



I. AREA AGENCY ON AGING
San Benito & Santa Cruz Counties

FOSTER GRANDPARENT/SENIOR COMPANION PROGRAM
Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara & Santa Cruz Counties

PROJECT SCOUT
Tax Counseling Assistance

AGING & DISABILITY RESOURCE CONNECTION
Navigating the San Benito County Senior & Disability Services Network

SENIORS COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Thursday, August 20, 2026
10 a.m. – 12 Noon

Hybrid in-person - Zoom Meeting
Seniors Council Conference Room
175 Westridge Dr., Watsonville, CA

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81931049538>

Meeting ID: 819 3104 9538

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kcITMKXHq5>

AGENDA

- 10 a.m. 1. Welcome, Call to Order and Introductions
2. Additions & Deletions to the Agenda
3. Receive Announcements from Board Members
4. Comments from Members of the Public on Items Not on the Agenda
- 10:10 5. Approve minutes of the July 2026 Board Meeting
- 10:15 6. Committee Reports
- A. Finance Committee
- B. Executive Committee
- Consideration of Personnel Policy Revision*
- C. Resource Development Committee
- D. Nominating & Board Development
- a. Election of Board Members
- b. Upcoming - Board Enrichment Trainings

175 Westridge Drive, Watsonville, California 95076 www.seniorscouncil.org 300 West St; Hollister, CA 95023
PHONE: AAA – (831) 688-0400 • FG/SCP – (831) 475-0816 • SCOUT – 1-877-373-8297 • FAX: (831) 688-1225

**SUPPORTED BY FEDERAL, STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, FOUNDATIONS, THE UNITED WAYS OF
MONTEREY, SAN BENITO, & SANTA CRUZ COUNTIES & YOUR PRIVATE DONATIONS**

- E. Advocacy Committee
 - a. State & Local Funding
 - b. Community Messaging
 - c. California Senior Legislature Report
- 11:10 7. Executive Director's Report
 - A. Budget Shortfalls
 - B. Dept of Aging & SB 1249 & CDA's 2030 Plan
 - C. Master Plan for Aging Local Playbooks
 - D. Operations & Service Providers
- 11:40 8. Program Reports (written)
 - A. Foster Grandparent/Senior Companion Program
 - B. Aging & Disability Resource Connection (ADRC)
 - C. Volunteer Coordination Project
 - D. Project SCOUT
 - E. AAA Updates
- 11:50 9. Miscellaneous Correspondence & Other Items
- 12 Noon 10. Adjourn

Next Meeting:
Thursday September 17, 2026
10 am to 12 Noon
Seniors Council Conference Room
175 Westridge Dr., Watsonville, CA

Questions, Clarifications or Additional Information:

If you have a question or wish clarification or additional information about any agenda item or attached materials, please telephone Seniors Council Executive Director Clay Kempf at 688-0400 ext. 115 before the meeting. If you get voicemail, please leave a detailed message so that a response can be made.

Distribution of Materials:

If you have information to share with members of the Board, a table or other suitable space will be provided on which you may make it available. It is the wish of the Executive Committee that meetings not be disrupted by distribution of paperwork or other items.

Accessibility:

This organization attempts to make meeting content understandable in languages other than English. All Meeting rooms are accessible for people with disabilities. If you wish to discuss reasonable modifications or accommodations for language or disability, please contact the Seniors Council office at 688-0400 at least 48 hours before the meeting.

Seniors Council Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Seniors Council to enable older persons to function with independence and dignity in their homes and in the community to their fullest capacity.

I. Area Agency on Aging Mission

To provide leadership in addressing issues that relate to older Californians; to develop community-based systems of care that provide services which support independence within California's interdependent society, and which protect the quality of life of older persons and persons with functional impairment; and to promote citizen involvement in the planning and delivery of services.



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SENIORS COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(Held by Zoom in accordance with COVID-19 social distancing requirements)

July 16, 2026

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Tami Aviles (President); Wayne Norton (Vice-President); (Treasurer); (Secretary); Pam Arnsberger; Antonio Rivas; Mickie Luna; Lisa Berkowitz; Mary Lou McKenney; Connie Padron

STAFF PRESENT:

Clay Kempf (Executive Director); Hilary Minugh (Fiscal Specialist); Patty Talbott (AAA Administrator); Zach Johnson (Administrative Services Officer); Corey Shaffer (Community Coordinator); Maureen Hebert (Fiscal Specialist); Leanne Oliveira (ADRC); Cathy Colvard (Fiscal Officer); Britt Bassoni (ADRC); Eduardo Santana (Project SCOUT); Crystal Ortiz (ADRC)

1. Welcome, Call to Order and Introductions

Introductions were made. Meeting called to order at 10:02 AM.

2. Additions & Deletions to the Agenda

Material added to packet for item 7.

Zach requested 7.2-1 be added to change name of holiday.

3. Receive Announcements from Board Members

Antonio brought flyers for Santa Cruz County Fair, request for volunteers. Senior Day will be scheduled.

Tami shared that grants committee faced the 'seniors vs. kids' issue recently in Monterey and SBC.

4. Comments from Members of the Public on Items Not on the Agenda

None present.

5. CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION, Rivas/Arnsberger, to approve minutes of June 2026 Board Meeting. PASSED.

6. Committee Reports

1. Finance Committee – Met on July 9, mostly reviewing profit & loss statements by program. Agency Budget vs. Actual through May included in packet. Still facing a deficit for the agency; final amount may increase or decrease, not officially final until after audit next year.
Mickie requested that notes be taken during meetings in the future; will be duty of Treasurer once selected.
Cathy noted that included P&L combines all programs, and breakout by program is available through fiscal office.
2. Executive Committee – Also met on July 9, discussion of onboarding Board members more effectively. Also, discussion of finance, resource development, and recruitment.
Request for updated demographics from Programs; should be available after end of July.
3. Resource Development Committee – Discussion of strategy and specific focus to move priorities forward.
Need for introductions to major donors; materials for presentations created and ready.
Need for effective communication about Board member activities and to properly make use of limited human and other resources.
SBC Senior Resource Fair and Volunteer Recognition pushed to 2027.
GivingTuesday webinar today at noon.
4. Nominating & Board Development – Zach reported that Coco Raner-Walter is still interested in joining from SLV area.
 - a. Election of Board Members – **MOTION Aviles/Arnsberger**, to reinstate Antonio Rivas as Board Member At-Large for another two-year term. **PASSED**. Pam thanked him for service on CSL.
 - b. Election of 26-27 Board Officers – Call for volunteers and nominations. Clay nominates Tami to continue as President; Wayne to continue as Vice-President; and Lisa to be added as Secretary.
MOTION, Arnsberger/McKenney, to elect Tami as President; to elect Wayne as Vice-President; and to elect Lisa as Secretary. **PASSED**.
5. Advocacy Committee –
 - a. State & Local Funding – met on July 13. Discussed future of CORE; Britt preparing a document tracking senior funding City by City as far back as 2010. Also discussed the Alliance and ADRC, challenges faced by Medi-Cal service limitations.
Clay reported on meeting with Liz, legislative staffer, regarding future need for ‘fix-it’ bill for SB 1249.
Older Americans Act reauthorization has passed on of two bodies, and includes 4+% increase to all senior programs.
 - b. Candidate Forum – Tony Nunez elected in South Santa Cruz County; both Curro and Sotelo re-elected in SBC. Discussion of how to build relationships with Supervisors.
Wayne suggested a Forum in SBC for recall and City Council seat.
 - c. *California Senior Legislature Report* –

7. Board Authorization of Changing 403b Agency Contribution

MOTION, Norton/Arnsberger, to implement changes to Personnel Policies reflecting this update. **PASSED**.

MOTION, Norton/Arnsberger, to authorize changing Cesar Chavez Day to Farmworkers Day in Personnel Policies. **PASSED**.

MOTION, Norton/Arnsberger, to authorize proposed change to employer 403b contributions. **PASSED.**

MOTION, Norton/McKenney, to approve Mutual of America resolution authorizing suspension of 403b contributions. **PASSED.**

MOTION, Rivas/Arnsberger, to make this change effective as of July 11. **PASSED.**

8. Board Authorization of Check Signers Redux

A. West Coast Community Bank – **MOTION, Rivas/Arnsberger, to:**

Remove Jane Schwickerath and Gwen Yeo as signers on account number 10006609.

Add Pam Arnsberger, Wayne Norton and Antonio Rivas as signers on account number 10006609.

Existing signers Clay Kempf, Patty Talbott and Cristina Banuelos should continue as authorized signatures on account number 10006609. **PASSED.**

B. Comerica Bank – **MOTION, Rivas/Norton, to:**

Remove Bob Campbell, Jane Schwickerath, Barbara Canfield, Gwen Yeo and Darrell Johnson from Comerica Bank account numbers 1894188802 and 1890968116.

Add Board Members Wayne Norton, Pam Arnsberger, Antonio Rivas and Seniors Council employee Cristina Banuelos as signers on account numbers 1894188802 and 1890968116

Existing signers Clay Kempf and Patty Talbott should continue as authorized signatories on account numbers 1894188802 and 1890968116. **PASSED.**

C. Bay Federal Savings Account – **MOTION, Rivas/Norton, to:**

Authorize Wayne Norton, Cristina Bañuelos, and Antonio Rivas as signatories for all Seniors Council accounts with Bay Federal Credit Union; and to remove Gwen Yeo as signatory for all SC accounts with Bay Federal Credit Union. **PASSED.**

9. Executive Director's Report

A. Budget Shortfalls

B. Dept of Aging & SB 1249 & CDA's 2030 Plan – CDA will be conducting 3 monitoring visits.

Will also need to meet with Board President and Advisory Council.

Clay met with Alicia Morales and had a good conversation about Counties' intentions towards AAA with respect to SB 1249, which seem benign.

C. Master Plan for Aging Local Playbooks – Clay also discussed MPA Governance Body with Alicia and confirmed impression that Seniors Council is not being given fair time to present.

D. Operations & Service Providers – Jovenes de Antaño has given up rental space at PVMCC. They are 'regrouping' and moving forward with fundraising efforts. Still uncertainty about vehicles that JDA had been using.

SBC Community Foundation declining to continue partnership funding Corey's position past end of FY 26-27. Discussed alternative arrangements, including expanding partnerships. Mickie recommended meeting with Hollister City Manager.

10. Program Reports (written) –

A. Foster Grandparent/Senior Companion Program – SCP budget will be increasing to accommodate last year's overspend. FGP is close to meeting goals.

B. Aging & Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) – Britt gave a brief recap of activities and challenges.

C. Volunteer Coordination Project – stats in written report, going well. Wayne praised Corey's work on newsletter.

D. Project SCOUT – over \$2.5M in refunds. CalFresh enrollments down due to political climate.

E. AAA Update

11. Miscellaneous Correspondence & Other Items

Tami congratulated Wayne on being appointed to the California Commission on Aging.

12. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:02 PM

Next Meeting: August 17, 2026 10 a.m. – 12 Noon

Minutes prepared by: Zachary Johnson

4:45 PM

08/11/26

Accrual Basis

Seniors Council of Santa Cruz

AGENCY WIDE Budget vs. Actual (Internal)

July 2025 through June 2026

	Jul '25 - Jun 26	Budget	\$ Over Budget	% of Budget
Ordinary Income/Expense				
Income				
PRIOR YEAR RELEASE FROM RESTRIC	25,000.00			
CFL				
Monitoring	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Total CFL	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
GRANTS REC'D (Income)				
FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION PROG.	27,950.00			
GRANTS REC'D (Income) - Other	4,711,036.54	4,475,452.45	235,584.09	105.3%
Total GRANTS REC'D (Income)	4,738,986.54	4,475,452.45	263,534.09	105.9%
LOCAL MATCH RECEIVED-JURIS.				
City of Capitola	10,000.00	5,000.00	5,000.00	200.0%
City of Hollister	0.00	9,500.00	-9,500.00	0.0%
County of San Benito	33,765.38	33,665.26	100.12	100.3%
County of Santa Cruz	154,750.00	154,750.00	0.00	100.0%
LOCAL MATCH RECEIVED-JURIS. - Other	0.00			
Total LOCAL MATCH RECEIVED-JURIS.	198,515.38	202,915.26	-4,399.88	97.8%
LOCAL MATCH RECEIVED - OTHER				
FOUNDATIONS				
Newman's Own Foundation	10,000.00			
Golden State Opp Foundation	50,000.00	30,000.00	20,000.00	166.7%
NANCY BUCK RANSOM FOUNDATION	0.00	10,000.00	-10,000.00	0.0%
SANTA CRUZ COMMUNITY CREDIT UNI	0.00	5,000.00	-5,000.00	0.0%
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION - San Beni	51,933.00	42,800.00	9,133.00	121.3%
HARDEN FOUNDATION	37,500.00	25,000.00	12,500.00	150.0%
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION - Santa Cr	25,000.00			
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION - Monterey	15,000.00			
FOUNDATIONS - Other	200.00	185,567.24	-185,367.24	0.1%
Total FOUNDATIONS	189,633.00	298,367.24	-108,734.24	63.6%
MISC CASH DONATIONS	12,838.70	7,819.00	5,019.70	164.2%
MISC VOL RECOGNITION	420.00	0.00	420.00	100.0%
UNITED WAY				
Monterey County	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Santa Cruz County	0.00	5,000.00	-5,000.00	0.0%
UNITED WAY - Other	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Total UNITED WAY	0.00	5,000.00	-5,000.00	0.0%
Total LOCAL MATCH RECEIVED - OTHER	202,891.70	311,186.24	-108,294.54	65.2%
OTHER INCOME				
FGP / SCP 5310	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Seniors Council Admin	53,088.00	68,868.00	-15,780.00	77.1%
REFUNDS & DEPOSITS RETURNED	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
MISC INCOME	7,714.81	5,000.00	2,714.81	154.3%
OTHER INCOME - Other	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Total OTHER INCOME	60,802.81	73,868.00	-13,065.19	82.3%
SHARE OF COSTS RECEIVED	30,282.00	28,000.00	2,282.00	108.2%
Total Income	5,256,478.43	5,091,421.95	165,056.48	103.2%
Gross Profit	5,256,478.43	5,091,421.95	165,056.48	103.2%
Expense				
RECORDS SHREDDING	295.90	175.00	120.90	169.1%
INCONVENIENCE FEES	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
PURCHASED FALLS PREVENTION SERV				
EQUIPMENT	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
PURCHASED FALLS PREVENTION SERV - Other	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Total PURCHASED FALLS PREVENTION SERV	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
OFFICE FURNITURE	2,482.27	2,037.00	445.27	121.9%
WEBSITE	299.40	0.00	299.40	100.0%
Bank Service Charges	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
MEETING EXPENSE	2,801.28	2,500.03	301.25	112.0%
ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSE	53,088.00	78,168.00	-25,080.00	67.9%
Reconciliation Discrepancies	2.20	0.00	2.20	100.0%
RETURN OF GRANT FUNDS	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
ADMIN TRANSFER	0.00			

6.A-1

4:45 PM

08/11/26

Accrual Basis

Seniors Council of Santa Cruz

AGENCY WIDE Budget vs. Actual (Internal)

July 2025 through June 2026

	Jul '25 - Jun 26	Budget	\$ Over Budget	% of Budget
ADVERTISING & PROMOTION	12,554.76	7,822.00	4,732.76	160.5%
BANK FEES	292.52	480.00	-187.48	60.9%
CONTRACTED SERVICES				
SUB-CONTRACTOR	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
VENDORS	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
ADVERTISING	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
AUDIT	34,703.80	28,650.92	6,052.88	121.1%
CASUAL LABOR	220.00	1,150.00	-930.00	19.1%
CONSULTANTS	31,966.92	40,050.00	-8,083.08	79.8%
SYNERGY	11,916.23	9,575.70	2,340.53	124.4%
TRANSLATION	12,575.80	11,600.00	975.80	108.4%
Total CONTRACTED SERVICES	91,382.75	91,026.62	356.13	100.4%
CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK	1,706.13	2,500.00	-793.87	68.2%
DISASTER KIT	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
ELECTRONIC FILING	1,740.58	2,500.00	-759.42	69.6%
EQUIPMENT				
EQUIPMENT- EXPENDABLE	5,444.67	1,500.00	3,944.67	363.0%
EQUIPMENT RENTAL				
MEDICAL GUARDIAN				
Mini Guardian	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
MG Home	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
MG Classic	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
MG Active	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Total MEDICAL GUARDIAN	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
EQUIPMENT RENTAL - Other	9,923.35	11,429.97	-1,506.62	86.8%
Total EQUIPMENT RENTAL	9,923.35	11,429.97	-1,506.62	86.8%
Total EQUIPMENT	15,368.02	12,929.97	2,438.05	118.9%
FEES	505.00	0.00	505.00	100.0%
INSURANCE	12,458.42	9,846.53	2,611.89	126.5%
MAINTENANCE & REPAIRS	37,788.16	32,663.78	5,124.38	115.7%
MEALS	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
MEMBERSHIPS	11,311.93	6,349.08	4,962.85	178.2%
OFFICE SUPPLIES	30,045.69	27,648.89	2,396.80	108.7%
PERSONNEL				
BENEFITS				
403b	54,560.50	56,012.56	-1,452.06	97.4%
HEALTH INSURANCE	214,832.56	231,657.66	-16,825.10	92.7%
WORKERS COMP INSURANCE	6,771.00	7,493.76	-722.76	90.4%
BENEFITS - Other	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Total BENEFITS	276,164.06	295,163.98	-18,999.92	93.6%
PAYROLL - WAGES				
Payroll Expenses	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
P/R TAX EXPENSE	89,493.53	97,038.33	-7,544.80	92.2%
PAYROLL - WAGES - Other	1,099,983.68	1,125,680.21	-25,696.53	97.7%
Total PAYROLL - WAGES	1,189,477.21	1,222,718.54	-33,241.33	97.3%
Total PERSONNEL	1,465,641.27	1,517,882.52	-52,241.25	96.6%
POSTAGE	4,629.11	3,813.12	815.99	121.4%
PRINTING & REPRODUCTION	15,638.16	12,023.41	3,614.75	130.1%
SPACE COSTS				
DEPOSIT	0.00	-220.00	220.00	0.0%
JANITORIAL	5,620.00	4,497.66	1,122.34	125.0%
OFFICE RENT	94,284.02	84,190.70	10,093.32	112.0%
STORAGE RENT	919.96	3,519.46	-2,599.50	26.1%
TRAINING FACILITIES	0.00	400.00	-400.00	0.0%
UTILITIES	12,543.43	12,814.74	-271.31	97.9%
Total SPACE COSTS	113,367.41	105,202.56	8,164.85	107.8%
STAFF RECOGNITION	1,224.97	1,200.00	24.97	102.1%
SUBSCRIPTIONS & PUBLICATIONS	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
TELEPHONE	18,807.13	18,852.82	-45.69	99.8%
TOTAL GRANTS PAID (Expense)				
FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION PROG	27,950.00	0.00	27,950.00	100.0%
GRANTS PAID (Expense)	2,644,586.00	2,417,072.00	227,514.00	109.4%

6.A-2

Reserves as of 6/30/25 \$651,404

Page 2

4:45 PM

08/11/26

Accrual Basis

Seniors Council of Santa Cruz

AGENCY WIDE Budget vs. Actual (Internal)

July 2025 through June 2026

	Jul '25 - Jun 26	Budget	\$ Over Budget	% of Budget
GRANT RELATED INCOME (Expense)	165,148.00	163,313.00	1,835.00	101.1%
MATCH CASH	571,257.00	1,709,415.00	-1,138,158.00	33.4%
MATCH IN-KIND	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
NON MATCH CASH	199,124.00	116,658.00	82,466.00	170.7%
NON MATCH IN-KIND	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
LESS MATCH	-935,529.00	-1,989,386.00	1,053,857.00	47.0%
TOTAL GRANTS PAID (Expense) - Other	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Total TOTAL GRANTS PAID (Expense)	2,672,536.00	2,417,072.00	255,464.00	110.6%
TRAINING				
FEES	889.08	7,000.00	-6,110.92	12.7%
LODGING	2,106.02	0.00	2,106.02	100.0%
MEALS	380.00	0.00	380.00	100.0%
TRAINING - Other	710.00	0.00	710.00	100.0%
Total TRAINING	4,085.10	7,000.00	-2,914.90	58.4%
TRAVEL-STAFF				
TRAVEL-LOCAL	14,492.45	14,245.74	246.71	101.7%
TRAVEL-LONG DISTANCE	799.34	3,700.00	-2,900.66	21.6%
Total TRAVEL-STAFF	15,291.79	17,945.74	-2,653.95	85.2%
VOLUNTEERS				
RECRUITMENT	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
OTHER VOL COSTS	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
INSURANCE	1,738.13	1,390.00	348.13	125.0%
MEALS	78,232.41	68,185.00	10,047.41	114.7%
PHYSICAL EXAMS	90.00	850.00	-760.00	10.6%
RECOGNITION	18,479.46	8,350.00	10,129.46	221.3%
STIPENDS				
TEMPORARY ALLOWANCE	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
COORDINATORS	60.00	1,000.00	-940.00	6.0%
TAX ASSISTORS	2,730.00	4,400.00	-1,670.00	62.0%
STIPENDS - Other	582,566.00	537,880.00	44,686.00	108.3%
Total STIPENDS	585,356.00	543,280.00	42,076.00	107.7%
TRAINING	1,126.00	0.00	1,126.00	100.0%
TRAVEL	116,642.84	130,327.00	-13,684.16	89.5%
UNIFORMS	0.00	5,400.00	-5,400.00	0.0%
Total VOLUNTEERS	801,664.84	757,782.00	43,882.84	105.8%
Total Expense	5,387,008.79	5,135,421.07	251,587.72	104.9%
Net Ordinary Income	-130,530.36	-43,999.12	-86,531.24	296.7%
Other Income/Expense				
Other Income				
INTEREST INCOME	808.76	900.00	-91.24	89.9%
Total Other Income	808.76	900.00	-91.24	89.9%
Other Expense				
Penalties	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
BAD DEBT	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Total Other Expense	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Net Other Income	808.76	900.00	-91.24	89.9%
Net Income	-129,721.60	-43,099.12	-86,622.48	301.0%

6.A-3



AREA AGENCY ON AGING
San Benito & Santa Cruz Counties

FOSTER GRANDPARENT/SENIOR COMPANION PROGRAM
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Date: August 20, 2026

To: Seniors Council Board of Directors

From: Zachary Johnson, Administrative Services Officer

RE: Update to Personnel Policies: Health Insurance

There has recently been some discussion about how to interpret some of our current policy as written, versus our desired position as an agency. To help clarify the Seniors Council's policies going forward, two changes are proposed:

- 1) *Remove* a paragraph from page 30; it is made redundant by the later, more detailed paragraph currently on page 31.
- 2) **Adding to** said paragraph on page 31 to clarify how the employee augmentation is impacted when waiving health, vision, and dental benefits; or a combination thereof.

V.B.1 HEALTH INSURANCE (page 30-31)

[...]

Employees that are eligible for health insurance benefits but have existing coverage through another family member or domestic partner may decline Seniors Council insurance. The employee must provide proof of other coverage in order to opt out. Employees choosing the opt out option will be provided a \$450 monthly stipend.

[...]

Employees that are eligible for health, **vision, or dental** insurance benefits but have existing coverage through another family member or domestic partner may decline Seniors Council insurance **for that benefit**. The employee must provide proof of other coverage in order to "opt-out". Employees choosing the opt-out

option will be provided a \$450 monthly augmentation if they waive all medical benefits. Partial opt-outs will be augmented as follows:

Coverage	Employee Monthly Augmentation
Health	\$410
Vision	\$5
Dental	\$35

Because this is not a reimbursement for actual expenses, this income will be taxable.

Seniors Council Application
Board of Directors, FGP/SCP, or AAA Advisory Council

Name: Coco Renner-Walter

Address: 8575 Hwy 9

City: Ben Lomond, CA Zip Code: 95005

Phone Number: 831-915-2495 E-Mail: coco@firedesignsbycoco.com

Occupation: retired

Relevant Skills: Team building, senior advocacy, knowledge of the SLV

Educational Background: AA in Fashion Design from FIDM

Previous Experience on a Board of Directors and/or Advisory Committee:

Why are you interested in serving on the Seniors Council Board or one of its Advisory Councils?

I want to gain a boards perspective of Senior Services, programs & opportunities

What types of activities are you interested in working on?

Advocacy.

What do you think is the greatest challenge facing seniors in our region?

The Lack of resources & the willingness to support Seniors.

Coco Raner-Walter Community Service

1980-2018	Proprietor of Fine Designs by Coco
2003-2009	SLV Highschools Parents Organization
2003-2018	Your Future is Our Business Career Panel / Expo Coordinator
2011-Present	Member of Santa Cruz County Democratic Central Committee (SCCDCC)
2012-Present	Member of the SLV School Districts Bond Oversight Committee
2012-2018	Events Chair of the SCCDCC
2013-2019	President of the Board of the SLV School Districts Bond Oversight Committee
2013-2015	Member & Vice Chair of the Democratic Club of North Santa Cruz County (DCNSCC)
2014	Voted Santa Cruz County Democrat of the Year
2015-2019	Chairperson of the DCNSCC Addressing Housing Shortages in the County
2015-2019	Founding Member of Affordable Housing Now
2016	Campaign Coordinator Measure S Library Bond Measure
2017-Present	Board Member of Highlands Park Senior Center (HPS&CC)
2018-2023	Board Vice President HPS&CC
2019	Attended Leadership Santa Cruz County
2019-2023	Chairperson of the SCCDCC
2020 & 2022	SCCDCC Civic Summit -Hosted & Organized
2022	Recipient of the Crosson Democratic Ideals Award
2023-Present	President of the Board of HPS&CC

Seniors Council Application
Board of Directors, FGP/SCP, or AAA Advisory Council

Name: Jan Shirchild _____

Address: 134 Centennial Street _____

City: Santa Cruz _____ Zip Code: 95060 _____

Phone Number: (831) 359-9701 _____ E-Mail: jshirchild@gmail.com _____

Occupation: Retired _____

Relevant Skills: Ran Project SCOUT at the WSC, where I interacted with many low-income Latinx seniors as well as staffing the Seniors Council Board and AAA Advisory Council. After retiring, I spent three years assisting with taking care of my sister who had a non-Alzheimer's form of dementia until her death.

Educational Background: BA in Community Studies from UCSC

Previous Experience on a Board of Directors and/or Advisory Committee: Besides staffing the Seniors Council Board and AAA Advisory Council, I also served on the City of Santa Cruz Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women.

Why are you interested in serving on the Seniors Council Board or one of its Advisory Council
Watching the rise of homelessness among seniors in Santa Cruz County as well the lack of doctors taking Medicare patients has boosted my interest in joining the Seniors Council Board.

What types of activities are you interested in working on ?
My main interest currently is advocacy but could be available for other short term projects.

What do you think is the greatest challenge facing seniors in our region?

Housing and health care



AREA AGENCY ON AGING
San Benito & Santa Cruz Counties

FOSTER GRANDPARENT/SENIOR COMPANION PROGRAM
Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara & Santa Cruz Counties

PROJECT SCOUT
Tax Counseling Assistance

AGING & DISABILITY RESOURCE CONNECTION
Navigating the San Benito County Senior & Disability Services Network

Date: 8-13-26

To: Seniors Council Board of Directors, AAA Advisory Council

From: Clay Kempf, Executive Director

RE: Advocacy Committee Report

Our Advocacy Committee had another productive meeting this month, and furthered our focus on specific efforts, roughly falling into the categories of local efforts and communications, and state-level advocacy around promoting the goals and ideals of the Master Plan for Aging while countering the continued threats presented by SB 1249 implementation.

STATEWIDE INFLUENCE

The appointment of Wayne Norton to the California Commission on Aging couples nicely with Pam Arnsberger being a member of the statewide Aging & Disability Resource Connection Advisory Group. Combined with Christina Mills leadership and advocacy work as the relatively still new Executive Director of the California Association of Area Agencies on Aging (C4A), we have the opportunity to again have statewide impacts with our ideas and concerns.

We want to push achieving the goals of providing more and better services to older adults that the Master Plan for Aging (MPA) envisioned and described, and avoid creating a bigger and more complex bureaucracy around those services. Strength in numbers is important here, and we're at least somewhat optimistic that others will embrace and support the ideas we bring forth. We're small in numbers, but not in creativity, and have a history of being the AAA that has initiated state-wide solutions to complex problems. And if we don't do it, who will?

LOCAL JURISDICTIONAL FUNDING & SUPPORT FOR PROGRAMS SERVING OLDER ADULTS & PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The County of Santa Cruz is revisiting their Community Program Funding (CORE) and will be holding a meeting the afternoon of Wednesday, August 19 afternoon to share information about upcoming changes to the next round of funding. Supervisors Justin Cummings and Kim De Serpa and their staff are leading the effort.

175 Westridge Dr., Watsonville, CA. 95076 **www.seniorscouncil.org**
PHONE: AAA – (831) 688-0400 • FG/SCP – (831) 475-0816 • SCOUT – 1-877-373-8297 • FAX: (831) 688-1225
SUPPORTED BY FEDERAL, STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS, THE UNITED WAY, AND YOUR PERSONAL DONATIONS

6.E-1

Meanwhile, we've been researching local public funding for senior service agencies since 2008, and the funding is about 78% of what it was at that time. Adjusted for inflation, the dollars only have 38% of their original buying power. Coupled with the doubling of the 60-plus population, available funding per senior is about 20% of where it was in 2008! In non-adjusted dollars, Santa Cruz County and City are about 90% of their former levels, Watsonville is at 75%, and Capitola at 31%. United Way has completely and intentionally eliminated all funding for older adults. The research has included the County of Santa Cruz, United Way, and the cities of Capitola, Scotts Valley, Watsonville, and Santa Cruz.

In San Benito County, the County has adopted a method by which they commit to providing ongoing funding for the AAA, senior meals, senior legal services, and long term care ombudsman that is tied into County revenue and inflation, resulting in increases to each program. While these increases have been relatively small, they send a very strong message that the County is committed to serving its older adults and that they clearly view community-based organizations as partners in that effort. Unfortunately, the City of Hollister has taken a different approach, and eliminated their funding to all of those programs except the AAA about a dozen years ago. This past year they retroactively de-funded the AAA *and* started charging rent to senior programs located in the Pauline Valdivia Memorial Center. I've been told that funds from the Senior Center Bond Act of 1984 were originally used to contribute to the costs of the back wing of the center.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the City of San Juan Bautista. With a population of only 2,128 people, SJB's annual city revenues are less than \$3 million per year, and as such, they have very limited ability to make meaningful financial contributions. Nevertheless, the City provides free use of their Community Center for activities such as the senior lunches and social activities provided by Martha's Kitchen and the Mary Velasco Sellen Senior Center.

MESSAGING

Our Advocacy Committee is developing details on how our local network of service providers can work together and provide both positive and challenging messages to our local governments and communities. We are breaking this strategy into developing talking points to highlight for each quarter of the year, highlighting 1) Funding shortfalls; 2) Collaborative Efforts (among providers and/or in partnership with communities); 3) Food, Safety & Shelter, and 4) To be Determined based on emerging needs or challenges.

Our goal is to provide a 1-3 page informational item and/or talking points for each topic to be shared as a consistent message under public comments at City Council meetings. We'll need not only our own Board members and staff, but also the staff

(and Board?) of other organizations to share these messages if we're going to succeed. We also want to encourage creative ways cities and others can provide support beyond the checkbook; for example by promoting or co-sponsoring events, reducing rents, etc.

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATION & RELATED ITEMS

California Department of Aging's (CDA) California 2030 Plan and implementation of SB 1249 continues to be one of, if not THE top discussion item among AAAs statewide. As previously reported, SB 1249 implementation has replaced the positive and creative efforts that were generated by California's Master Plan for Aging for most of the state's AAAs.

The relatively good news is that the past month hasn't included much in the way of new activity around this item, other than the continued progress of Senator John Laird's SB 1261. SB 1261 is the bill that protects ADRCs from being de-certified and defunded by CDA in the case when a AAA or an Independent Living Center (ILC) changes from one agency or operational model to another.



AREA AGENCY ON AGING
San Benito & Santa Cruz Counties

FOSTER GRANDPARENT/SENIOR COMPANION PROGRAM
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PROJECT SCOUT
Tax Counseling Assistance

AGING & DISABILITY RESOURCE CONNECTION
Navigating the San Benito County Senior & Disability Services Network

Date: 8-14-26

To: Seniors Council Board of Directors, AAA Advisory Council

From: Clay Kempf, Executive Director

RE: Executive Director's August Report

STAFFING & BUDGET SHORTFALLS

I'm sad to report that Fiscal Specialist extraordinaire Hilary Minugh has accepted a new position as Watsonville Wetlands Watch's new Fiscal Officer. We'll miss her skills and personality tremendously. That being said, congratulations to her, and Wetlands Watch has made a great hire.

We're also extremely grateful that Wetlands Watch is allowing Hilary to continue working for us two days per week while we recruit and train her replacement. We have been running ads for the position and are in the process of interviewing selected candidates, with the first interview taking place yesterday.

Program Directors are currently in the process of developing their 2026-27 budgets now that we have information about current year funding (e.g., award of approximately \$1 million in Americorps grants to Foster Grandparent & Senior Companion). Along with that, some brief discussions about re-designing how our programs operate and evolve with new demands and funding constraints.

As reported last month, Americorps is planning a national virtual celebration of volunteers as part of America's 250th anniversary. Our Board, Advisory Council members, volunteers and project staff, are all invited to join us for the **2026 AmeriCorps Seniors Nationwide Celebration** to honor service, connection, and community.

7-1

Date: Tuesday, September 15, 2026
Time: 2:00–3:30 p.m. ET (in place of the September TA Call)
Theme: *A Nation of Service*

How to Participate

- **Host a local celebration** for your volunteers and staff. You may choose to hold this during or in place of your September In-Service Training if that timing works well for your project.
- **Log into the national broadcast live** from 2:00–3:30 p.m. ET.
- Feel free to extend your local celebration with additional activities before or after the national program.
- Register your group for the national broadcast.
 - Register once per location, not per individual.
 - If you will have more than one gathering site, submit **one registration per site** using the name of the staff member leading that location.

In even better news, the status of our application for funding for the two programs has changed from pending to awarded!

The funding requests encompass the three fiscal years of 2026-2029. Totalling well over \$1 million per year, these grants provide the vast majority of funding for both programs, and represents our second-largest funding source, topped only by the Older Americans Act administered by California's Department of Aging. Cristina has applied for increases over her current grant amounts, and we're all crossing our fingers that those submissions will be successful. The revisions are mainly around the new requirement that answers to each of the grant questions follow a very specific format. It appears the review process has been modified significantly and is morphing from an art into a checklist.

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF AGING

No news on the search for or appointment of an interim CDA Director in response to Susan DeMarois upcoming resignation has been announced, but rumors are starting to circulate. We're curious, of course. The Director of CDA is a Governor-appointed position, so we don't know what will occur next.

Preparation for CDA's upcoming monitoring reviews of our operations in the coming months. Program Monitoring will take place the week of September 14, followed by HICAP Monitoring the following week. Fiscal will be reviewed the week of October 12. All reviews are now conducted remotely, so we won't have CDA staff occupying our office during those three weeks. There are, of course, pros and cons of having them present; in person monitoring always helped CDA to understand our operations better, and the nature of our communities and service providers.

Seriously good news came from CDA with the announcement of additional funding for our HICAP (Health Insurance Counseling & Advocacy Program), with an increase of about \$50,000 this year and \$77,000 in the future to hire additional staff. We have received over 25 separate documents to explain this funding, ranging from its intended use to revised contracting language to new reporting requirements. We're hoping CDA staff will provide some verbal explanations and maybe even some question-and-answer sessions to help us decipher the two-dozen-plus documents and various e-mails received so far. Unfortunately, no increase in administrative funds were included as part of the allocation.

MASTER PLAN FOR AGING (MPA) LOCAL PLAYBOOKS

We continue to promote and share the content of our MPA Local Playbooks throughout our PSA. Next steps for the workgroups and for the overall evolution of the playbook is an item we have yet to develop a plan for, but Corey, Zach, Britt and I will develop plans around that concept in the coming months, incorporating finding a new funding source to support the work.

Corey continues to promote the plan and highlight her work around volunteerism as of the our local playbook outcomes, and continues to receive positive reactions.

As reported last month, I made a presentation before Scotts Valley about our local playbook in partnership with Alicia Morales of Santa Cruz County. The 15-slide presentation focused on the Santa Cruz County Needs Assessment that we worked closely with the County to develop. Only two slides had our input, making for an interesting presentation, especially around the state & local history of the MPA and our playbook.

The Aging and Long Term Care Commission of San Benito County continues to be the oversight committee for the San Benito County Playbook, and includes the item as a standing report at their monthly meetings. Britt, Corey and I share pertinent information at each meeting. Those efforts are embraced, and the County and the community at large does a nice job of working cooperatively and promoting the collaborative nature of the effort.

SERVICE PROVIDER UPDATE

Service delivery in Hollister at the Pauline Valdivia Memorial Center continues to evolve, with remodeling work still in progress and building entrance compromised and porta-potties still in use instead of the bathrooms in the building.

We are pleased to report that at long last Jovenes de Antaño has completed the paperwork to transfer the second of two vehicles purchased with AAA funds to Martha's Kitchen. The first vehicle was transferred without incident in July of 2025. I'm

not sure what caused their reluctance to complete the transfer for the second vehicle, but it's done at last. Jovenes has also given up their office lease at the center while they reorganize and decide what their future will be.

Attached for everyone's information is a one-page sheet depicting who our contracted service providers are for the FY 2026-27, along with contract amounts and service category. These amounts will probably change here and there as budget amendments from the state are received; usually we see small increases. HICAP funding has already received an augmentation of about \$50,000.

Future packets will include additional provider information showing their service units for 2025-26, along with contracted service unit goals.

We're also planning on highlighting our own direct service programs in coming months as part of a "Board Enrichment Series" that Advisory Council members can certainly join. These presentations will take place after some of our Board meetings and can be viewed remotely as well as in person. The idea is we'll hold about an hour long session to provide more information on various topics, starting with presentations about our direct services. More to come on that topic.



ADRC of San Benito County Staff Report – August 2026

ADRC No Wrong Door Network program staff have completed update work on the San Benito Aging & Disability Resources Directory for 2026. The print-copy update is the first since 2024, but the digital directories, available at <https://sanbenitoadrc.org/resource-directory/>, have been continually updated during this time, and both the English and Spanish version available via the URL are always the most comprehensive and up-to-date versions available. An added benefit of the on-line digitized versions of the Resources Directories is that one is able to print just the section or sections needed, in a PDF format, saving resources and otherwise supporting changing needs for resources and service information.

Now that the update has been completed, staff have turned their attention to distributing the English-language version, while also simultaneously working to complete a Spanish-language version of the same updated directory. There have been a couple of delays owing to end-of-fiscal-year priorities, and then formatting challenges, but we hope to have the finished Spanish-language version of the directory ready to distribute by the end of September.

ADRC No Wrong Door program staff continue to assist individuals from their office location inside the PVMCC, despite on-going renovation and construction work taking place there. Please note that, while the front doors are closed and locked, access to the building and the ADRC and Martha's Kitchen offices, and the congregate dining site - - along with scheduled HICAP office hours in the ADRC-adjacent office - - can still be had through entrances on either the north or south side of the building. ADRC staff are still available to assist with everything from simple information or referral requests to complex and more work intensive person-centered case management or transition assistance needs. At least a couple of the advantages stemming from working directly with ADRC staff is their comprehensive knowledge of area service supports, especially in the older adults and disabilities service realms, and ADRC staff's willingness to help in creating and initiating a collaborative care plan, in which the consumer can and is encouraged to take an active role in addressing their needs. ADRC staff is skilled in determining potential eligibility and in helping to complete applications for assistance, with the goals of effectively addressing and resolving consumer needs where possible.

ADRC No Wrong Door management and administrative staff have been exploring ways, over the past several years, and more intentionally during the course of this past fiscal year and on-going, to achieve greater program funding sustainability and to gather more local funding support for the importance services provided by ADRC program staff and by ADRC No Wrong Door Network partners. Topics of interest and discussion have included the cultivation of donations from local individuals and business, the introduction and adoption of fundraising from local events and activities, seeking philanthropic support from local, regional, and state-based foundations, and applying for program and services specific grants from private and public institutions. While the ADRC project has submitted a balanced budget to CDA this year and has received approval for it, the current financial situation is extremely tight and the budget has incorporated into it only very minimal office supplies, no advertising or promotion, and no staff training - - although we will still pursue on-going no-cost training options. Additionally, we have had to reduce staff hours, and organizationally, we have suspended both merit-based raises and cost of living increases in an effort to further reduce expenses. Obviously, such a pared back budget and

reduced hours will likely result in a reduction of service capacity, the possible inability to retain quality staff, and greater and longer-term program instability. The challenges confronting our efforts to diversify funding support are many, at a time when many other non-profit organizations and programs are also confronting their own funding challenges, making grant and foundation support spaces crowded and more competitive than ever.

ADRC staff completed State Program Data Reporting for the FY25/26 service year, and although some service category numbers were down, increases in service numbers were also seen. For the ADRC's first full year without the I&A support data provided by former Core Partner Jovenes de Antano, the number of individuals served with I&A support decreased somewhat. However, the ADRC saw year-over-year increases in Short Term Case Management, Person-Centered Option Counseling, and Transition Assistance services during the same period.

No Wrong Door (NWD) Network partners continue to be encouraged to provide data for the services they delivered to consumers in San Benito County. As a reminder, ADRC hub site program staff never claim these data and these delivered services as their own, but instead use the reported data to shine a bright light on the efforts of locally-focused programs and organizations - - as a part of the NWD Network - - to help meet the service needs of older adults, individuals living with disability, and caregivers, and to help them navigate complex service systems to access the support they need to live safely and successfully in their community of choice. The ADRC is by definition our local collaborative of NWD service providers working in a coordinated and communicative manner, and for the benefit of consumers, as well as those participating programs and organizations. Data sharing on behalf of the ADRC is indicative of the strength of our local partnerships, and can also be a leverage in pursuit of additional and expanded funding opportunities.

Finally, and to reiterate an important aspect of current ADRC work mentioned in previous reporting, inclusive and diverse communities make for stronger individuals and families and more resiliency for all, and the ADRC is proud to be an on-going and forward-looking champion of such an inclusive, positive, and strengths-based approach to addressing both individual and community needs. The ADRC serves all individuals, families, and caregivers regardless of income, ethnic origin, or immigration status, per the statute and regulation which created the ADRC No Wrong Door Network federally and within the State of California. Additionally, and as an on-going focus of the ADRC in 2026 and 2027, we will continue to advance the connection and further the collaborative work being done between the ADRC of San Benito County, the Community Foundation for San Benito County, and the San Benito Connect – Volunteer Services Development Program, as this partnership benefits a number of local non-profit programs and organizations. Volunteers are at the core of community-based services provision, while at the same time, volunteerism represents an incredible opportunity for older adults and those living with disability to engage and serve others in need, thus increasing their own feelings of self-worth and self-determination.



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Monthly Report to the Board of Directors – Seniors Council of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties

Submitted by Corey Shaffer, Community Coordinator

Senior Services Planning and Volunteer Engagement

San Benito County, Seniors Council

For the Month of June 2026

Although June was impacted by personal bereavement following the passing of my mother on June 2, I continued supporting key initiatives and community partnerships throughout the month.

San Benito Seniors Connect Newsletter

- Distributed the June 2026 edition of the **San Benito Seniors Connect** newsletter (newsletter summary attached) to subscribers.
- Continued development and content planning for the July newsletter.
- Promoted local resources, community events, volunteer opportunities, and healthy aging information throughout San Benito County.

Community Outreach & Presentations

- Co-presented with Clay Kempf at the **San Benito County Behavioral Health Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee (EDIC)** meeting (presentation flyer attached).
- Shared information about California's **Master Plan for Aging**, community partnerships, and the **SBC Connect Volunteer Network**, highlighting efforts to strengthen volunteerism, community engagement, and access to local resources for older adults and adults with disabilities.

Community Partnerships

- Attended **Community Chats with Cassandra**, hosted by the Community Foundation for San Benito County, which brought together nonprofit and community leaders to discuss evolving health and human service needs throughout the county.

- At the conclusion of the meeting, Executive Director **Cassandra Karshov** invited me to provide a brief overview of the **SBC Connect Volunteer Network**, highlighting how the platform connects volunteers with local organizations and supports community engagement throughout San Benito County.

San Benito Seniors Connect Newsletter Performance

The **San Benito Seniors Connect** newsletter continues to demonstrate strong community engagement.

Past 12 Months

- Emails Sent: **6,380**
- Emails Delivered: **6,182 (97%)**
- Overall Open Rate: **56%**
- Overall Click Rate: **6%**
- Total Opens: **3,451**
- Total Clicks: **396**

The June 2026 newsletter was one of the strongest-performing editions of the year, achieving:

- **67% Open Rate**
- **11% Click Rate**

SBC Connect Volunteer Network (sbcvolunteers.org)

- Continued monitoring and management of the SBC Connect Volunteer Network website.
- Supported volunteer recruitment efforts while monitoring website activity, volunteer registrations, and community engagement analytics to help expand the network throughout San Benito County.

Looking Ahead

- Publish the July edition of the **San Benito Seniors Connect** newsletter.
- Continue expanding awareness of the **SBC Connect Volunteer Network** through community outreach and partnerships.
- Strengthen relationships with local organizations to increase volunteer opportunities and community engagement.
- Continue implementation of the local **Master Plan for Aging** initiatives in collaboration with community partners.
- Facilitate the **San Benito County Master Plan for Aging Workgroups Goals and Strategies Meeting on July 30**. The meeting will bring together representatives from all five Master Plan for Aging workgroups to provide progress updates, discuss goals and strategies, identify next steps, and continue advancing implementation of the Local Master Plan for Aging in San Benito County.

8.C-2

JUNE 2026

San Benito Seniors CONNECT

♥ Stay healthy. ♥ Stay connected. ♥ Stay supported.



MAY INTO CONNECTION

May was a meaningful month of connection, recognition, and community collaboration across San Benito County. Thank you to our partners, volunteers, and everyone who helps create a stronger, healthier, and more age-friendly community for older adults.

Together, we are building a community where older adults thrive. ♥



JUNE HIGHLIGHTS



**MEN'S
HEALTH
MONTH**



**ALZHEIMER'S &
BRAIN AWARENESS
MONTH**



**ELDER ABUSE
AWARENESS
MONTH**



**PRIDE
MONTH**



**FLAG DAY
JUNE 14**



**JUNETEENTH
JUNE 19**



**FATHER'S DAY
JUNE 21**



**FULL MOON
JUNE 29**



UPCOMING EVENTS & CLASSES

- 6/01-6/30 - Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month
- 6/01-6/30 - Pride Month 🌈
- 6/04 - Bingo Night, 7PM-9PM, The GardenShoppe, 364 7th St., Hollister
- 6/06 - Aromas Bulky Drop-off Event, 8AM-10:30AM, Aromas Community Park
- 6/07 - Hello June, 12PM-4PM, Damm Vineyards, 3028 Cienega Rd., Hollister
- 6/14 - Flag Day 🇺🇸 ♥
- 6/18 - Casino Night 🎰 7PM-11PM, The Brass Tap, 1701 Airline Hwy., Hollister
- 6/19 - Juneteenth 🌈🌈🌈
- 6/16 - The Wild Goddess Vinyl - Womens Plant Night 🌿
6PM-9PM, Palette & Pour, 650 San Benito St., Hollister
- 6/20 - Luke Combs & Eric Church Tributes, Guerra Cellars, 500 John Rd., Hollister
- 6/20 - Fire Fall Landscape Painting Adult Workshop 🎨🍷
1PM-3PM, 35 5th St., Hollister
- 6/20 - Father's Day BBQ at the Overlook, 3PM, Paicines Ranch,
13388 Old Airline Hwy., Paicines
- 6/21 - Father's Day 🎁 ♥
- 6/21 - Summer Begins ☀️🌊
- 6/22 - VFW Post 9242 2026 Golf Tournament,
San Juan Oaks Golf Club, 3825 Union Rd., Hollister
- 6/25 - Boozy, Bees Book Bonding 📖♥️ 7PM-8:30PM,
The GardenShoppe, 364 7th St., Hollister
- 6/29 - Full Moon 🌕

THIS MONTH'S VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

HOLLISTER DOWNTOWN Volunteers Needed

We are currently looking for people with a strong commitment to our community to assist us with our events.

350 Sixth St. Ste. 102
Hollister, CA



We need help with:

- ✓ Farmers' Market
- ✓ Downtown Clean Up
- ✓ Street Festival & Car Show
- ✓ Saddle Horse Show Parade
- ✓ Lights On Celebration

If you think you are willing to help us for our community events, then you may submit your interest today!

8.C-3

HEALTH & WELLNESS TIP

Summer Safety for Seniors

Stay hydrated, avoid peak heat hours, stay cool, and check on others. Small steps can help prevent serious health complications.



Thank you to our community partners,
volunteers, and supporters! ♥



San Benito County

**BEHAVIORAL
HEALTH**

Supporting your mental health and recovery journey



**SALUD
CONDUCTUAL**

Apoyando tu salud mental y tu recuperación



Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee



**Building Connections:
Volunteering, Inclusion & Aging Well
in San Benito County**



This presentation will highlight local efforts to support older adults and adults with disabilities through the Master Plan for Aging, along with the development of SBC Connect, San Benito County's volunteer platform. In collaboration with the Community Foundation for San Benito County, this work focuses on strengthening community connections, increasing volunteer engagement, and improving access to local resources.

8.C-4



Corey Shaffer is the Community Coordinator for Senior Services Planning and Volunteer Engagement with the Seniors Council, serving San Benito County. In this role, she supports the local implementation of California's Master Plan for Aging by working with community partners to improve services and supports for older adults and adults with disabilities.

In collaboration with the Community Foundation for San Benito County, Corey leads efforts to strengthen volunteerism and community connection through SBC Connect, San Benito County's volunteer platform. She also manages the San Benito Seniors Connect newsletter, which shares local resources, programs, and opportunities to help residents stay informed and engaged. Corey is passionate about building partnerships and creating a more inclusive, connected, and supportive community for all.



Seniors Council
Concilio de Personas Mayores
Service • Support • Advocacy

**This meeting is open to all San Benito County community members, community partners and providers.
The zoom link can be requested via the email below**

**LUNCH IS PROVIDED WITH RSVP
PLEASE INDICATE ANY
SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS VIA EMAIL:
L.COOMBES@SANBENITOCOUNTYCA.GOV**

**THURSDAY
JUNE 4
11 AM**

**REDWOOD ROOM
1131 COMMUNITY PKWY
HOLLISTER**



AREA AGENCY ON AGING
San Benito & Santa Cruz Counties

FOSTER GRANDPARENT/SENIOR COMPANION PROGRAM
Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara & Santa Cruz Counties

PROJECT SCOUT
Tax Counseling & CalFresh Assistance

AGING & DISABILITY RESOURCE CONNECTION
Navigating the San Benito County Senior & Disability Services Network

Project SCOUT July 2026 Report

2026 July Tax Prep Options:

- 1-ALL: Project SCOUT Tax Facilitated Self Assistance ONLINE <http://tinyurl.com/SCOUTFSA>
- 2-Project SCOUT VITA (Ad hoc, remote, & special events all throughout Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties by appointment).
- 3-Santa Cruz Public Library Downtown one Saturday per month by appointment.
- 5-Watsonville Senior Center by appointment.
- 6-San Juan Bautista Public Library one day per month by appointment.

2026 July Tax Production Totals:

- Number of Tax Returns prepared and processed – 2037
- Primary or secondary 60 years old or older – 985 or 48%
- Average income of those serviced – \$31,812.00
- Dollar Amount of Federal refunds including credits – \$1,764,349.00
- Dollar Amount of State refunds including credits – \$425,055.00
- Dollar Amount of TOTAL refunds – **\$2,189,404.00**
- Money back in the wallets of our clients, including average return cost of \$240.00 –
\$2,678,284.00!

2026 July Calfresh Services:

Besides taking Calfresh requests, Project SCOUT assesses all seniors and disabled assisted with free tax prep for CalFresh qualification. Those who qualify are contacted and offered CalFresh services.

- Number of Senior and disabled clients assessed for services – 58 (54 SCC, 4 SBC)
- Number of clients assisted with Calfresh in Santa Cruz County – 7
- Number of clients assisted with Calfresh in San Benito County – 3

8.D-1

2026 July Recap:

Project SCOUT closed its doors to services for the last two weeks of July 2026. Those contacting Project SCOUT were informed via phone and email to contact us back in August for services.

Project SCOUT admin submitted and is working on two important grants: ABC Initiative Implementation Grant offered through Prosperity NOW with support from the CITI Foundation. This grant is for IRS Sponsored VITA programs (not open to TCE) with the purpose of integrating child savings education, referrals, and account access such as section 530A accounts into tax-time services. Project SCOUT requested \$35,000.00.

Project SCOUT admin is also working on Golden State Opportunity's RFP for services during 2027 tax season up to June 2027. As with our last cycle completed with Golden State Opportunity, Project SCOUT is providing two RFP's for Statewide Education and Outreach @ \$25,000.00 (Santa Cruz County), and Rural Counties @ \$25,000.00 (San Benito County).

Best Practices:

Project SCOUT assisted taxpayer ATP from Capitola who had recently lost her husband, who had always done their taxes. Anxious and distraught, she was seen at our Downtown Santa Cruz Library site and was assisted by one of our caring volunteers. The volunteer guided ATP from the initial process of gathering all her documents to the completion of the tax return which took over a month, and in the words of ATP "would not have been possible without the wonderful help of (volunteer) MR". Not only is the stress of having to complete her taxes in such a difficult time behind her, but she is now expecting a refund of \$5473.00 which will help her navigate recent funeral costs and others. ATP has been incredibly grateful of our services and is proof of the paramount effect Project SCOUT has on those we serve.



**Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service
Taxpayers Services Division**

Grant Program Office (GPO)
401 W. Peachtree Street, Stop 420-D
Atlanta, GA 30308

August 4, 2026

Eduardo Santana
Program Director
Seniors Council of Santa Cruz and
San Benito Counties
234 Santa Cruz AVE
Aptos, CA 950762797

Administrative Review Letter

Re: VITA/TCE Grant **26VITA0291**

Dear Eduardo Santana:

An administrative review was conducted by the Internal Revenue Service's Grant Program Office on 05/28/2026 with regard to your **2026 VITA/TCE** Grant. The purpose of this review was to make an assessment of whether your grant funds are being used appropriately and effectively in compliance with the terms and conditions of your grant agreement. The review was also conducted to assist with any issues encountered due to administration of the grant.

An administrative review is not as extensive with regard to the verification of grant related funding and expenses. Therefore, it does not preclude reviews conducted by our Quality Program Office or the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration.

The review showed your organization is in compliance with grant program guidelines and terms and conditions of your 2026 grant agreement.

Thank you for your cooperation during the review. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact the Grant Program Office at grant.program.office@irs.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David A. Eckert".

David A. Eckert
Chief, Grant Program Office
Stakeholder Partnerships, Education & Communication

8. D-3



DATE: August 15, 2026

TO: AAA Advisory Council
Seniors Council Board of Directors

FROM:  Patty Talbott, AAA Administrator

RE: **AAA UPDATES**

Contracts

Service provider contracts are finalized and being uploaded for review and DocuSign. I have prepared a list of all current Area Plan funded contracts, amounts and services to be provided, which is included in this report.

2026-27 Update to the 2024-28 Area Plan

The required annual update to the 4-year Area Plan on Aging was prepared and submitted to the Department of Aging. I have already received feedback from CDA and there were just a couple of minor changes to submit in order to receive final approval, which is in process. The complete update is incorporated into the full Area Plan and is located in that section of our webpage. It can be found under "Programs – Area Agency on Aging – 2026-27 Update"

CDA Monitoring

Preparing for the CDA monitoring next month has been very time consuming, requiring the scanning, labeling and uploading of many documents ahead of the interviews next month. I'm grateful to our providers for their cooperation as they all received and responded to numerous document requests from me during this busy time of year.

Senior Farmers Market Vouchers

Distributions at the farmers has been completed and went very well this year. Kudos to our RD Caren Dix, who led a dedicated and well-organized team of staff who made it happen.

8.11.2

SENIORS COUNCIL/AREA AGENCY ON AGING
2026-27 AAA PROVIDER FUNDING CONTRACTS and AAA DIRECT SERVICES

PROVIDER	SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED	COUNTIES SERVED	FUNDING	SOURCE
SANTA CRUZ AND SAN BENITO COUNTIES				
Health Projects Center	Family Caregiver Support Program (IIIE)	Santa Cruz & San Benito	\$148,896	Area Plan
Senior Network Services	Ombudsman and Elder Abuse Prevention	Santa Cruz & San Benito	\$193,212	Area Plan
Senior Network Services	HICAP (Health Insurance Counseling & Advocacy)	Santa Cruz & San Benito	\$301,250	HICAP
Senior Network Services	MIPPA (Medicare Outreach)	Santa Cruz & San Benito	\$41,144	MIPPA
Senior Legal Services	Legal Services (IIIB)	Santa Cruz & San Benito	\$92,000	Area Plan
Volunteer Center	Health Promotion (IIID) Matter of Balance	Santa Cruz & San Benito	\$22,851	Area Plan
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY ONLY				
Comm. Bridges/Meals on Wheels	Home Delivered and Congregate Meals (IIIC)	Santa Cruz	\$931,328	Area Plan
Comm. Bridges/Meals on Wheels	State Nutrition Modernization Funding - HDM only	Santa Cruz	\$166,884	Older CA Act
Community Bridges/Lift Line	Transportation to Contracted Meal Sites (IIIB)	Santa Cruz	\$20,000	Area Plan
Family Service Agency	Peer Counseling and Visiting (IIIB)	Santa Cruz	\$15,000	Area Plan
Senior Network Services	Info and Assistance, Case Mgmt, In Home Visits (IIIB)	Santa Cruz	\$104,750	Area Plan
Volunteer Center	Helping Hands - Home Safety/Minor Repairs (IIIB)	Santa Cruz	\$25,000	Area Plan
SAN BENITO COUNTY ONLY				
Martha's Kitchen	Home-Delivered and Congregate Meals (IIIC)	San Benito	\$327,736	Area Plan
Martha's Kitchen	State Nutrition Modernization (NM) Funding - HDM	San Benito	\$74,710	Older CA Act
San Benito County ADRC	CDA ADRC Funding	San Benito	\$199,008	ADRC
San Benito County ADRC	Information & Assistance, Case Management (IIIB)	San Benito	\$38,457	Area Plan
AREA AGENCY ON AGING AREA PLAN DIRECT SERVICES				
Coordination (IIIB)	Approved Coordination Objectives in Area Plan	Santa Cruz & San Benito	\$4,300	Area Plan
Direct Service Nutrition (IIIC)	Provider RD and Nutrition Education Services	Santa Cruz & San Benito	\$13,000	Area Plan
Outreach (IIIB)	Senior Farmers Market Voucher Distributions	Santa Cruz & San Benito	\$2,000	Area Plan
Personal Affairs Assistance (IIIB)	Project SCOUT Tax Assistance	Santa Cruz	\$17,700	Area Plan
Area Plan Funding: IIIB=Supportive Services, IIIC=Nutrition Services, IIID=Health Promotion, IIIE=Family Caregiver Support Older Californians Act: NM=Nutrition Modernization (Additional Funding for Meals), OM Supportive Services (Volunteerism) MIPPA: Medicare Improvement for Patients and Providers Act ADRC=Aging and Disability Resource Connection, HDM: Home delivered meals				

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT

Jason Hoppin, 831-454-3401

Jason.Hoppin@santacruzcounty.us



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
Housing for Health
PARTNERSHIP

County Releases 2026 Point-in-Time Count

*Continued Housing Challenges and Growing Need for
Homelessness Prevention Services Highlighted*

The 2026 Santa Cruz County Point-in-Time (PIT) Count identified 1,648 people experiencing homelessness, a 12 percent increase from 2025. While this year's total is up primarily due to improved methodology, it remains below historic levels including the 2022 peak of 2,299.

Overall, more local residents are falling into homelessness for the first time, while those who become chronically homeless continue to face significant barriers to finding permanent housing. And more than ever, homelessness is impacting people with deep ties to Santa Cruz County:

- 50 percent of respondents reported experiencing homelessness for the first time, up from 40 percent in 2025;
- 93 percent said they were living in Santa Cruz County when they lost their housing, up from 78 percent;
- 70 percent had lived in Santa Cruz County for 10 years or more.

Conducted on January 29, the Point-in-Time Count is a federally required census of people experiencing homelessness on a single day. More than 200 volunteers, outreach workers, service providers, and people with lived experience came together to canvas neighborhoods throughout Santa Cruz County, with follow-up surveys providing additional insight.

Additional key findings from the report include:

- 78 percent of people experiencing homelessness were living unsheltered;
- The top self-reported causes of homelessness were substance use disorder (25 percent), followed by job loss (15 percent);
- 71 percent reported at least one disabling condition that interfered with their ability to work or secure housing.

"The federally mandated PIT Count provides one measure of our efforts to reduce the impacts of homelessness on individuals and the community," said Dr. Robert Ratner,

Director of the Santa Cruz County Housing for Health Division. "This year's findings show that more local residents are experiencing homelessness for the first time, and nearly all were living in Santa Cruz County when they lost housing. These results reinforce the need to invest in integrated health and housing services, as well as low-income housing including for seniors and people with disabilities. We also need to redouble our homelessness prevention and housing retention efforts."

The PIT Count is a snapshot of homelessness at a specific point in time and does not reflect the full breadth of community homelessness over the course of a year. The findings reflect the growing pressures facing many households, including high housing costs, economic uncertainty, and health challenges.

The most reported barriers to obtaining permanent housing were "can't afford the rent" at 76 percent, "no job/not enough income" at 70 percent, and "no money for moving costs" at 42 percent. These findings reflect the significant challenges many residents face in securing and maintaining housing in the nation's most expensive housing market.

Communities across the country are facing potential reductions in funding for programs that help prevent and reduce homelessness. Locally, changes to programs such as Emergency Housing Vouchers, permanent supportive housing, and broader safety-net programs could make it more difficult for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to access housing, health care, and other essential supports.

The increase in the 2026 PIT Count can primarily be attributed to changes in the County's methodology. For the first time, the 2026 PIT Count included people participating in safe parking and safe sleeping programs throughout the county who had not been included in previous counts. These programs accounted for an additional 126 people in the overall count.

The County also conducted a more robust outreach to identify transition-age youth experiencing homelessness. The number of transition-age youth counted increased from 24 in 2025 to 86 in 2026, an increase of 62 people.

Santa Cruz County remains committed to preventing homelessness, expanding access to affordable housing and supportive services, and strengthening partnerships across the community. Housing projects opening in 2026 and 2027, which include Bridge House, Live Oak Landing, Hope Village, Harvey West, Casa Sankofa, and Veterans Village, will add much needed housing and supportive services for people experiencing homelessness.

The 2026 PIT Count findings will help inform policy decisions, funding priorities, outreach efforts, and service planning throughout Santa Cruz County as local leaders and community partners continue working toward long-term solutions to homelessness.

The full 2026 Santa Cruz County PIT Count and Survey Report is available on the [Housing for Health Partnership](#) website.

Zachary Johnson

From: CCoA <agewatch@cco.ca.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, August 4, 2026 1:01 PM
To: Zachary Johnson
Subject: August Age Watch: A Senate Win, a New Commissioner, a Warning Sign

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Categories: PACKET MATERIALS

[View this email in your browser](#)

California Commission on Aging, August 2026



Meet Commissioner Wayne Norton



Wayne Norton brings more than two decades of hands-on advocacy for older adults to his new role as Commissioner, with a career that spans journalism, education, and long-term care ombudsman work before landing in aging policy. Commissioner Norton was appointed to the Commission by Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas on July 7, 2026.

Commissioner Norton served as a Staff Ombudsman with PSA 13, covering the two-county area of Santa Cruz and San Benito, and later as Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program Coordinator. This work gave him a close-up view of the challenges rural

communities face in accessing resources. After retiring, he joined the PSA 13 Area Agency on Aging Board, where he has served as both President and Vice President. He has also served on the Board of the California Long-Term Care Ombudsman Association and the San Benito County Aging and Long-Term Care Commission.

Beyond aging services, Commissioner Norton is an elected Director of the Aromas Water District and co-founded the Aromas-San Juan Broadband Access Project, which helped secure a \$29.4 million grant to expand internet access across San Benito, Santa Cruz, and Monterey counties. A U.S. Army veteran who served in Vietnam, he was named San Benito County Veteran of the Year in 2020 and holds a master's degree in education and a bachelor's degree in journalism from San José State University.

Commissioner Norton's earlier career — first as a newspaper editor covering local politics and government, then in education managing non-instructional support staff — kept him close to civic life long before he entered aging services. Community engagement was a constant throughout — from driving voters to the polls to volunteering on campaigns — reflecting his belief that we all have an obligation to help our communities through civic life.

Commissioner Norton is eager to engage with the Commission's priorities, with particular interest in helping California's Master Plan for Aging (MPA) take hold at the local level. He also sees the state's change in leadership as an important moment to advocate for advancing the MPA's goals.

For Commissioner Norton, service has been the throughline of his life — from the Army to his years as an ombudsman, to his current role on the Commission. He views

his new appointment to the Commission as an honor and sees it as one more way to fulfill an obligation we owe each other: building a more just and equitable society.

AB 2207 Implemented

CCoA is pleased to announce that full implementation of AB 2207 (Reyes) State Boards and Commissions — a CCoA-sponsored bill — has been achieved.

AB 2207 expanded three state bodies to include CCoA representation. This ensures older adults' interests are represented on the committees and boards that shape the policies affecting them. Commissioners have now been appointed to all three:

- Commissioner Janet Frank was appointed to the **California Behavioral Health Planning Council** in January 2026.
- Commissioner Lindsey Yourman was appointed to the **Alzheimer's Disease and Related Conditions Advisory Committee** in June 2026 by CalHHS Secretary Kim Johnson, replacing former Commissioner Faisal Qazi.
- Commissioner Brendalynn Goodall was appointed to the **California Workforce Development Board** by Governor Newsom in July 2026.

Reauthorize the Older Americans Act

On July 14, 2026, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed [S.2120](#), the bipartisan Older Americans Act (OAA) Reauthorization Act of 2025 — a four-year renewal reauthorizing OAA programs through fiscal year 2030.



Young at Heart In Santa Cruz County

July 2026 Edition

Foster Grandparents Program benefits seniors and kids

By Tara Fatemi Walker

This month, we're exploring the Seniors Council's Foster Grandparent Program, which connects senior volunteers with students at local schools who are facing academic and/or social challenges. Funded through AmeriCorps Seniors, the program welcomes individuals 55 and older who can mentor and tutor for at least 15 hours per week. There are volunteers in Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, and Santa Clara Counties. **Foster Grandparents Have Impact**

Senior volunteers' lives are enriched due to the fact they are more active when they are volunteering. Foster grandparents also tend to experience a decrease in loneliness and/or depression and improved health and quality of life.

As far as the students who are served by foster grandparents, there are a variety of demonstrated benefits. These include academic performance, social and emotional de-

velopment, logic and math, language arts and literacy, and small and large motor skills.

I recently interviewed Cristina Banuelos. She has been with the Foster Grandparent Program for 13 years, starting as the Program Coordinator for San Benito and Monterey County volunteers. Four years ago, she became the Program Director for both the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion programs; the latter is another program run through the Seniors Council and AmeriCorps.

Cristina consistently hears stories from volunteers who share how they help children enjoy going to school because of the relationships they build.

"Throughout these years I have seen how much this program has impacted the lives of both the volunteers and the children that they serve," she says. "The volunteers and coordinators inspire me every day to keep this amazing program succeeding for them either by advocating or writing



A foster grandparent at work in a classroom, photo courtesy of Seniors Council

grants to keep it funded." 70-year-old Jasjit Balani is soon starting her third school year participating as a foster grandparent. She volunteers at Green Acres in the Live Oak area of Santa Cruz. "I work with first graders;

the teacher I work with is Mrs. Rispaud," says Jasjit, who is known as "Grandma Peachy" in school. "Mrs. Rispaud has been a wonderful person to work with. I help with a few of the children who need a little extra help,

and I also generally help in the class." Volunteering has been very rewarding for Jasjit on a personal level. "When I joined the program, I was undergoing a lot of issues in my life and this program literally saved my life," says Jasjit.

"It is such a pleasure to work with small children and a great opportunity to do volunteer work."

Kathi Lancaster, 69, has been a foster grandparent for two years at Oaul Elementary, working with

Continued on page 2

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Foster...continued from page 1

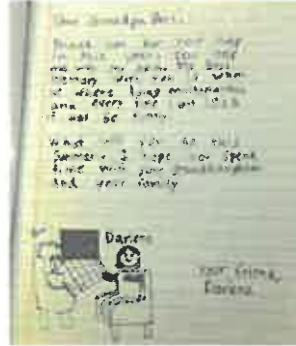
pre-K students. "I assist the teachers with groups and I also mentor two or three students, one on one, with learning, language, and social skills," she says. "These students are academically and/or emotionally challenged." Karthi highly recommends becoming a foster grandparent. "The joy it gives me is indescribable. Like when I see their excitement when they complete a project and get a sticker. Or when they get what's called the golden lunchbox, full of treats, rewarded weekly to a class for good behavior at lunchtime." Karthi looks forward to starting her third school year as a volunteer next month.

Cristina is proud of the fact that even though Foster Grandparents are volunteers, "we are able to pay them a stipend and reimburse them for their mileage/transportation. This way, nothing will come out of their pockets to do their service. Our volunteers can use this as extra income for their medicine, food, and other living expenses. Knowing how much this additional income helps them every month motivates me every day."

In addition to the aforementioned stipends and mileage reimbursement, Foster Grandparents have access to other resources and benefits including monthly training sessions with lunch provided and a meal each day at their specific volunteer site (or a cash subsidy). "There is also an annual recognition lunch where we celebrate our volunteers for all that they do," says Cristina.

"We acknowledge the years they serve with certificates, pins and gifts of appreciation." There are different events for each of the different counties, so the volunteers can all receive more attention. Overcoming Obstacles When asked about challenges she has faced, Cristina replies, "Our biggest challenge has been funding. Our main funding grant is from AmeriCorps Seniors, a federal grant where I have to meet a 10% match. In the past two years we have been told we might be completely or partially defunded." On top of that, nonprofits everywhere are being cut, which means the grant application process is more competitive.

The program was in dire jeopardy during the last couple years when the Trump administration attempted to dismantle AmeriCorps, which as a federal agency supports volunteer and service efforts not only in California but also across the country. Monica Alvarez, Program Coordinator for Santa Cruz County's Foster Grandparents, says, "We even asked our volunteers to call and write into the government to save the program. We still have our volunteers' letters. They wrote and called our California representatives to ask to save our program. We were so proud of them!" In 2025, a federal judge ruled that the Trump administration must restore funding to AmeriCorps in California. This happened after Governor Newsom, Attorney General Rob Bonta and a coalition of states sued the Trump administration over its efforts to take apart AmeriCorps.



Thank you note from Ann Solido Elementary student to foster grandparent Roberto Robledo



Thank you note to foster grandparent Roberto Robledo from teacher at Ann Solido Elementary

There were multiple benefits to Foster Grandparents reaching out to government leaders. "Before the funding issues of the program, some of the volunteers did not feel comfortable contacting a Senator, Governor or State Representative for issues that matter to them," says Cristina. "There were also those volunteers that had no idea that their opinion could be expressed to those that represent them. We gave them the contact information; we guided them in how to either write a letter or have a script ready to advocate for themselves. Our volunteers found the power of their voting voice and that was amazing to see as they not only advocated for their programs but also their own personal needs when it comes to housing, health and food." Staying Young at Heart Paula Yarr is entering into her 14th year as a foster grandparent. All of her volunteering has been in the same fifth grade classroom at Soquel Elementary School.

She is assigned specific kids each school year, usually two or three, and focuses on these individuals. "They tend to be the underserved children in the class," says Paula. "But I also tend to help almost everybody in the class at one time or another during the school year, whether with their assignments or with emotional support." In fifth grade there is a lot of need for this; for example, they're starting to go through hormonal changes. "I'm the 'emotional support animal' of the fifth grade," she says, laughing. She loves working with fifth graders and finds it re-

warding to be a volunteer. She sometimes sees people going through the motions, doing the same thing day after day. "That might be fine for them, but I need a lot more stimulation and I get that through the class curriculum and through volunteering," Paula appreciates the fifth-grade curriculum because it's all about American history, and I collect Native American baskets, and I get to bring these into class to share them." She also has taught kids how to make baskets and gets very excited about this. "One time we were having an adventure—the school is on the Soquel Creek—and we were clearing the ivy. The students wanted to know what they could do with all the ivy. I said that you can weave it into a basket, and then I started showing them how to do that. Next thing you know both boys and girls are weaving baskets out of ivy!"

Paula appreciates getting to share some of her skills and says volunteering is also keeping her young. "People ask me how old I am, they can't believe I'm 78 years old and I personally don't feel 78. So, being a foster grandparent has been very good for my health."

Roberto Robledo, 74, is about to start his fifth year of volunteering at Ann Solido Elementary. He works with kids in first through fifth grades; most foster grandparents only work with one grade.

Roberto shares more about his role. "The whole purpose of foster grandparents in the classroom is to provide a two-prong

approach. You're there for tutoring and helping out with kids who need extra help in academics and also, for mentoring. You're there as a grandpa or a grandma, to provide them some comfort. You could be helping with spelling, math, science or another subject—but also just for kids to have a shoulder to lean on if they need one. I'm finding that that's a big part of being a foster grandparent."

Roberto retired 10 years ago. "About five years ago I was looking for some creative outlets, local and community minded and found a few of them; one was the foster grandparent program. It keeps me busy, involved, and relevant—which is really nice and important."

"Many kids at the school look at foster grandparents as 'superstars.' People want to be with Grandpa Bertz (that's what they call me) whether they need extra help or they're at the top of the class. Being an immigrant community, Watsonville gets a lot of newcomers, particularly kids who sometimes enter school in the middle of the year and they have a lot of catching up to do. So, it's nice to have somebody who can help them through that."

Roberto enjoys the monthly meetings where other foster grandparents, from schools across the county, come together. "I'm just really impressed to see so many people feeling the way I do about being in the classroom and being a foster grandparent."

Spreading the Word During the pandemic, the program had to pause for a couple years. Since it came back, "it has been a struggle to re-introduce the

program into the community, despite being here for the past 32 years," says Cristina. "We have a large network of volunteers, but we still hear the occasional, 'I didn't know your program existed.' We find this a little disheartening, but it motivates us to get the word out that we are here to help."

There are currently 71 Foster Grandparents in Santa Cruz County who range in age from their 60s to their 80s. "Our volunteers stay with us for years, as many say that this program has given them a purpose during a time when they needed it," says Cristina. "Our plan is to keep on growing and have more people that are 55 years and older out there helping their communities and enjoying life."

Interested in signing up to become a foster grandparent? Contact Monica Alvarez at (831) 688-0460 x117 or monira@seniorscouncil.org. Last month,

Monica became Program Coordinator for Santa Cruz County. Before that, she worked in roles including Program Coordinator in Monterey and San Benito Counties. She first joined as the Program Specialist in 2022 after the pandemic and became a Program Coordinator in 2023.

I can meet about the Foster Grandparents Program at seniorscouncil.org/foster-grandparents-program-10/.

Seniors Council/AmeriCorps Seniors' Foster Grandparent Program for Santa Cruz County is located at 175 Westridge Dr. in Watsonville. Note: this is also the address for the Council's Senior Companion Program.



Foster grandparent Jose Alvarez (right) sits with students of Seniors Council



Foster grandparents Susanna Espinoza and Jaqui Balani at the April 2026 volunteer recognition lunch

EDUCATION / SCHOOLS

San Juan seniors document skills, concerns in internet use survey

BenitoLink survey taken as part of a 'TekConnect' grant from Spectrum

by **Robert Eliason**
July 28, 2026



Zoom tutorial at the Mary Velasco Sellen Senior Center with BenitoLink's Robert Eliason, second from left. Photo by Leslie David.

Lea este artículo en español [aquí](#).

In advance of planned Zoom training sessions sponsored through a “TekConnect” grant from Spectrum, BenitoLink distributed a survey to guests attending the Mary Velasco Sellen Senior Center lunch at San Juan Bautista’s Casa Maria in early spring.

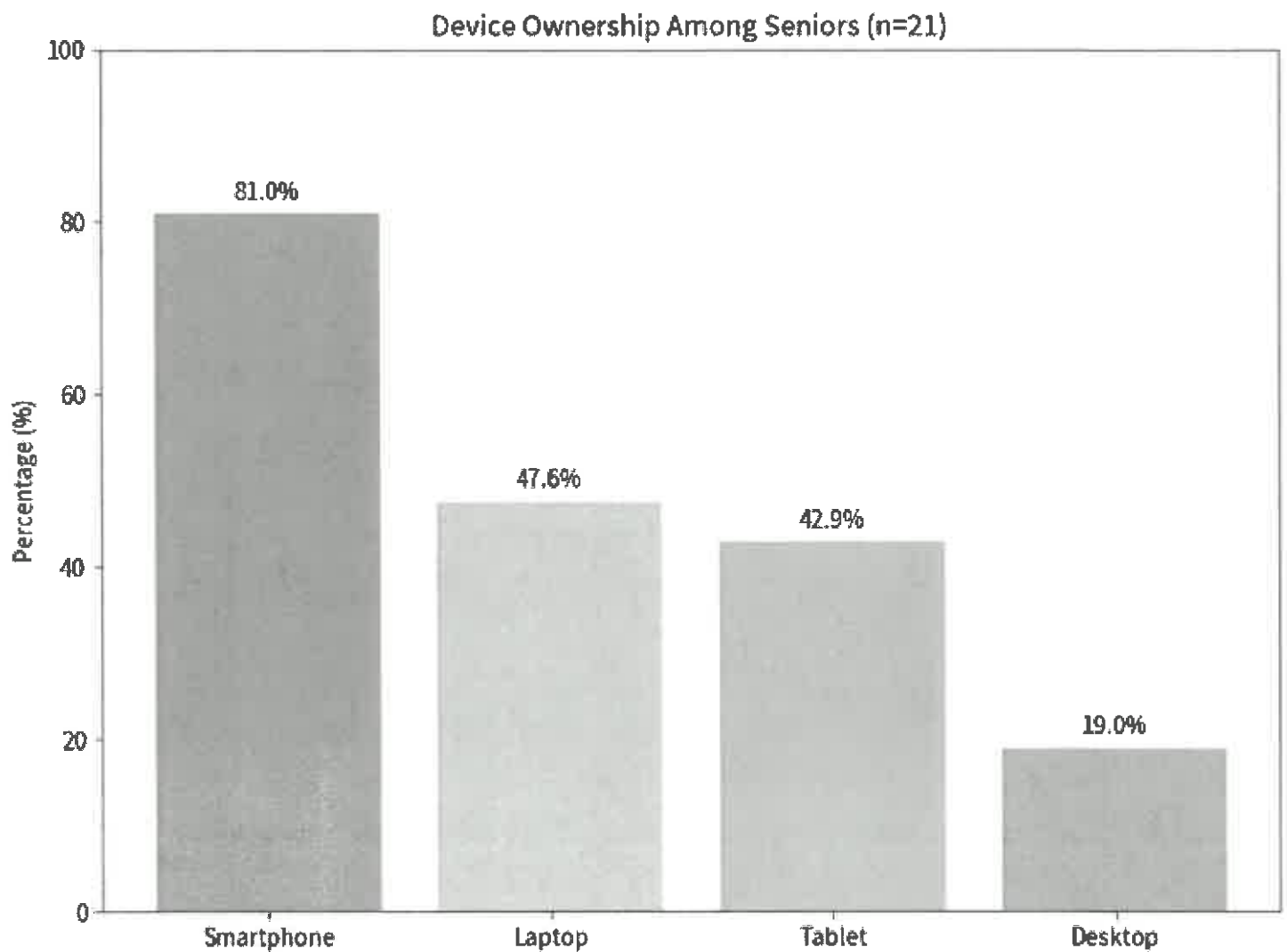
The questions were intended to gauge the group’s level of internet access and computer experience. While only 28 of the approximately 60 people at the lunch responded, it was enough to gain insight into the group, much of which seemed to align with national trends.

According to a 2022 Pew Research [study](#), there has been a steady and dramatic increase in tech usage by people 65 years and older over the past two decades.

Smartphone ownership in that age group, for example, grew from 13% in 2012 to 61% in 2021. Social media use also increased, but at a slower pace, from 11% in 2010 to 45% in 2021. Tablet ownership in 2010 was almost nonexistent at 4%, rising to 44% in 2021.

Seniors, however, have significantly lagged behind younger people in the use of electronic technology. In 2012, smartphone ownership by those aged 18-29, was already higher than current senior use at 66%. And by 2021, adoption by the 18-29 group had grown to 96%. The next age group, 30-49, was at 95%.

The numbers have grown since then. A 2025 Pew [study](#) on broadband usage placed smartphone ownership by adults under 50 at 97%, with those over 65 rising to 78%.



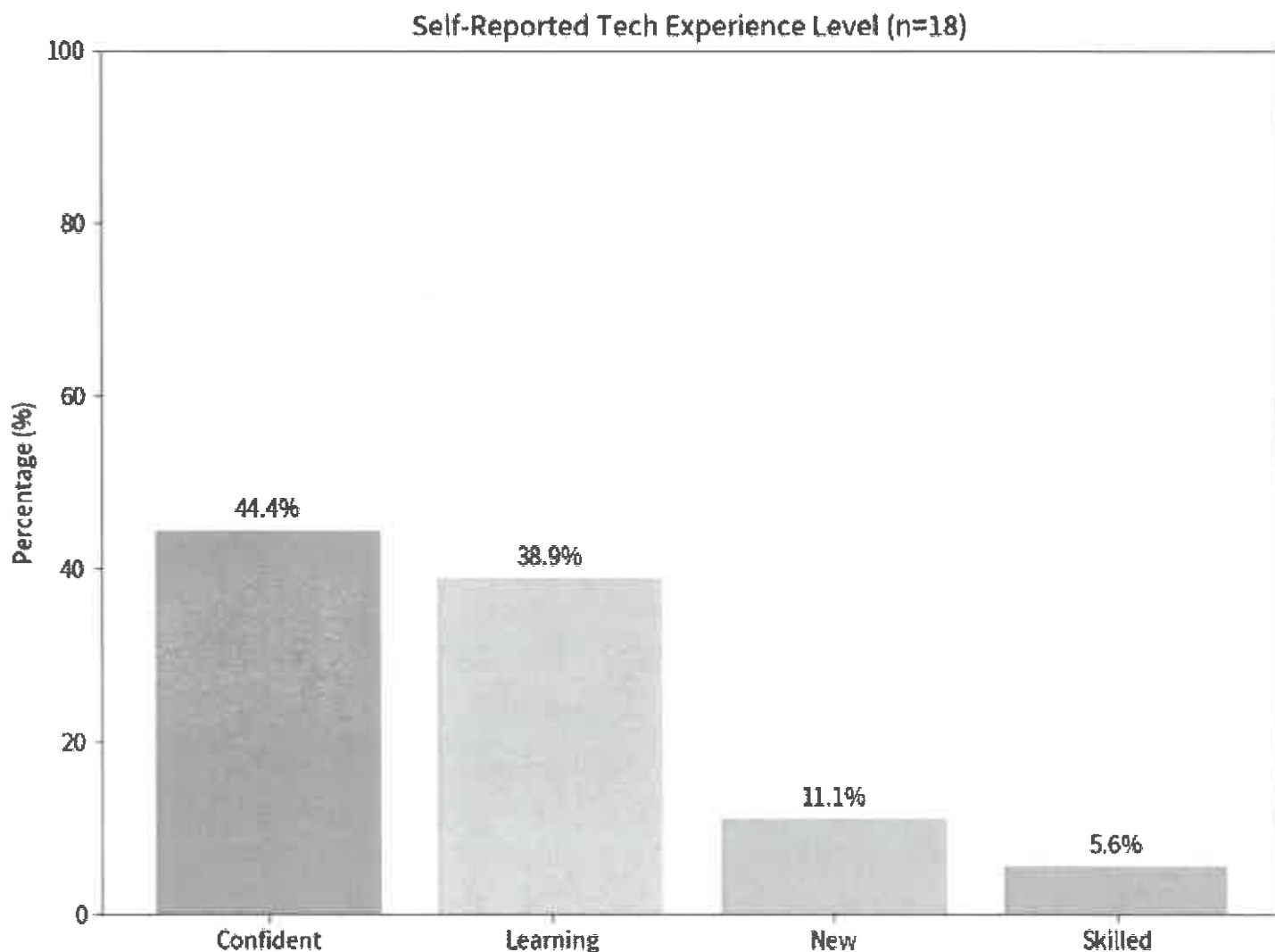
Among the seniors in Spectrum-BenitoLink's survey, 21 of the 28 respondents (75%) were using some device to connect to the internet, but only 17 (61%) said they own a smartphone. Four connected to the internet using only a laptop, with one also using a tablet. Seven people, or 25%, did not indicate that they own an electronic device of any kind.

Of the 21 people who owned at least one device, 17 respondents (81%) owned smartphones, 10 (48%) owned a laptop, 9 (43%) owned a tablet, and four (19%) owned a desktop.

Of the people who regularly used a device to access the internet, 18 assessed their own skill level running from "skilled" (one, or 5.6%), "confident" (eight, or 44%), "learning" (seven, or 39%) or "new" (two, or 11%).

Our intention was to offer instruction on using Zoom, and, perhaps surprisingly, 14 (67%) said they had some experience with the application, with half rating themselves as "confident or skilled and the rest as "learning."

The daily use of the internet by this group, whether beginners or experienced, is largely linked to reliance on the internet for news and information. Of the 17 who responded to a question about where they got their news, only three did not include an internet source.



Many could not specify what source they used, making only indistinct references to browser searches. Others listed BenitoLink, Apple News, San Jose Mercury, National Public Radio and Facebook, among others, as information sources.

Coupled with this was one of the main issues expressed by the respondents: which online sources can be trusted? Nine of the 14 people who answered this question cited false information, scams, internet safety and identity loss as concerns.

According to a 2025 study by the American Association of Retired Persons, one-third of seniors have similar concerns about the internet, and with good reason.

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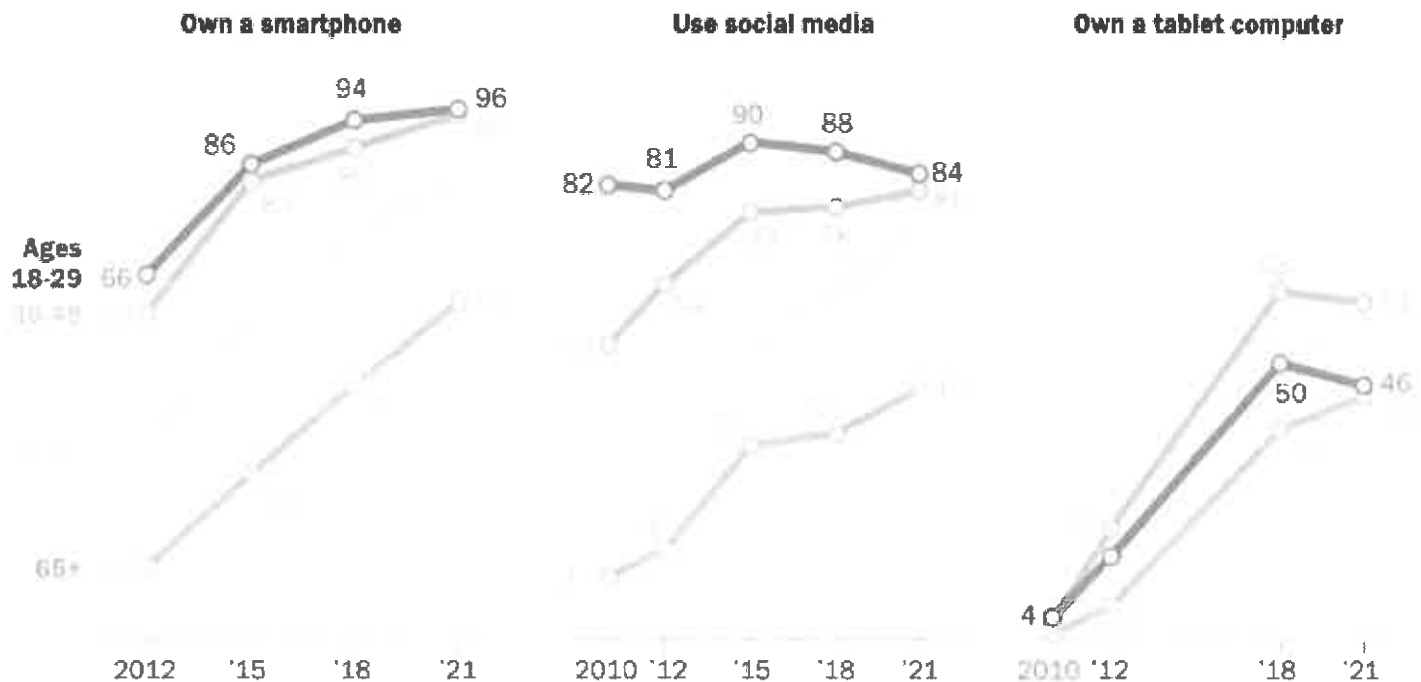
A 2025 FBI report cited those over 60 as being the major targets of online fraud, accounting for \$7.749 billion—34%—of the \$20.9 billion lost in 2025. This is an increase of 26% over 2024.

Admittedly, ours was a small, localized sample, but it shows that there is a need for the kind of assistance that the TekConnect grant is designed to provide.

In the coming months, BenitoLink will also be working with the Hollister senior community to assess its skill levels and concerns.

Smartphone ownership and social media use among older adults continue to grow

% of U.S. adults who say they ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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