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# IOCP FINAL REPORT TO MN ORNITHOLOGISTS UNION

December 31, 2015

## **Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners (IOCP)**

**1605 County Road 101 North**

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**Date of Grant:** 4/22/2015

**Amount of Grant:** \$2,690

## GRANT SUMMARY

With funding from the Savaloja Grants Program of the Minnesota Ornithologists Union, Interfaith Outreach and Community Partners (IOCP) introduced a pilot program – **Our Minnesota Birds** – to increase awareness of and appreciation for Minnesota’s birds among low-income seniors living in West Hennepin County. IOCP applied for the grant to fund activities that help seniors stay active and engaged with their neighbors, reducing social isolation and its myriad negative effects.

By introducing **Our Minnesota Birds**, we intended to improve birding habitat, reduce social isolation among seniors, and connect immigrants more fully to their new home. This pilot program was expected to reach up to 50 older adults (ages 50 to 90) living in the Currents neighborhood of Plymouth through IOCP’s 50Plus Club.

## ORIGINAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR BIRD APPRECIATION AND EDUCATION

1. Attract more and diverse birds through habitat development: installing feeders, planting bird-friendly shrubs and small trees, and incorporating a neighboring marsh area into the newly defined Bird Habitat and Nature Area to preserve a natural habitat.
2. Improve bird appreciation through better habitat access: benches for improved seating for seniors with limited mobility, and binoculars to improve visual access.
3. Raise awareness of Minnesota birds through education: a library of bird resources (including books and shelving), onsite program materials and Minnesota “field” trip expenses. Possible destinations include Hawk Ridge Nature Center in Duluth, the Bell Museum and the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden in Minneapolis.

## PROGRESS TOWARD ORIGINAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Though the program is based at Currents apartments, 42 members of IOCP's 50Plus Club (plus eight children) from three affordable housing neighborhoods (Currents, Kimberly Meadows and Shenandoah Woods) participated in various events. Thanks to the Savaloja Grant's Program, these low-income seniors living in Plymouth are learning about local birds and those living at Currents are working to create bird-friendly habitat in their neighborhood. Many participants are immigrants, and learning more about Minnesota birds creates a meaningful connection to their new home.

With activities that include bird feeder construction, habitat planning, special presentations onsite and a field trip to Hawk Ridge in Duluth, these older adults are expanding their knowledge of Minnesota's birds and are building a growing community of enthusiasts. This "community" of engaged neighbors reduces the growing risk of social isolation among these older adults, for whom limited resources make overcoming isolation more challenging. Isolation is known to lead to significant adverse health and wellbeing consequences, ranging from poor compliance with medical therapy to greater risk of death from heart disease or stroke.

In addition to community-building activities, specific accomplishments include:

- Building and installation of more than 20 new feeders
- Onsite education program from Eastman Nature Center
- Programs at the MN Landscape Arboretum, Eastman Nature Center and Hawk Ridge Nature Center
- Installation of a resource library with binoculars at Currents

Upcoming plans include:

- Habitat improvement in Spring, 2016 in an accessible courtyard area
- Expanded library materials, including field guides
- Grand Opening celebration scheduled for July, 2016

## NOTEWORTHY INSIGHTS

A recent event connecting older residents with a younger generation in building winter feeders is a step beyond reducing social isolation, toward truly improving the community for all families who live at Currents. Older adults worked with neighborhood children to make winter feeders, creating connections across generations, developing the next wave of enthusiasts, and contributing to the new Courtyard birding station at Currents.

Currents has been an enthusiastic partner in this initiative, working with the 50Plus Club and local resources to identify and develop an optimum habitat area that will both attract birds AND be accessible to seniors with impaired mobility. Currents expanded the planned development from solely using the marshy area on the property to developing the centrally located Courtyard, which has increased visibility for all residents. The two areas offer diverse attractions and varied accessibility. The marshy area is bordered with cattails and swamp willows, has mature trees for shaded seating, a full sun exposure for blooming shrubs and flowers, a variety of grasses and creeping junipers, and numerous feeders and bird houses to attract and shelter birds.

Residents and staff report sightings of birds ranging from mallards, red-winged blackbirds, and flycatchers to broad winged hawks, hummingbirds, woodpeckers, and songbirds. In addition, moths, butterflies and a variety of insects and small mammals visit the marsh area. In the upcoming year, signage will be added to stimulate an interactive experience for visitors.

Although well-suited to birds, the marsh area can pose accessibility issues to older adults as it is a very natural environment. The Courtyard birding station offers easy access in the center of the community. Located just outside the recreational building, the Courtyard features a variety of feeders and a watering “hole” for a quick bath or drink. Birders may sit indoors and view the heavily-frequented feeders through the large paneled glass during the winter months. In the spring, a platform with bench seating will be installed allowing an outdoor, up-close experience with these new feathered friends. The birder seating area will be enhanced with colorful annuals to attract the much loved hummers. The Courtyard’s mature trees provide shelter during inclement weather. Currents added a variety of berry producing shrubs to support natural feeding during the winter season. Additionally, color blast perennials and flowering and shrubs were planted in the fall around the bend from the birding station in preparation for a perfect habitat.

Members of the 50Plus Club completed a survey about **Our Minnesota Birds**, and results showed the following:

- 100% agree or strongly agree that they appreciate and notice birds more
- 94% agree or strongly agree that they have access to bird habitat in their community
- 88% share their new awareness and information with friends, family and neighbors
- Respondents are interested both in additional education and additional field trips to expand the program.

The high percentage of respondents noting that they share information with others, as well as the high interest in addition education and field trips, both validates the appeal of this activity to 50Plus Club members, and reinforces its worth as a program that works to reduce social isolation in this group.

## FINANCIALS

Funds from this grant are being spent as intended, though some variation among expenses occurred (such as delayed spending on supplies and habitat as we deferred development into Spring, 2016, and more spending on bus transportation for education outings). Please see the attached budget summary.

## THANK YOU

We are deeply grateful for the support of the Minnesota Ornithologists Union Savaloja Grants program, as we expanded our 50Plus Club focus to include **Our Minnesota Birds**. We have welcomed the snowfall to enjoy watching birds at our many new winter feeders, and look forward to spring as we improve the courtyard area for outdoor bird watching.

It will be our pleasure to share information about our next phase of development at the MOU annual meeting in December, 2016, and we will extend an invitation for your members to attend our grand opening this summer.