Welcome to Our Communities

St. Mary’s Court: A vibrant residence community located in Foggy Bottom. Home to individuals 62 years and older on low-medium private incomes.

Sibley Plaza: A diverse public housing building located near the NoVa-Galludet metro stop. Houses individuals solely based on income level - thus, the residents vary in age.

“The clearest message we get ... is this: Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period.”

—Robert Waldinger, Director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development

Nowadays, many of our time and effort goes into fostering the next generation - very little attention is paid to the generation that came before us. As retired, elderly individuals, they should be enjoying their time living in their home.  Ask before jumping in to help. The participants are senior adults, not children. Sometimes they may just want to talk and not participate in the activities and that is fine!

Senior Wellness: The Golden Age

by: Angela Bourassa, Sarah Cummings, An Harmanli, Minh-Tam Le, Ellen Massey, Besen Sanga, Ahalya Somaskandan, Nkechi Uzoukwu & Kirk Williamson

Senior Wellness Community activities shared a common thread of strengthening relationships through shared new experiences like Laughter Yoga, learning through play with health-themed Bingo, relationship-focused arts and crafts like card making, and hands-on health demonstrations that opened discussions that continued after the implementation.

What Changed

Change among our community sites, St. Mary’s Court and Sibley Plaza, happened on a micro level. Awareness and knowledge through bingo activities helped residents of St. Mary’s Court learn in an interesting way as well increased their recall of healthy facts through repeated rounds of bingo. Also, relationships were built there through recognizing and celebrating residents, such as Dottie’s birthday. At Sibley Plaza, changes seen were building relationships amongst the residents by improving their connections to each other through large group activities such as Laughter Yoga and our Easter Egg Hunt. New perceptions of processed sugar in foods like pizza and ice cream were identified visually to our seniors through our sugar models. The outcomes and impacts on our residents included: behaviors, awareness, attitude, knowledge and perception. Overall, it is important to acknowledge and celebrate victories, even if victories are miniscule.

Recommendations

I. Whether it’s a game night, dining at a restaurant, enjoying happy hour, or just hanging out, do activities that will strengthen the team’s relationships. It does not have to be every week. It could be every month or 2-3 times a semester. The more cohesive you are as a group the better your final project, plan and execute events at the sites.

II. Be willing to be flexible and accommodate each other, but don’t compromise to the point that it will hurt your own progress.

III. Bingo is a popular activity and great setting to get to know the residents. Try it in the beginning at both sites and bring prizes.

IV. Identify the key people at the sites, such as Ms. Clark at Sibley Plaza and Ms. Patricia or Ms. Dottie at St. Mary. These are individuals who know the residents and the place well. They can help the team facilitate resident participation, advertisement of future implementations and learn the culture and environment of their respective sites.

V. Most importantly: Be respectful to the residents and their space. Keep in mind you are visiting their home. Ask before jumping in to help. The participants are senior adults, not children. Sometimes they may just want to talk and not participate in the activities and that is fine!

What We Learned

I. What is the most important thing you learned from each other and from the people you served?

“Everyone has a story and you won’t understand their perspective unless you sit down and listen. I mean really listen. Store away your phone and to-do-list. Empathy starts with a willing mind and heart.” — Minh-Tam Le

“Successful teamwork starts first at relationship building from within. It is only then can we execute quality time, care, and service while leaving both a positive and memorable impact on others.” — Sarah D. Cummings

II. What does it mean to engage in inter-professional team-based service (i.e., address how teamwork is affected by differences in values, communication styles, motivations, perceived responsibilities, power dynamics, levels of commitment, environmental circumstances, and personal/professional cultures)?

“Commitment, communication and taking ownership of your actions are key concepts. We should also look at the big picture. The amount of actual time we spent is trivial, but the impact is deeper then we can see.” — Besen Sanga

“It’s easy to forget to put energy into building community within the team, instead focusing on community building with our participants. Being intentional about building our own community only enhances our ability to serve well.” — Angela Bourassa

III. How will you use this knowledge/these skills in your future careers?

“I SCOPEs has reminded me of the importance of true human connection in medicine and that through no medicine at all, real change can be made.” — Ellen Massey

Kudos

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