Aging and Wellness

Age-friendly communities encourage active aging by optimizing access to services and community activities that enhance quality of life for all residents. One out of every seven individuals in the United States is now 65 or older. By 2040, one out of every five people in the United States will be over 65. The growing movement on building age-friendly communities has emphasized the importance of optimizing the social well-being of older residents, which can ultimately benefit people of all ages. Age-friendly communities are defined as coordinated cross-sector efforts to make social and physical environments favorable to older adults. An age-friendly community has safe and accessible public transportation, affordable housing, safe outdoor spaces, quality health services, and sufficient community engagement through volunteer opportunities and other social activities. Towns and cities must prepare for the aging of their residents by facilitating mobility and social participation for older residents.[1]

Lessons Learned – Community members provide valuable insight into areas of improvement to focus program activities. Develop programming based on the results of baseline assessment surveys on older residents in your community.

Planning Steps:

1. Establish an age-friendly committee to include older residents in the process of building an age-friendly community. Committee members should include:
    a. Community leaders
    b. Department of Transportation or Recreation or Public Works representatives
    c. Department on Aging or Health Department representatives
    d. Senior residents in the community (most important aspect of the committee)
2. Conduct a baseline assessment survey among older residents on how age-friendly your community currently is. AARP provides surveys to facilitate the assessment process for age-friendly communities.
    a. Survey topics can include:
        i. Housing
        ii. Transportation
        iii. Health and wellness
        iv. Social participation
        v. Civic engagement
    b. Survey questions can include:
        i. How would you rate your community as an age-friendly place?
        ii. How important is it for you to remain in your community as you age?
        iii. How likely will you move to a different home after retirement outside of your community?

3. Develop an Action Plan based on the findings from your baseline assessment. The Action Plan should include:
    a. An overall goal
    b. Action steps
    c. Activities to achieve set action steps
    d. Schedule of activities
    e. Resource list needed to complete the overall goal
4. View Princeton Age-friendly Community Action Plan as a template to create your own action plan.

Program Examples:
1. **Transportation Training** - Partner with New Jersey Travel Independence Program to provide older residents of your community with the information they need to confidently use public transportation and increase their independence.
2. **Resource Directory** - Services needed may already be in existence, but many older residents are not aware of them. Create a resource directory of appropriate services and resources to distribute to the community, especially seniors.
3. **Complete Streets** - Work with your municipality's Department of Public Works to advocate for safe access for all roadway users and pedestrians.

Best Practices – Intergenerational programming supports the fight against ageism and promotes cross-generational socialization that benefits people of all ages. Building age-friendly communities requires support from the whole community; creating a program that unifies people of all age groups helps bridge the gap that causes ageism.

Evaluation – Evaluation is an important process that allows your community to identify areas of improvement and helps define the impact of your programming. Take the following steps to develop your evaluation strategy:
1. Include evaluation methods in your action plan.
2. Administer pre and post-implementation surveys to assess progress on your program beyond your action plan. The baseline assessment survey should serve as the pre-implementation evaluation, and a follow-up survey including best practices and lessons learned should be the post-implementation portion of the evaluation process.
3. Record quantitative data such as attendance on program activities to define results and impact.

To learn more on how to evaluate your program click here.

Resources –
Grotta Fund for Senior Care
The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation
AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities
WHO: Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities
Age-Friendly Community Initiatives in the Early Planning Phase
A Blueprint for Action: Developing a Livable Community for All Ages

Success Stories:

- **Age-Friendly Englewood** – Hosted a Housing Options Conference for 65 or older Englewood residents to promote local housing services and assistance to apply for benefits. Seniors were educated on tax freezes and tax relief by a local tax assessor. Affordable housing was a noted concern in Age-Friendly Englewood's initial baseline surveys.
- **Age-Friendly Teaneck** – Has partnered with Teaneck International Film Festival to host a contest to encourage interested high school film makers to interview older residents about their early years in Teaneck using students' own smartphones. This contest encourages intergenerational relationships and supports the fight against ageism.
- **Age-Friendly Ridgewood –** Is establishing Neighborhood Networks in collaboration with local Homes and School Associations to encourage neighborhood help to older residents in the community that need assistance with household services. The program is initiated through local schools to encourage intergenerational relationships between youth and older residents in the community.
- **Generations for Garfield** – Has organized Walking Clubs with seniors as team leaders. Garfield residents are encouraged to sign up at the Garfield Health Department where group walks commence every Thursday. Participation is encouraged through monthly raffles of fitness equipment.
- **Westwood For All Ages** – Collaborated with Westwood library to host a birthday celebration for seniors in their 80s, 90s, and 100s. The mayor and council were in attendance along with 100 seniors and community members of all ages. This event was part of the fight against ageism and celebrated intergenerationality among Westwood residents.
- **Tri-Town 55+ Coalition** – Has implemented a Ride for Seniors program in partnership with GoGoGrandparent- an on demand transportation company that interfaces with Lyft or Uber for older adults without smartphones or apps. This subsidized transportation service is for Chatham and Madison residents 65 or older. Over 1000 rides have been provided since the program's inception in April 3, 2017.
- **SOMA: Two Towns For All Ages** – Has improved communications for seniors with a monthly calendar, a printed newsletter and a website to coordinate the multiple classes, events and services in both towns.
- **Lifelong Elizabeth** – Has hosted 3 Senior Safety Days to present information on public transportation services, walking safety, food safety, and fall prevention. Lifelong Elizabeth invited 11 vendors and four speakers to discuss topics of concern brought up during an online survey assessment.
- **Lifelong Plainfield –** Is collaborating with Healthy Plainfield, the City of Plainfield's Health Initiative, to develop and implement a plan that would streamline communications and consistently engage a wider audience (seniors, their families, and other supports). The partnerships include the Plainfield School District, Faith-based groups, senior living communities, and others that allow Lifelong to broaden its engagement efforts.

References –

1. Greenfield E. *Age-Friendly Community Initiatives In The Early Planning Phase: Perspectives On Why, How, And Who From Northern New Jersey*. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; 2016.