

**Vital Aging Network Forum  
Ridgedale Library  
12601 Ridgedale Drive  
St. Louis Park, MN**

**January 8, 2008  
“VAN’s Vision & 2008”**

Speakers: Mark Skeie, VAN Chair  
Tom Hyder, VAN Coordinator  
Facilitator: Karen Richtman, ALVA Graduate - Educator

**INTRODUCTION:** Patrick Jones, Director of the Ridgedale-Hennepin County Library, welcomed guests and gave a short description of services available through the Hennepin County Library system. He then introduced Margaret Gillespie who briefly described services available to the 55+ population.

**PROGRAM:** Mark Skeie began by asking “What is one attribute of “community” that is important to you?” Forum guests responded with the following list:

- Recognition, appreciation and valuing differences
- Overcoming isolation
- Being friendly and open
- Mutual support and connectiveness
- Sharing food
- Inter-generational community
- Overcoming the stigma of ageism
- Opportunities to contribute and/or volunteer
- A sense of belonging
- Home – belonging

Mark then reviewed VAN’s mission, vision and operating principles.

VAN Mission - To promote self-determination, community involvement, and personal enrichment for and with older adults through education and advocacy.

VAN Vision - VAN models the change that is needed in our communities: older adult talent is maximized for the greater good as well as for individual good. Vital agers lead VAN and seize opportunities to partner with other people and organizations to advance vital aging.

- VAN Operating Principles - Everyone should be encouraged and supported in being as self-sufficient as possible.
- Self determination is central for the realization of civil and human rights.
- Involvement and integration of older adults in communities is necessary for individual and community health.
- Older adults are a community resource. Their productivity and contributions must be recognized, encouraged and supported.

- Communities should recognize and support the mutuality of interests across generations.
- Ageism is a pervasive form of bigotry that must be challenged.

VAN is a civic institution that builds the civic capacity of individual older adults, providing opportunities to impact the common good in support of Vital Communities.

**ACTIVITY – DEFINE COMMUNITY:** Karen Richtman asked each forum guest to draw a map of their community. She then asked each table to discuss:

1. Why did you choose to include these items in your community?
2. What criteria defines your community?
3. How do you decide where your community begins and ends?

After the table discussion, each group was asked to complete the following statement. “A community is \_\_\_\_.” Answers were recorded. She then asked the groups to discuss how a community differs from a vital community. Descriptions of a vital community were:

Engaging	Strength-based	Accepting
Life-giving	Inclusive	Reciprocal
Dynamic	Energized	Changing
Growing	Essential	Alive
Listening	Relevant	Adaptive
Involving	Purposeful	

Following this discussion, each group was asked to restate their definitions of community by incorporating the descriptions of what is a vital community. The final definitions were:

1. To be connected, relevant, supportive, accessible, with a sense of belonging, challenging and engaging, purposeful, learning, dynamic and responsive.
2. A vital community is dynamic, supportive and purposeful; and one that encourages connectivity.
3. A vital community is an accessible environment that supports our needs, where we feel connected, provides a sense of belonging, purpose and opportunities for growth.
4. A vital community passionately engages people to get involved in their community through their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual realms.
5. A vital community is a dynamic, supportive and purposeful environment that meets our needs, where we feel connected and provides a sense of belonging.
6. A vital community is a supportive, purposeful, dynamic group of individuals that compliment each other, directly or indirectly, to which we feel connected, supported, have a sense of belonging and is a part of our emotional soul with never-ending boundaries.

**VAN in 2008** - Tom Hyder next reviewed the purpose, activities and relationships of the Vital Aging Network. He stated the VAN’s purpose is to support both vital agers and vital communities. He outlined the VAN projects and programs, which include:

VAN Leadership Group  
Website  
Monthly Bulletin  
Monthly Forums  
Speakers Bureau  
Advocacy Leadership in Vital Aging ALVA  
Vital Communities Toolkit  
VAN Ventures

He also described VAN's organizational structure and committees, which focus on the areas of communication, education and networking, and development. He explained VAN's vision of an on-line toolkit and requested input regarding its effectiveness. Tom announced that the ALVA program will start again in the fall of 2008, and described plans to use the community college system in selected communities throughout the state to offer the ALVA program, as well as exploring the use of teleconferencing in the ALVA program. In response to a request for comments, the following was mentioned:

- Live speakers are better than a teleconference
- Keep in mind the abilities of the audience to hear
- Self-contained classes work better
- Bonding with a peer group is the best aspect of ALVA classes

Tom made a request for member involvement in VAN and noted that sign-up sheets were available if anyone had an interest in participating in VAN's work in the following areas:

- Communications (framing VAN's message, website, VAN Bulletin, Speaker's Bureau)
- Network/Education (monthly forums, statewide education outreach, ALVA program)
- Finance/Development (resource development, revenue models, annual budget, multi-year fiscal planning)
- Other (be a resource for VAN)

Mark Skeie recapped the meeting and answered questions and comments from the audience.

*Minutes respectfully submitted by Gail Hernandez*