Martha Wise Award Entry for Outstanding Existing Project
2018-2019

Chapter Name: Junior Auxiliary of Russellville, Arkansas

Submitted By: Heather Shewmake

Chapter Address: P.O. Box 1011
Russellville, Arkansas 72811

Population Category: under 15,000

Name of Project: Bingo Buddies

Project Category: Outstanding Existing Project

Active Membership of Chapter: 36

Numbers of Members Participating: 30

Purpose of Project: To serve the senior in our community through a partnership with the Pope County Senior Wellness and Activity Center

Cost of Project: $850

Numbers of Persons Served: 100+
Bingo Buddies and the JA of Russellville

Let’s be honest, who doesn’t love to yell “BINGO” and win a prize or sit by a friend and have great conversation followed by an amazing lunch? This is what happens every Thursday, 10:00 sharp, for one hour at the Pope County Senior Wellness and Activity Center. Patrons in the community gather to have fun and enjoy one another. What could be better than joining in on the fun, meeting new people and helping someone in need? This is exactly what happened to the Junior Auxiliary provisional class of 2017-2018. One special member of the class went to play bingo with her family member and while playing she recognized a need. Not only were the bingo cards they were using quite old but some of the seniors, who are also patrons of the local Friendship community, seemed to be lonely.

The provisional class took note of this need and jumped in to action. They seized the opportunity to serve the seniors and began planning how they were going to turn this focus in to their provisional project. After visiting with leaders at the center, their plan launched with the purchase of 300 new bingo cards for use all year long. Taking it further, they sponsored the games the third Thursday of every other month by being the bingo caller and supplied not only 30 prizes for the winners of the nearly 100 participants but also supplied a “buddy” for a senior
who seemed to simply need a friend. Someone to ask them how their day was going, maybe remind them of a partner long passed, and deliver a simple smile that then received a smile in return.

Bingo buddies was such a rewarding and impactful project for the provisional class that the full active chapter supported its continuation for the 2018-2019 year. With recommendations from the centers leader’s one or two JA members purchase 30-40 prizes for the winners of that week’s games. These prizes range from Little Debbie snack cakes (everyone’s favorite), to soups, personal care items, Sudoku and more. The last prize of the day is a $10 Walmart gift card which, as you can imagine, is a big hit. Purchasing the prizes for that day’s game also helps to remove some of the financial burden placed on the Senior Center. Any prizes that were not “won” remain at the center for the following week’s game. Members that participate in Bingo Buddies get to also try their hand at “calling”, which we know all too well is serious business. Others sit and play with a table, their special friend that they met the week prior, or find a new friend that may need help because they can’t see the numbers on their card or can’t quite hear the letter and number called. Once game play is over, members help the cards get returned to their storage compartments and tables cleaned because it’s time for lunch.
As someone who has volunteered at Bingo Buddies, I can say with utmost certainty that I have impacted and been impacted by a senior. I have learned to “call” the game at just the right pace and volume. I have experienced a senior tell me that I reminded him of his wife, that had passed, when they were first married and it nearly broke my heart. We sat and talked about his memories and it made us both smile. The participants get new bingo cards that they can choose to use for that days hour of play and prizes that are purchased for them. This also allows the center to place that week’s allocated bingo funds to a different project of their choosing.

Bingo buddies is not only rewarding for the volunteer but also very impactful for the patron that met a new friend, shared a story and improved their visit to the Senior Center that day. Because of Bingo Buddies, the JA of Russellville will seek to recognize new needs within the Pope County Senior Wellness and Activity Center. We will work hand in hand with its leaders to find new opportunities to impact the patrons that visit. We will all be seniors one day and I hope that there will be volunteers that will enrich my life like we work to enrich theirs and help me play a little Bingo!