

Senior Wellness: The Golden Age

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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 NoMa-Galludet metro stop. Houses individuals solely based on income level - thus, the residents vary in age.

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.



St. Mary's Court residents pose for group picture around Valentine's Day and bingo cards.



Recommendations

1. 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 relationship. It does not have to be every week. It could be every month or 1-2 times a semester. The more cohesive you are as a group the better you'll organize, plan and execute events at the sites.
2. Be willing to be flexible and accommodate each other, but don't compromise to the point that it will hurt your own progress.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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!

"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 "The Golden Age" - but instead, many of them live in stress:

- 52% of seniors with low-medium income are not confident in their ability to afford long-term care services.
- Over 25% have difficulty paying their monthly expenses.

We found that **engaging seniors is the best way to nurture their health and well-being.**

The activities we chose to do with them were not only informative, but it also ensured the residents would be **involved** and **engaged** with one another and **foster community-building.**

Laughter Yoga

We led residents through laughing yoga exercises to promote stress relief and foster positive feelings.

Bingo

Our biggest attractor at both sites was bingo with our own healthy twist. We had weaved in facts about the body systems, nutrition, behaviors and American culture.

Arts & Crafts

Keeping the month health theme in mind, we provided a craft at every implementation to spark creativity and social connections.

Hand Massage

Our residents at St. Mary loved the personal hand massages by our ISCOPEs member coupled with a diagram of its benefits.

Education

We emphasized the importance of health management through sugar models and health-focused pamphlets. Two members measured blood pressure at both sites and counseled residents as needed.

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 heart 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.

What We Learned

1. **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 O. Cummings

1. **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 than 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

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

"ISCOPEs 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

We want to extend a thank you to:

- Susan Walker, St. Mary's Court Community Partner
- Liz Anne Ganiban, Sibley Plaza Community Partner
- Aubrey Hubbard, Team Advocate
- Adnan Ahmed Uddin, Angie Hinzey, Semira Kassahun, Donna Javellana, ISCOPEs Leadership Team
- Sarah Meadows, Faculty Coach
- The Residents of Sibley Plaza and St. Mary's Court

ISCOPEs at Sibley Plaza and St. Mary's celebrate:

