

**Summary, Vital Aging Network April Meeting:
COMMUNITY OUTREACH FOR OLDER ADULT LEARNING
Tuesday, April 9, 2002, 10 a.m. to noon, Luther Seminary**

Present

Dale Anderson, Karen Bowen, Sue Carter, Jane Cunningham (Convenor), Cornelia Chearn, Carol Daly, Diana Don Carlos, Sue Engelmann, Barb Eschle, Alice Evans, Judy Fairbrother, Cory Franklin, Hal Freshley, Bev Fritz, Annie Glasglow, Karen Greer, Patty Hastreiter, Jan Hively (Recorder), Nan Just, Kristin Keller, Barb Laporte, Diane Lindblom, Mary Maher, David Manthey, Brian McCaffery, Lindsey McDivitt, Sue Meyers, Barbara Muesing, Cathryn T. Olson, Grace Ramseyer, Pat Samples, Bernie Saunders, Judy Schuck, Lydia Volz, Steve Wagner, Joanne Westergaard

Handouts

MASS April 18-19 Spring Conference brochure
Catholic Charities April 30 workshop brochure, "How to Successfully Work with Difficult Personalities" with Richard P. Johnson
MCDES May 17 workshop brochure, "Loss, Recovery, and Resilience" with Froma Walsh

COMMUNITY EDUCATION, WEST ST. PAUL ISD 197:

"The Connect" Newsletter for Staff and Volunteers
Breakdown of ISD 197 Community Education Revenue
"Learning for Life's Seasons" Spring 2002 Catalog of Classes
"The Elder Edition" publication for older adults in ISD 197
Overview of Adult Basic Education in Minnesota
ISD 197 Brochure for 2002 Adult Basic Education

LEARNING IN RETIREMENT NETWORK (LIRN)

Background on MN Humanities Commission
LIRN Organizations and Programs
Minneapolis Community Education Spring 2002 "55 Plus Older Adult Program"
"Intergenerational Program News", Feb 2002, Mpls Community Education

VAN

"What's Next for the Vital Aging Network?", Hively Concept Paper
"VAN Leadership Group Structure", Wagner Concept Paper
"Suggestions for Outcomes" from VAN Summit Planning Group

Community Education

ISD 197 Presenters: Barbara Eschle (Older Adult Programs), Beverly Fritz (Director), Kristin Keller (ABD-GED Coordinator), David Manthey (ACCESS, Adult Enrichment), Sue Doffing (Volunteer Coordinator)

Bev Fritz. Community Education is what happens in a school outside of the 8 to 3 school hours. It is a department within each public education school system. Unique among the 50 states, Comm Ed receives a local levy and state aid, both filtered through the K-12 system to maintain the “lighted school house”. This amounts to \$5.95 for every resident plus \$1 for every youth. Fees cover one-half the cost. The resources are dwindling, with the recent shortfall and budget cuts.

West St. Paul has experienced demographic change. Older adults are selling their homes and younger families are moving in, but still, it is a haven for older adults. West St. Paul and Mendota Heights have the largest population of older adults among metro area communities, largely because there is affordable housing, including public housing. 82% of the households have no children in school. 30% of those with children send them to non-public schools (3,000 of the 8,000 children in the district going to 7 non-public school). 65% of Comm Ed expenditures go to youth programs, although 82% of the households have no children.

David Manthey. ACCESS provides programs for adults with disabilities. The district supports “Community of Hope,” a program for the deaf that involves special computers, signing, etc. Adult Enrichment programs started with basket weaving, physical exercise, and foreign affairs...and these still draw participants. Computer education is also a big draw. The challenge is to get as many adults into the school as possible.

Kristin Keller. Prosperity, mobility, and education level influence vitality. The isolation of older adults who are lacking in these areas is increased for those who can’t speak English. The elders say, “In America, nobody appreciates old people.” Most of the immigrants come from cultures where age was esteemed. “They look at me the way I look at the homeless.” Kristin has organized conversation circles involving ages 16+, to provide an intergenerational education opportunity. The goal is a non-age-segregated society.

Sue Doffing. Sue recruits, trains and coordinates 1800 volunteers, including youth students, parents, and older adults. She provides training for Reading Buddies, PACER puppets, the Bucket Brigade, the Picture Person, and other programs to help schoolchildren learn. The district has initiated the “CONNECT” program through the high school guidance office for mentoring. Sue recruits through newspaper ads. She provides a variety of rewards to recognize volunteers, including treats at the time of sign-in, an ice cream social, written thank yous, etc. 30,000 hours have been donated this year.

Barb Eschle. Senior Centers are operated by different institutions in different communities. ISD 197 is collaborating with Dakota County to develop a new senior center, for which Comm Ed will provide the staff and program. They are looking for a name, recognizing that the “senior” in “senior center” won’t sell. No one wants to maintain silos that separate adults and older adults. The programs are being developed to encourage older adults to volunteer and remain active all their lives.

Discussion. It's frustrating that all of the Comm Ed programs for adults must run outside of the school day, which means that no computers are available during hours when the older adults are most likely to attend. There are pluses and minuses to being located in the school. Intergenerational relationships have developed while the older adults programs were located in an elementary school. Now that they are moving to the new senior center, older adults will lose their visibility. Now, students go to 7 nursing home, and Comm Ed sponsors a dance for high school students and seniors.

Learning in Retirement Network.

Presenters: Jane Cunningham, Director of LIRN, MHC; Patty Hastreiter, Coordinator of Older Adult Programs, Community Education, Mpls Public Schools.

Jane Cunningham. The MN Humanities Commission is one 50 similar state organizations, developed along with the National Endowment for the Arts, and National Endowment for the Humanities in the '60s. MHC provides cradle to grave programming, and serves the state from St. Paul. MHC receives federal dollars for the Learning in Retirement Network (LIRN) providing humanities-centered education for older adults that would typically be outside the stretch of Community Ed. Older adult volunteers help organize and deliver LIRN programs, which act as a catalyst for older adults to assume a leadership role. MHC provides a max of \$6,000 a year to 20 LIRN organizations, some in Community Education and others at the U of M, private colleges, MNSCU institutions, or ad hoc...for example, the Canyon Valley Elder Collegium. For many older adults, quality of life is associated with lifelong learning. They tend to want to find something near home. The seniors create the program, and Jane gets out of the way. "This group could colonize the moon!" Her task is like channeling water downhill.

Although one might think that community colleges would be providing similar programs, the humanities are precarious in most of the community colleges – because of lack of internal interest in the face of a "workforce development" focus, and because of mergers, turnovers, etc. In others, such as Rochester Community College, however, "Learning Is Forever."

Patty Hastreiter. The most popular Community Ed programs for older adults are the Humanities Commission programs. They are located at neighborhood sites, usually on bus lines – in libraries and parks and senior residences as well as schools. Those under age 55 are admitted as well. There is substantial interest among families of home-schooled children. Over the last 19 years during which Patty has worked with these programs, she sees more collaboration – which is essential as funding gets tighter. For their members, the UCARE insurance plan pays \$15 for trips and classes.

Patty has recruited 150 older adults as volunteers to help with intergenerational programs, particularly working with LEP (limited English proficiency) students.

Discussion. In some communities, programs meet in coffee houses so that the participants can socialize before and after the sessions. Generally, the interests and skills of older adults are changing. The group was advised to review Dawn Lindblom's paper

about this topic. Dawn commented that different incentives and a different approach to marketing are necessary to recruit older volunteers. It's important to look hard at the roles and opportunities available for volunteers so that they will match changing interests. You can find Dawn's paper, "The Changing Face of Baby Boomers," at www.cnscs.gov, under "Fellowships 2000-2001."

What's Next for the Vital Aging Network (VAN)?

Jan Hively. Jan walked the group through a drafted concept paper describing the two-year history of the Vital Aging Network, an informal network that maintains a monthly forum and a listserv for individuals and organizations to share information and work collaboratively. The purpose is to promote self-sufficiency, community participation and quality of life for and with older adults through education, advocacy and leadership development. The vision for VAN has been a "network of networks." The University of Minnesota has implemented VAN's wish for a Web site to connect older adults to education resources to find personal direction and see all the options, and to provide support for advocates for vital aging, at www.van.umn.edu. The U of M is providing resources to continue to develop and maintain the Web site next year.

As mentioned at last month's VAN meeting, Jan (the U of M Vital Aging Initiative Coordinator) is leaving the U at the end of May. It's important to find the resources to assure ongoing leadership for coordinating VAN's month-to-month activities, reinforcing the visibility of Vital Aging concepts, and nurturing statewide networks. Jan is drafting a proposal for a national foundation that has shown interest in this Minnesota model alliance between the state's land grant university and the community-based Vital Aging Network. She will send the drafted proposal out to VAN for review and comment.

Steve Wagner. Steve, the director of the U's Career and Lifework Center, in the College of Continuing Education, has managed the development of the VAN Web site and, with Barbara Laporte, developed the "Finding Personal Direction" pathway for the Web site. Steve has agreed to provide fiscal oversight and management for resources garnered in support of VAN's purpose. He walked the group through his paper that proposes that a VAN Leadership Group be formed to organize and coordinate the network. Each member of the Leadership Group would be responsible for a specific function and would provide oversight for a VAN Coordinator, if funding comes through for the staffing function. Steve would represent the U's interests as a member of the Leadership Group.

Discussion. The group described some of VAN's positive contributions that might be mentioned in a proposal, including its role in capacity building. Articulating the value of older adult productivity, and the role of VAN in encouraging it, is important. There is a broad range of outcomes that can be anticipated for VAN participants – related to answering the questions, "What's next for me in my personal life?" "What's next for me in my job?" "What's next for my organization?" We generate "ahas"! We define and build on assets, like the Search Institute.

We need more time for discussion at VAN meetings – more thinking time – more thinking about concrete ideas for what to do and advocate. Perhaps we should schedule mini-conferences in partnership with other organizations to discuss specific topics. We need to talk about models related to vital aging. We need to talk about language – to encourage non-ageist vocabulary.

Next Month

Next month, the topic will be “Housing Alternatives for Vital Aging,” with Terry McKinley, from Senior Coops, as the primary presenter. Also, we will show the introductory film from the Vital Aging Summit. And we will continue to discuss the future of VAN.

In June, there will be time to plan agendas for the future – and ways of assuring enough discussion time!