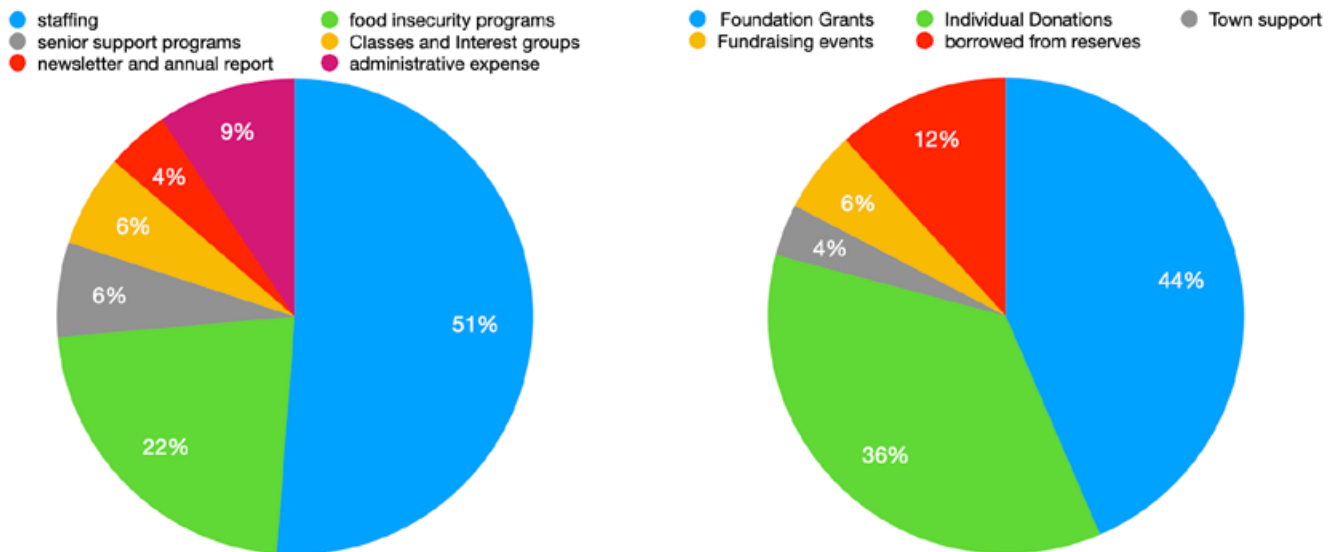
The new website features a calendar detailing upcoming events of interest to area seniors and information on all our programs as well as how to become a volunteer with NFSC. Visit the easy-to-use donations page, where you can show your support for our mission by making a contribution, either with a credit card or PayPal.



2024 Income and Expense Report

NFSC has recently completed its fifth year of service to seniors in the North Fork Valley. Our work is entirely supported by foundation grants and community donations, so your support is vital. We're a very cost-effective organization because our wonderful volunteers provide most of our programs and service: we could not exist without them. North Fork Senior Connections is extremely grateful for the support and encouragement we receive and strives to be an asset to our community.

Below are two charts that show where our funding comes from and how those funds are used in support of our mission.



NFSC volunteers provide free transportation for seniors within Delta County. Plan ahead and call **NEIGHBORLY RIDES!** Do you need help with a small household task? Call **HANDY HELPERS** for volunteer assistance. **(970) 527-1735**

Thanks to our generous sponsors:

Thanks to our generous coffee sponsor: Both Senior Connections and the Paonia Senior Center appreciate their support!

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