

**Communications Committee Meeting
Minutes
November 15, 2021**

Attendees

CoA Members

Jean Dinwiddie, Co-chair
Beverly Rollins, Co-chair
Wayne Berman
Virginia Cain
David Engel
Kendell Matthews
Laurie Pross
Eddie Rivas
Barbara Selter
Marsha Weber

Alumni Members

Chuck Kauffman
Marcia Pruzan
Revatha Vikram

Staff

Shawn Brennan, Montgomery County HHS, Health and Disability Services
Jennifer Long, Montgomery County
Joelle Modderman, Montgomery County Public Information Office
Betty Ring, Senior Fellow for Montgomery County Councilmember Sydney Katz

Guest Speaker

Steve Gurney, ProAging Community

Roll Call

Co-chair Jean Dinwiddie opened the meeting by taking roll and asking for a motion to approve the minutes of the October meeting. The minutes were approved.

Meeting with Steve Gurney, Founder, Positive Aging Sourcebook and ProAging Podcast

Mr. Gurney began his address by noting that he likes to help organizations think differently about serving older adults. He asked about some of the challenges that the CoA is faced with.

Revatha Vikram stated that she is involved in getting diverse communities together, and it is not always a smooth path. She asked whether he could provide any suggestions for getting things done for these communities. Barbara Selter asked about the best ways to help older adults. Beverly Rollins asked about how to get more information out to middle income individuals, individuals who fall into the income gap (i.e., cannot qualify for income assistance but who are not wealthy).

Marcia Pruzan reported that, in her position with the Age-Friendly Initiative, she is writing an article for *The Beacon* newspaper on how to get information out to older adults. Jean Dinwiddie asked about how to reach individuals who have no Internet access. Virginia Cain asked about how to meet the needs of individuals in a crisis situation.

In response to these questions, Steve Gurney stated that, although these are his opinions, we have to try different strategies to see how they work, and if they do not, then reframe them and try again. He said that a lot of these challenges are very common. A lot of them tie into Ageism topics. Sadly, our society segregates by age.

Steve noted that one of the things he has seen is that nobody is ready for retirement communities, or other things he talks about. Even a walker and wheelchair. Our society has an ageist viewpoint. Older adults just want to be viewed as individuals, and not as old. That's a challenge: how can we communicate to an audience without communicating that what we are discussing is for older adults? That is not an easy task.

He continued, saying that a lot of the time when we communicate with older adults that person is in a crisis. They have not planned for this situation; they have resisted getting the information. He has found that when doing work that involves a crisis, the individual/family then becomes open to the information.

Steve said that when thinking about communicating information to older adults, he uses "Trojan Horses." Instead of going out and saying, "Seniors, I have a great program for you!" he doesn't use the word "Senior" or talk about how he is trying to reach older adults. He noted that Senior Centers are great places but they are "Senior" centers. He stated that where he lives they are not called "Senior" centers.

He stated that a large percentage of individuals over age 65 are grandparents. Although they don't like to be called senior citizens, they do not mind being called a grandparent. So, he brings up the topic of grandparenting to reach older adults. He then slips in ideas about older adult issues.

Steve also brought up the issue of hearing aids. They are pretty much invisible now. But a lot of individuals do not want the stigma of getting a hearing aid, and they often delay the purchase of

one. But there are lots of ways to suggest that someone needs a hearing aid. For instance, you can say, “Don’t you want to hear your grandchildren?”

Marcia Pruzan stated that she is heading up a committee in the building where she lives and has found out that the only way to get someone to think about an older adult item is to ask, “Do you know someone who...?” Steve responded that we have to try different things until we find something that works. For instance, there is very little diversity in retirement communities. To help with diversity issues, if the individuals in those diverse communities could come together, they might be able to get something accomplished.

Steve discussed the gap issue—the “caught between the cracks” group. There are a lot of benefits available to low-income individuals, and if you get them on a waiting list they might qualify. Wealthy people usually do not have money problems and they have a lot of choices. The individuals in the wealth “gap” (income too high for low-income benefits but not high enough to afford things like in-home unskilled care) have a bigger challenge. That group is where we should focus on having individuals do advance planning and consider the network that surrounds them—family, community, and church. The real solution for assisting the “gap” population is tapping into their network support.

On the topic of older adults’ use of technology, Steve stated that the issue of these adults not having or using the Internet is a huge problem, but the bigger problem is that those folks do not realize how valuable having Internet is. Perhaps if they understood how to use it they could better know its value as a tool.

Upon ending his discussion Steve asked the group, “What are some ideas on how we can best meet our goals?”

Kendell Matthews stated that in her community older adults make excuses for not wanting to use the Internet. Steve noted that it dawned on him that if someone is nervous about using something, there is always an excuse they can come up with not to use it. As providers, we have to be listening to why these individuals have objections and address those.

Steve noted that he knows there are a lot of providers who want to support older adults and they would probably be willing to work with them, maybe for a contribution. Chuck Kaufmann commented that everything is going up in price. There are some political solutions to issues facing older adults, and we should seek them. He noted that he would look for public/private solutions.

Steve stated that another approach for addressing older adult needs is to combine efforts and programs so that a group that is usually specific to one demographic group (such as children), can work together with other demographic groups, such as older adults. Also, we could start looking at one group and see what it needs and then combine it with another effort. Transportation is an example of where that approach might work.

Chuck noted that another problem is affordable housing. Steve said that his solution for affordable housing is home-sharing. It takes time to build affordable housing and, even if new

houses are built, the number that are built will be limited. Home-sharing could be a fast, inexpensive solution.

Wayne Berman asked about using radio and TV to get the word out about helping older adults. Steve responded that a thing about media outlets, they like “real life” stories. That can be a challenge. You need to present an individual’s challenges in the story and then ask how the challenges can be overcome.

Chuck asked how we can get over the reluctance of older adults participating in problem solving and to address their issues. Steven stated that he sees this all of the time; individuals do not want to acknowledge that they are older adults.

Steve closed by commenting that another Trojan Horse that he uses to get the attention of older adults is to bring up the topic of “solo agers.” In many of his meetings he sees individuals referring to themselves as solo agers. Solo aging is empowering. Individuals do not want to be a burden on their kids. They want to do everything on their own. When his organization presents a topic on solo aging it often attracts a larger older adult audience.

50+ in Montgomery County Update

Jean discussed the December show stating that a Christian minister will discuss Christmas and a rabbi will discuss Hanukkah, but they are having a problem getting someone to discuss Kwanza. In January, the show will focus on older adults and pets, and the February show will feature the Villages.

Jean reported that the 50+ workgroup is now preparing Public Service Announcements that are more County-specific; and not just free AARP ones. They are working on PSAs regarding free rides on Ride-on buses and on the Flex program. Also, Steve Gurney may have a PSA on his Sourcebook in January.

Rev suggested that the March program look at how diverse communities are doing and what kind of help they need at places like senior centers. The show can highlight what they are doing and what kind of help they need.

Marsha Weber asked about the Russian community – is anyone doing anything for them? Rev noted that the Korean community gets information out and the Chinese community has good liaisons.

Marsha Weber commented that individuals often believe that it is ok to wear glasses but not ok to wear hearing aids. Kendell stated that wearing hearing aids indicates that you are getting old.

Jean reminded everyone that the 50+ planning group meets the first Friday of each month.

Status of Committee Projects

Briefing Book: Beverly reported that she is still waiting on a few comments but otherwise it is complete. Barbara asked Beverly to send the Book to her once the comments are incorporated and then she will ask the CoA members to approve it.

Montgomery County website: David reported that the workgroup has an ally on the County staff who has agreed to help monitor and update the website. The staffer is reviewing an online form that David prepared that will allow the workgroup to make website changes. All change requests should go through David. Eddie asked whether there are any legal hoops the group should be aware of. David responded that the form he prepared should take care of that; it asks for an approval by the County. He noted that the staff contact is suggesting ways to communicate our changes to the County.

Marcia Pruzan requested that there be Age-Friendly partners involved in this effort to keep the website up-to-date, and that they be given information on how to make the website changes.

David stated that, at first, the group will take baby steps so as not to overload the staff contact. Shawn requested that Jennifer Long or she be copied on all communications with the contact. David commented that the first steps in the effort will be to correct incorrect website information. The group also wants to make it easy for users to go from one website to another as they seek information.

Update on library visits re: older adult information: Workgroup members provided the following information.

ASPEN HILL 4407 Aspen Hill Road Rockville, MD 20853

- Has an older adult display

CHEVY CHASE 8005 Connecticut Ave Chevy Chase, MD 20815

CONNIE MORELLA (BETHESDA) 7400 Arlington Road Bethesda, MD 20814

- Has flyers and a bulletin board

DAMASCUS 9701 Main Street Damascus, MD 20872

DAVIS 6400 Democracy Blvd Bethesda, MD 20817

- Only has a bulletin board but it has relevant information
- Very little information to hand out

GAITHERSBURG 18330 Montgomery Village Ave Gaithersburg, MD 20879

- Has bulletin board for older adult information but nothing on it
- Has 55+ volunteer information
- Staff very helpful
- Does not offer older adult programming but programming is being converted to online/virtual.

GERMANTOWN 19840 Century Blvd Germantown, MD 20874

KENSINGTON PARK 4201 Knowles Ave Kensington, MD 20895

LITTLE FALLS 5501 Massachusetts Ave Bethesda, MD 20816

LONG BRANCH 8800 Garland Ave Silver Spring, MD 20901

MAGGIE NIGHTINGALE (POOLESVILLE) 19633 Fisher Ave Poolesville, MD 20837

- CLOSED FOR REFRESH

MARILYN J. PRAISNER 14910 Old Columbia Pike Burtonsville, MD 20866

- Has an older adult display

NOYES LIBRARY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN 10237 Carroll Place Kensington, M

OLNEY 3500 Olney-Laytonsville Rd Olney, MD 20832

POTOMAC 10101 Glenolden Drive Potomac, MD 20854

QUINCE ORCHARD 15831 Quince Orchard Road Gaithersburg, MD 20878

- Nothing specific to older adults
- Has the *Beacon* and the Resource Guide
- Staff very helpful
- Does not offer older adult programming but programming is being converted to online/virtual.

ROCKVILLE MEMORIAL 21 Maryland Ave Rockville, MD 20850

- Katie reported that it does not have a section dedicated to older adults, but Shawn says it's there
- However, they get the largest amount of calls for large-typed books and audiobooks from older adults.
- Also, if the CoA wants to display something in the case at the entrance of the library, we are able to do that. We must contact Patrick Fromm at (240) 777-0277 for more information.
- Older adults are also interested in the events that the Rockville library has listed on its events page.

SILVER SPRING 900 Wayne Ave Silver Spring, MD 20910

- Does not have a section dedicated to older adults.
- However, they do have large-typed books and audiobooks. They get a lot of calls from older adults for both. They also encourage older adult patrons to get e-books and e-audio books.
- Katie spoke with both Camille and Lee. Camille was her initial point of contact. And she also talked with librarian Lee.

- Both recommended that the CoA meet with Mr. Uzoma Onyemaechi who is the manager if someone wants a follow up meeting.

TWINBROOK 202 Meadow Hall Drive Rockville, MD 20851

WHEATON 11701 Georgia Avenue Silver Spring, MD 20902

WHITE OAK 11701 New Hampshire Ave Silver Spring, MD 20904

- Has an older adult display
- They allow seniors to come in and use computers. Has an older adult book group. Has materials right inside front door. Do have some virtual programs like knitting and crafts.

Discussion:

Chuck noted that it has been a problem stocking older adult-related information in libraries for a long time – getting the space and stocking the shelves. Marsha Weber stated that someone needs to take the responsibility to make sure the information is up-to-date and stocked. Eddie commented that the CoA should not have to take that on. He asked whether staff in Aging and Disability Services have ways to do that. Shawn responded that staff get the information out to the libraries but depend on the libraries to stock it. The information is very easy to forget about. The Vital Living network volunteered to keep an eye on these things but it is no longer around. Shawn noted that it is best to have folks volunteering to adopt a library.

Jean stated that she does not have a good idea of what can be displayed in the libraries. Shawn responded that Lylie Fisher and the Caregiver Program have developed a lot of things that can be placed in the libraries. *Living and Thriving in Montgomery County* is good. Shawn stated that County staff have not gotten the alert to get out and stock the libraries.

Chuck stated that the CoA should identify the sources of good older adult information and have the library personnel be responsible for displaying it. Jean suggested that CoA members may want to identify at least one important document and then also adopt a library to make sure it has it.

David stated that it would be worthwhile to put together a package of older adult information and then distribute it to the libraries. Eddie noted that effort will require coordination. He asked, “Why not use SSL students?” Betty Ring commented that we also need to watch for things that are out-of-date. Barbara stated that it would be great to put together a package and ask CoA members to adopt a library to ensure the packages are in stock. Jean stated that we will have to discuss the package at the next Communications Committee meeting and what we should put in it. We will have to take baby steps.

Jean asked Shawn and Betty to please tell the Committee what materials are available. Barbara agreed and said we should get the new Commissioners engaged. Beverly commented that we are not just talking about public libraries; places such as retirement communities, nursing homes,

and assisted living also have libraries. Marsha Weber noted that the Villages need to be included and Eddie added senior centers.

Virginia asked whether there is a particular librarian who would know about older adult brochures and information. Marsha Weber stated that in Olney there is a librarian who is in charge of older adult programming. Rev asked whether we should have older adult information available at places of worship.

Jean closed the meeting by stating that we will tackle this topic again at next month's meeting. She also asked the members to let David know if they see something that needs updating on the County websites.

Adjourn