

VITAL AGING NETWORK: WHERE HAS IT BEEN? WHERE IS IT GOING?

Tuesday, June 11, 2002, 10 a.m. to noon, Luther Seminary

Present

Dale Anderson, Karen Bowen, William Cox, Carol Daly, Diana Don Carlos, Aina Essig, Harvey Feldman, Hal Freshley, Annie Glasgow, Fred Kogler, Barbara LaPorte, Melinda Ludwiczak, Georgiana May, Sue Meyer, Brian McCaffery, Lindsey McDivitt, Gunilla Montgomery, Grace Ramseyer, Miriam Reibold, Dave Saemrow, Judy Schuck, Kate Stahl, Steve Wagner,

Introductions

Everyone briefly introduced her/himself to those present.

VAN Update

Steve Wagner provided an update on the development of the **VAN website** and a brief account of the tremendous work and energy that went into it. Special appreciation is owed the University of MN's Lifework Center and their creative staff, to Eileen Collard and all the others who worked so hard to assemble the resources and to Jan Hively for getting it organized, up and running. In order to keep it fresh, there are new items every month. In July, people will be encouraged to describe someone whom they admire for their *vital aging*. A report of website activity to-date is appended to the end of these notes.

In order to keep up the vitality of the network itself, a **VAN Leadership Group** of 19 persons will convene just prior to the July VAN meeting to begin to sort out the most important functions for VAN and to plan the best way/s to accomplish them. Some of the ongoing functions include planning the topics for monthly meetings, updating the web, identifying the opportunities/needs for connecting with persons in Greater Minnesota and with other networks, and possible ways to attract and leverage resources.

VAN SELF-EVALUATION AND FUTURE DIRECTION/S: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

We divided into 5 smaller groups to talk about our own experiences with VAN, and share ideas and expectations for its future. The following is an amalgam of notes from the five note-takers. (Thank you!).

What would you like to get out of VAN?

- Networking! Bringing all kinds of people together who share a common interest. Ways to expand to other networks; Expand to cross-cultural networking and inter-cultural perspectives.
- Ideas and inspiration:
 - ✓ Re-careering (in the next phase of life),
 - ✓ Where & how to use my talents (or give back to society)
 - ✓ Hearing other people's stories; getting insight into healthy, happy ways to live the last third of our lives
 - ✓ Feel supported in my own aging
 - ✓ Latest information on web (to double check accuracy)
 - ✓ Increase the visibility of people who are happy with aging
- Intergenerational education - to stop ageism before it become imbedded in adolescents and young adults
- Engage employers and encourage retaining older workers (flexibility in work schedule);
- Catalyst for connections: relationships with agencies (e.g. Walker Methodist).
- Cooperative/collaborative programming (e.g. planning for retirement, intergenerational housing).

- A job! networking that leads to finding productive work, for pay or otherwise

Future ideas about VAN?

- Need to create "mini-VANs" across the state to share core values of VAN;
- Connect with more people: help people become computer literate--information on where to find computer access - or help develop computer elder gurus; develop a brochure to inform people (especially if not on web yet)
- VAN Summit:
 - ✓ Have at least annually
 - ✓ Use IT to broadcast to satellite locations.
- Generate a *vital aging* speakers' bureau: people and topics for possible meetings; put Jan Hively on a speaking circuit as a trumpeter of what is going on here.
- Promote advocacy:
 - ✓ Change society's thinking about older adults. It must be understood that older adults have a great deal to contribute, that they want to be productive
 - ✓ Spread the word; energize the "movement"
 - ✓ Address/change the vocabulary of aging, a way to avoid being put into boxes.
 - ✓ Address the "disconnect" between paid work and productivity
 - ✓ Develop advocacy kits: include resource lists e.g., TV, radio, newspapers - big and small, weeklies, neighborhood)
 - ✓ Expand beyond MN
- Van website:
 - ✓ Make the VAN website the "default" homepage at Senior Centers.
 - ✓ Use the website "post-it notes" and/or responses to questions as research tool to understand this diverse population. (Comment that responses on post-it notes provided a surprising insight into the many perspectives of people.)
 - ✓ Profile role models—show the different ways that older people are vital.
 - ✓ Put notes from the monthly minutes on the website.
 - ✓ Regularly promote the website via the listserv—feature a new resource or an interesting feature every month.
 - ✓ Get website approved by Bobby (?) – certified accessible to disabled persons.
- Develop collaborative programming among agencies that are represented by particular VAN members; co-sponsor events (share mailing list) to build VAN name recognition.

Monthly VAN meetings: topics that you'd like to explore?

- Inter-cultural contacts; how to make VAN more inclusive.
- Strategies for closing the "digital divide" how to make more people more computer literate
- Holistic/alternative medicine and aging
- Spirituality and aging (several responses)
- Aging well for women and aging well for men—are they the same or different?
- Life work change - life transitions
- Making and maintaining friendships after losses (of job, spouse, move)
- Alternative therapies--plant, pet and music therapy
- Family dynamics--communication between generations of family members on critical issues (health care decisions, wills, etc.)- working through conflict without assuming divorce is the first alternative;
- Wisdom and aging: Are they coincident or compatible? Learning from elders
- The arts—opportunities to communicate about vital aging through the languages of art, dance, theater, music
- Learning/educational opportunities: University offerings, travel

- Poly-pharmacy (not sure what means, but could be the link between Rx, OTC and self-medication with non-regulated health pills)
- Senior discounts
- The vocabulary of aging: old, retirement, senior, etc.
- *Not* politics and *not* legislation.
- Establishing issue-oriented committees (This would recognize that some members prefer smaller groups, and others want to focus on specific issues.)

Meeting format, time, place, frequency?

- 10:00 a.m. is good. Traffic is lighter and we don't contribute to congestion. Should Leadership group meet at noon instead of 8:00 a.m., for the same reason? but other options might be explored (evenings);
- Fixed time and day of month makes planning easier (several mentions); consider weekend sessions - quarterly- to involve/engage those outside metro area;
- Like the current structure with intros, flexible content and wrap up. It provides some structure but a lot of flexibility
- Bring similar discussions to the burbs.
- Introductions: too long, valuable, should be limited to 1-2x a year.
- Presentations by experts are welcome.
- Consider interactive TV through UMN ITV and/or human service offices in each county.
- Name tags instead of introductions?
- Break into two or three groups discussing 2-3 different topics

VAN Leadership Group—Suggested priorities:

- Raise money:
 - ✓ Develop relationships with potential funders
 - ✓ Need postage to send monthly update to people who don't have a computer.
 - ✓ Find grant-writers from among us (or hire)
- Really explore what we will do - research - and see what difference does it make in the lives of the older adults
- Repeat the Summit (several responses)
- Look at replicability and sustainability of the network
- Expand the diversity of persons in the network
- Explore how to have a real impact in Greater Minnesota. Local leaders need support
- Link with similar groups in US or elsewhere.

Personal contribution?

- Most comfortable with “commonality”—sharing ideas with age-peers noting similarity and variations among interests and experiences.
- Nothing in particular
- Want to be part of changing the culture in re attitudes toward aging.
- Identify language pockets and where intercultural information is needed for them;
- Activism - how to do this?
- Keep the UMN and VAN connection;
- Link VAN and regional network with Cooperative Extension colleagues across the state to "hook" them (despite dramatic cuts).

Other feedback?

- Update the list of VAN members who attend meetings, regularly, and make the list available to "those who show up."
- Get an article on VAN in *Modern Maturity*.