



More lessons from the Village to Village Conference

By TRAIL Executive Director Christine Scheetz

This year's National Village to Village Network Virtual Conference offered powerful reminders of how Villages like TRAIL play a vital role in helping older adults thrive. Two sessions in particular—*Less Medicine, More Connection* and *The Power of Inclusion in Villages*—highlighted the growing evidence that community, belonging, and meaningful engagement are essential to healthy aging.

Less Medicine, More Connection

This session explored an important idea: friendships, activities, learning opportunities, and purpose aren't just "nice to have"—they can actually address and prevent health decline. The message wasn't anti-medication; rather, it emphasized how social prescribing—encouraging social connection—can complement medical care and improve well-being.

Many chronic conditions common among older adults (including chronic pain, hypertension, depression, cognitive decline, and arthritis) can increase the risk of isolation. But the presenters shared encouraging research showing that strong social connections can help prevent or lessen these challenges.

Key insights:

- ✿ Loneliness is a serious health risk. Studies show that social isolation can be as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Villages are uniquely positioned to counteract this.
- ✿ Small gestures have big impact. A friendly phone call, a ride, sharing a meal, or a volunteer visit can brighten a day and strengthen emotional well-being.
- ✿ Villages are "community medicine." While medical professionals treat symptoms, Villages foster relationships, belonging, and purpose—essential ingredients for healthy aging.

Early research on Village impact shows:

- ✿ Longer life expectancy among Village members
- ✿ Fewer hospitalizations and readmissions
- ✿ Increased awareness and use of community resources
- ✿ Protection against physical and cognitive decline
- ✿ Social isolation may even be a modifiable risk factor for dementia

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More lessons from Village to Village conference *continued*

The Power of Inclusion in Villages

The second session focused on how diversity and inclusion strengthen Villages. Creating a community where all older adults feel welcome—regardless of culture, language, background, or identity—not only broadens community ties but also reduces isolation.

Why inclusion matters:

- ※ Diverse perspectives bring creativity, resilience, and stronger networks.
- ※ Inclusive practices build trust, belonging, and meaningful relationships.
- ※ Underrepresented seniors are less likely to experience isolation when they feel seen and valued.
- ※ Cross-cultural friendships and intergenerational connections grow naturally in inclusive communities.
- ※ Inclusion ensures equitable access to programs, services, and support.

Barriers Villages must address:

- ※ Language and communication challenges
- ※ Cultural stigma around aging or asking for help
- ※ Transportation and accessibility issues
- ※ Limited representation of diverse voices in leadership

Steps toward greater inclusion:

- ※ Outreach to underrepresented groups
- ※ Culturally relevant programs and events
- ※ Translation or interpretation services
- ※ Diverse leadership and volunteer representation
- ※ Partnerships with cultural and faith-based organizations
- ※ Involving seniors directly in planning and leadership roles

A holiday message to our TRAIL community



As we celebrate the holiday season, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who makes TRAIL of Johnson County such a warm, welcoming, and supportive community.

To our members: Thank you for your trust, enthusiasm, and engagement.

To our volunteers: Your generosity of time, talent, and kindness brings TRAIL's mission to life each day.

To our donors, sponsors, and partners: Your support ensures that older adults in Johnson County can age in place with confidence, safety, and connection.

Warmest wishes for a peaceful, healthy, and hope-filled holiday season and new year!

TRAIL office closures

Wednesday, December 24, Thursday, December 25, and Thursday, January 1

We ask that members provide at least one week's notice when making a service request, but you do not have to wait for that one-week window to do so. Service requests made well in advance are welcome! To make one, just call Jessica Hahn, member and volunteer service coordinator, at 319-800-9003 or email her at membersupport@trailofjohnsoncounty.org. If members have appointments or requests from now through January 2026, Jessica would be happy to enter those into our volunteer system.



Engaging volunteers

Boosting volunteer support and engagement

Volunteers are essential to TRAIL's mission of providing services to its members that allow them to live safely and independently in their own homes.

More than 40 service volunteers devote thousands of hours a year assisting Full members with transportation and tasks of everyday living.

The members share their gratitude often, saying things like, "I don't know what I'd do without TRAIL volunteers."

As an organization, TRAIL values its volunteers, showing its thanks with the annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon in April, special treats from the Volunteer Committee, and support via orientation, training, and online resources.

This fall member service volunteers and local gerontologist Mary McCall met to discuss how TRAIL could further enhance its support for volunteers. Their collaboration led to the development of

two initiatives designed to address volunteer needs and well-being.

Grief support sessions

To assist volunteers in coping with the loss of a member, TRAIL now provides one-on-one grief support sessions. These sessions are facilitated by professionals, offering a confidential and understanding space for volunteers to process their experiences. Volunteers interested in scheduling a session can contact the TRAIL office at 319-800-9003 or reach out via email to Jessica at membersupport@trailofjohnsoncounty.org.

Quarterly gatherings

Beginning in 2026, TRAIL will enhance volunteer engagement and support by hosting quarterly volunteer gatherings. These sessions will feature presentations and training focused on topics selected by volunteers themselves, ensuring the content is relevant and responsive to their interests and needs.

In addition to educational programming, these gatherings will provide



opportunities for volunteers to discuss challenging situations they may encounter in their roles. Volunteers, along with facilitators and staff, will collaborate to share insights and solutions, fostering a supportive environment for open dialogue.

Volunteers will also be encouraged to reflect on their experiences, celebrate meaningful moments together, and offer mutual support—especially through periods of loss. This holistic approach aims to strengthen the volunteer community, enhance the overall volunteer experience, and ensure every volunteer feels valued and empowered in their service.



TRAIL wishes to express deepest gratitude to Alex Taylor, past chair of the TRAIL Board of Directors, as he steps down from the Board this month. Alex has contributed to TRAIL's success in many ways over several years. He joined the Board in mid-2019 when a vacancy occurred, was elected chair in 2021, and co-chaired the Board with Susan Shullaw in 2023. He helped guide TRAIL through COVID and through the 2024-25 leadership change and has been involved with the work of several committees. Alex and his wife, Laura, have also contributed generously to TRAIL through their business, Woofables Gourmet Dog Biscuits. Thank you, Alex, for all you've done to support TRAIL's mission!

Thanks to Solon Retirement Village for sponsoring this month's newsletter.

Add warmth and joy to your celebrations

No matter the holiday, the marketing for it can be flashy and over-the-top, often convincing us to buy and give more than we intended. Want to avoid buyer's remorse and the commercialization of any holiday? Here are some ideas to help you feel more connected to friends and family.



Letters: Who wouldn't want to open the mailbox to find a letter or hand-inscribed card instead of a bill? Due to digital communication like email and texting, handwritten letters are becoming rare. Choose the personal touch and send a note to let your friend or loved one know you are thinking of them.

Phone calls: Remember when phone calls cost a fortune? (A 10-minute call in the 1950s might cost \$50 in today's money.) Like a letter, a call to someone special will bring you closer together and spread warmth and happiness.

Give experiences: Skip the mall and instead plan an "experience" that offers you a chance to spend quality time with someone. Consider tickets to see a movie, a meal prepared together, or visit a local farm see young goats at play. Each is sure to bring smiles to yourself and others. Doing something together also avoids adding to someone's clutter in their home.

Handmade gifts: Do you bake, sew, or woodwork? A handmade gift beats mass-produced items hands down. Be intentional in how you celebrate any holiday or event—your family, friends, and your bank account will thank you.



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TRAIL Happy Hour

TRAIL members enjoyed dining at Monica's on December 2. Happy Hour is a regular social event that gives new and old friends the opportunity to connect. Check the TRAIL member calendar for our next gathering. Everyone is welcome!



The book club meets on the third Monday of every month, from 1 to 2 PM, on Zoom.* TRAIL member Barb Stein facilitates the group ("loosely," she adds), which reads mostly fiction, chosen by the consensus of the members from among suggestions. There's no commitment; drop in once or become a regular. Visit the TRAIL website calendar page or the latest *TRAIL Guide* issue to see the book title for next month and get the Zoom link.

**Don't know how to use Zoom? A TRAIL volunteer can help you get started. Just call the TRAIL office at 319-800-9003 or email Jessica Hahn at membersupport@trailofjohnsoncounty.org to ask for assistance.*

Books . . .

The TRAIL book club for men meets in person at 1:30 PM on the second Thursday of the month at The Courtyard by Marriott (Melrose Avenue, Iowa City) and occasionally at members' homes. This group reads both fiction and nonfiction, suggested and chosen by a vote of members. If you are interested in taking part, just email David Rust at david@trailofjohnsoncounty.org. He is happy to answer questions and introduce you at a future meeting.

And more books . . .

Did you just finish a book you can't stop thinking about? Or do you have an old favorite you recommend to everyone you meet? You're invited to share that book title with *TRAIL Guide* readers and add a quick description if you like. Just send your favorites to susan@trailofjohnsoncounty.org and we'll share them in a future issue of the *TRAIL Guide*.

Books . . .

This is the perfect time of year for curling up with a cup of tea and a good book (though a lazy summer afternoon also works). Whatever the case, your next good read might be waiting for you in TRAIL's virtual book club.

Supporting a movement

In her column for today's newsletter, TRAIL Executive Director Christine Scheetz shares more highlights from the recent Village to Village Network (VtVN) annual conference. The VtVN is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, and TRAIL is proud to be the only organization in Iowa affiliated with this nationwide movement that fosters connection, support, and independence for older adults.



TRAIL and other VtVN member organizations don't just rely on older adults themselves. We thrive through the power of volunteers, collaborations, and shared resources. Ours is a community-based approach, where relationships are built and strengthened to ensure that no one ever feels alone or isolated.

We hope you'll consider how your year-end giving can sustain and grow TRAIL, helping us further expand our services for older adults in Johnson County. Your support is essential to ensuring our vitality and long-term success.

Please make your 2025 Annual Fund gift today, whether through our [website](#) or by mailing a check to our office at 28 South Linn Street, Room G03, Iowa City 52240.

Thank you!

"Closing the Gap" closes strong

Based on a follow-up survey among attendees, TRAIL's five-part "Closing the Gap: Healthspan vs. Lifespan" series in October was a great success. We received many positive comments about the quality and relevance of the speakers and their presentations.



When it comes to lasting impact, **90% of respondents** said that they were very likely to or were thinking about altering their behavior based on the health-related information they heard during this series.

Attendees also offered many good suggestions for future presentations, and we do plan to repeat our "Closing the Gap" series with new topics and speakers next fall. Until then, remember that you can access our 2025 speakers' PowerPoint presentations via the [More Resources page](#) on the TRAIL website:

- Julie Fitzpatrick, DPT, "Optimal Wellness: A Proactive Approach"
- Scott Eberly, MD, "Metabolic Flexibility: More than Muscles"
- Dallas Vanorny, MD, "Total Joint: Understanding Your Options, What to Expect Before, During and After Surgery"
- James Norman, PT, "Balance, Strength & Beyond: Aging with Confidence"
- Jessica Hirth, PTA, and Stacey Hodges, OTR/L, "From Setback to Comeback: Optimizing Recovery"

Our thanks to **Athletico Physical Therapy** for sponsoring this series, and to the many TRAIL volunteers who assisted with planning and logistics.



Holiday caregiving help

The holiday season can be both joyful and challenging for caregivers of older adults, especially those living with dementia. But with the right tools and support, meaningful moments are possible.



Janel Meints, CTRS, DCP

individuals with Alzheimer's and related dementia diseases and their therapists.

The hour-long program focused on supporting caregivers, family members, and friends during the holiday season. Topics included:

- Understanding sensory changes and how they impact holiday experiences
- Practical modifications to create a comfortable and supportive environment
- Tips and strategies to navigate gatherings and traditions with empathy and flexibility

You can now watch the entire program on YouTube at this link: youtu.be/8Wi_WwqKOWo

Whether you're a caregiver, know a caregiver, or know someone with dementia, we encourage you to watch this informative and insightful program to gain practical advice and strategies to support your loved ones' physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being.



Last month the UI Csomay Center for Gerontological Excellence hosted the timely and valuable webinar "Holiday Caregiving," presented by Csomay Coordinator Janel Meints, CTRS, DCP. Janel is the founder of Dementia Haven and is a certified therapeutic

recreational therapist with more than 12 years working with



Photo: Iowa City Press-Citizen

Congrats, Michelle!

Michelle Buhman, who is retiring this month from her position as program specialist at the Iowa City Senior Center, played a key role in TRAIL's early development.

Michelle was one of TRAIL's founding Board members, becoming involved with the nascent organization in 2016. She became chair-elect in 2018 and served as Board chair in 2019. Her knowledge of, experience with, and devotion to older adults did much to shape TRAIL's ongoing success.

A reception to honor Michelle will be held at the Senior Center on December 29 at 3 PM. We hope you'll join us in wishing Michelle the best and thanking her for all she's done for TRAIL and the entire Johnson County senior community.



In Memoriam

Melvin F. Dvorsky

Member Melvin Dvorsky passed away Monday, December 1, 2025. He became a member of TRAIL in April 2022.

See Melvin's obituary [here](#).



NOTE: Some events are virtual, while others are in person. Full details for each event can be found on [TRAIL's online calendar](#).

New events are frequently added, so check TRAIL's weekly calendar preview emailed on Fridays or the [online calendar](#) to stay up-to-date.

Calendar key: **BLUE** events are for TRAIL members. **GREEN** (virtual) and **YELLOW** (in-person) events are hosted by other groups but may be of interest to TRAIL members.

Members pay their own fees if there is a cost associated with an event (\$).

Want to attend an event, but need a ride? Call Jessica at 319-800-9003 or email her at membersupport@trailofjohnsoncounty.org.

TRAIL Guide is published on or about the 15th of each month by the TRAIL Marketing and Communications Committee for the benefit of TRAIL members, donors, volunteers, and friends. If you have questions or suggestions about the newsletter, email info@trailofjohnsoncounty.org.

Upcoming TRAIL Events Calendar

The TRAIL office will be closed Wednesday, December 24, Thursday, December 25, and Thursday, January 1.

[Book Club: *My Friends* by Fredrik Backman](#) (via Zoom)

Monday, December 15, 1 to 2 PM



[Holiday Flower Arranging with Willow and Stock Florists](#) \$

Tuesday, December 16, 11 AM to noon

207 North Linn Street, Iowa City

[Cinema Salon: "Wicked: For Good"](#) \$

Tuesday, December 16, 3 to 5 PM

FilmScene at The Chauncey, 404 East College Street, Iowa City

[Free Movie Night: "Scrooged"](#)

Wednesday, December 17, 6 to 8 PM

Coralville Public Library Schwab Auditorium, 1401 5th Street, Coralville

[Build Better Balance](#)

Thursday, December 18, noon to 1 PM

Iowa City Senior Center, Room 302, 28 South Linn Street, Iowa City



[Elder Abuse: Iowa Law and Support Services](#)

(via Zoom)

Friday, December 19, 1 to 2 PM

[Free Drop-in DIY Gift Wrapping](#)

Saturday, December 20, 10 AM to 6 PM

Iowa City Public Library Digital Media Lab, 123 South Linn Street, Iowa City

[Grief & the Holidays](#) \$

Sunday, December 21, 11 AM to 12:30 PM

The Goose Nest, 912 East Davenport Street, Iowa City

[Afternoon Tea Party—Postponed](#)

New date to be announced in the spring



[Coffee at Sidekick Coffee and Books](#) \$

Tuesday, December 30, 10 to 11:30 AM

1310 1/2 Melrose Avenue, Iowa City