

**Summary, Vital Aging Network Meeting, December 11, 2001
10 to noon, Skyway Senior Center, Minneapolis**

Present

Karen Bowen, Sadie Brown, Sue Carter, Carol Daly, Barbara Eschle, Alice Evans, Hal Freshley, Leola Furman, Karen Greer, Chuck Gribble, Jon Groth, Jan Hively (recorder), Dolores Irwin, Beth Kessler, Ruth Kildow, Joan Knuesel, Barbara Laporte, Melinda Ludwiczak, Diane McNew, Claire Olson, Grace Ramseyer, Sharon Rebar, Sister Mary Virginia Schmidt, Marilyn Salay, Wayne Takeshita, Irma Uah, Deborah Wemette

Welcome to the Skyway Senior Center: Ruth Kildow, Mpls. Senior Ombudsman

Ruth Kildow is the Senior Ombudsman for the City of Minneapolis, responsible for a wide variety of services as a coordinator and advocate. The city created the position in 1974, under then-Mayor Al Hofstede. The Skyway Senior Center is a dream come true. A couple of banks used to provide a public space for seniors where they could sit down and use a restroom but that service hasn't been around for awhile. Opened last month, the Skyway Senior Center space was created and furnished by the Ryan Development Corporation, who constructed the building. Some assistance has been provided by the Downtown Neighborhood Revitalization Program, Mpls. Public Housing Authority, and Target Corporation. St. Thomas plans to offer computer instruction and other classes. The City pays rent for the space. Melinda Ludwiczak is a consultant who is interim director while a hiring process is being conducted for the ongoing director.

**Wise Women's Group of Northside Minneapolis: Dolores Irwin, Facilitator
Sadie Brown and Irma Uah, Members**

A Northside resident and ordained minister, Paulette Sankofa, started an organization called "Colorful Threads" several years ago. Community residents meet regularly in circles of 12 - 20 people. Each of the 18 circles has a different focus. The Wise Women's Group is one of two circles for seniors. The purpose of the Wise Women's Group is to provide access for Northside residents to information, services and benefits that the majority population in other neighborhoods may already have. Circle members are primarily African American, plus a few Somali and Caucasian Visitation Sisters.

The Wise Women emphasize the importance of talking with their children and grandchildren about the racism that is pervasive in all of our systems. They have reached hundreds through their family networks to help overcome the common practice of internalizing racism. Our parents taught us that "we have to be twice as good as anyone else to get anything good." But today, many feel that they should get by like everyone else.

We have worked on neighborhood and racial redlining that causes our insurance premiums to be higher, mortgages to be harder to obtain, etc. Whereas 80% of the majority population owns a home sometime in life, that is the case for only 40% of

minorities. We have worked with NRRC (the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council) to access home ownership assistance plans. At election time, we meet with candidates. Now Northside Minneapolis has submitted a proposal to the Northwest Area Foundation for comprehensive community development in Northside Minneapolis. It emphasizes the merit of Colorful Threads to expand participation and outreach.

The goal of Colorful Threads is peace and spiritual, physical, and economic wellness. One circle helps participants in Turning Point's dependency treatment and other counseling programs to become integrated in the community. There is a circle for Somali women, and an Asian group. There are circles for young women and single mothers. There is a Kwanzaa group led by Ed Irwin for youth and their families. There are three youth groups. There are two quilting groups: one a second Wise Women's Group, the other mixed ages, led by Theresa Dols. The latter group invited children of different ages to ask questions. The quilting group then responded with its answers, written on squares of the quilt.

Comments:

..I am impressed by the breadth of touch that your group has through its family and community networks.

..You are both learning and teaching. Do you make use of the local media?

..We submit information to the Near Northside newspaper, and I (Dolores Irwin) have time on KMOJ-Radio each week.

..What is the role of the facilitator for each circle?

..I see me primary role as building leadership.

The Future of Senior Centers: Melinda Ludwiczak, Consultant and Interim Director, Skyway Senior Center; and Hal Freshley, Research and Planning, MN Board on Aging

Melinda Ludwiczak has managed community education programs and centers involving older adults in a few locations including Robbinsdale and Bloomington. Just as this center is a dream come true for those involved with senior services in the Minneapolis area, so is this center a dream come true for Melinda, who has been eager to start a program from the ground up.

There is a market for the senior center both among older adult residents of downtown (9,000 now living downtown) and others who come from all over the metro area to shop and make bus connections downtown. So far, Skyway Center visitors have already come from most of the zip code areas in the Twin Cities. Melinda hasn't had to go out to find education partners; they have called her. The center is planning movie days, tai chi, a walking group with the YWCA, health programs with the HMOs, etc.

Senior Centers have a 50-year history since they were started in NY, Philadelphia and San Francisco. Now there are several thousand of them, represented through the National Institute of Senior Centers, the oldest and largest unit in the National Council on Aging. Melinda is the MN delegate and Secretary to the National Institute, which sponsors two

meetings a year. There is a MN Association of Senior Services also. The national professional association has developed national accreditation standards for senior centers and provides technical assistance to centers. Melinda's saying is, "Good minds create great ideas, but the best minds steal great ideas."

Every center is unique. They are located in churches, hospitals, as an "oasis" in May Company stores or other stores, in storefronts, etc. Some are concepts rather than places - - senior centers without walls that use spaces throughout the community in partnership with others, for example, public libraries, shopping malls, universities, B&Bs, stores and restaurants. Most small towns, however, have a senior center.

The question for every center is, "How many niches can we fill?" There is also a question about, "What shall we call them?" In Bloomington, the Creekside Center prefers to use the word "community center" rather than "senior center" because their programs are designed for people of all ages, although mostly seniors use them. Some of the questions about scope are answered by funding requirements that may be outmoded because the Older Americans Act works with a model designed by the G.I. generation and used primarily by them today. One fight has been to advocate cost sharing so that users can contribute to the costs for meals, etc. The federal requirements haven't kept track of changing needs and interests, whereas center directors must be in tune with their market. The current federal Secretary of Aging, however, Josefina Carbonell, comes to the job from directing a network of 18 senior centers in Miami. This is the first time the secretary has been one of us.

Demographics dictate changes. Now there are three generations of older adults, from 55 to 100+, who often can pick and choose where they will go for what. The range of interests goes from day care for frail elderly to a club for skydivers. You can't lure them with lunch anymore. The question is always how to be cost efficient in developing programs that will attract users. We have directors through the state and country who are role models for innovation. In Nebraska, for example, the center sponsors a 5 a.m. breakfast for hunters because no restaurant is open for them. It is important for success to cultivate the advocacy and leadership of users.

Hal commented that this Skyway Center is a place that is comfortable and open during the critical hours for maximum use. It offers e-mail, coffee, cookies, and has already served older adults 55 to 100. As it does this morning, it gets people together to share information.

Comments:

..Do senior centers cultivate the arts?

..Yes, some crafts, other fine arts. This center is asking artists to exhibit their work on the walls, all of which is for sale.

..Has the U's Elder Learning Institute contacted you?

..Yes, as has the Humanities Commission Learning in Retirement Network (led by Jane Cunningham), and the University of St. Thomas.

..You can reach Melinda Ludwiczak at the Skyway Senior Center, 612-370-3869

Life Events: Barbara Laporte, U of M Career & Lifework Center

The most recent layout for the VAN Web site shows topics for the "Finding Personal Direction" pathway such as: "Approaches to lifework planning", "Tools for self-assessment", and "Tools for Discussion Leaders." To better fit the needs and interests of older adults seeking guidance, the VAN Web site team leader has proposed that we should organize the pathway based on "Life Events." Barbara Laporte, the counselor with the U of M's Career and Lifework Center who will work with older adults, has considered some categories for life events, but is asking the VAN group to suggest life events that may lead mid-life and older adults to seek guidance.

Life events suggested by the group:

Seeing yourself as "old"

First child leaves home

Last child leaves home

Grief, about loss of

job

pet

health

ability

child

partner

friend

Employment:

Job change

Reentering the job market

Being forced out of a job -- layoff

Feeling outmoded or obsolete at work

Retirement

Retirement of a spouse

Planning when to retire

Planning retirement activities

Work-life issues

Parenting parents

Chronic illness diagnosed -- need for support group

Chronic pain

Role changes --- taking over the responsibility, etc.

Parenting grandchildren

Accepting:

losing driver's license

isms

last living person among siblings

Questions about faith

Loneliness
Loss of dreams (I never got to be a manager, parent, spouse, grandparent, business owner...)
Moving on
Lifestyle changes
Relocation
Forgiveness
Finding community -- connecting
Finding support groups
Staying in touch with youth
Finding and reentering relationships
 Dating
Adapting to declining capacities -- finding adaptive technology -- asking for help
Nutrition -- health
 Over-the-counter medicines?
Safety issues
Coping
Finding traveling companion
Finding book club
How do I pass along the wisdom -- creating a legacy
Family dynamics
 Expectations when children are married
Living on a fixed income -- adapting to financial changes
Self-expression

Next Meeting -- Tuesday, January 8, Luther Seminary (Hwy 280 and Como in St. Paul), 10 to 12 a.m.

The agenda will include Ann Meissner, from Elder Zest, on the topic of "Gerotranscendence;" and a usability test of the Web site design.

Handouts:

.."Welcome to the Skyway Senior Center"
.."Resource Guide for Seniors & Friends" from the Senior Ombudsman's Office, call 612-673-3004
..Cartoons from "Stone Soup" on what is attractive or unattractive about a senior center
..Results from "Skyway Senior Center Survey," 11-1 to 11-30-2001
..Barbara Laporte's initial list of ideas for "Finding Personal Direction: Life Events that Influence the Search"