

Community Forum

Addressing the Needs of African American Aging Adults

Highlight Summary - January 17, 2018

Thank you to all who attended the January 17th forum at the Urban League of Greater Madison to discuss issues and concerns impacting African American aging adults. This forum included African Americans **only** as requested by attendees who participated in the 1st forum on November 14, 2017 at Mt. Zion Baptist Church. This request was made and granted in order to foster fruitful and candid conversation among participants and allowed them the opportunity to express themselves freely without judgement.

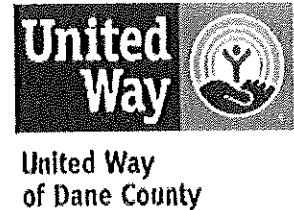
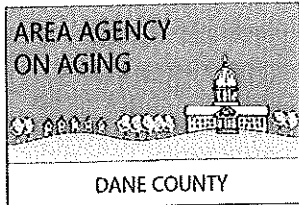
Pam Bracey, Cultural Diversity Program Specialist for the North/Eastside Senior Coalition (NESCO), began the forum by welcoming attendees and having each person introduce him/herself. Pam then followed up with the purpose of the forum and brief overview of the format referencing the agenda.

Toya Johnson, Director of Community Impact for Older Adults and People with Disabilities at United Way, then proceeded to recap the previous forum providing copies to the attendees and highlighting some of the main issues and concerns that were brought up, barriers identified, and some of the suggested solutions.

After the recap portion of the meeting, attendees were given the opportunity to expand and add "Unspoken Truths" to the list of issues and concerns to ensure that we have the full picture of the obstacles and stresses that impact our African American older adults. These truths may or may not have been touched on in the November forum due to some attendees not feeling comfortable to speak freely. For those who didn't attend the last meeting, this was their chance to voice their concerns based on their own experiences

"Unspoken Truths"

- Interaction with Police
- Need time to regroup with "ourselves" – allowing spaces or offering more meetings such as this one
- "Senior" name mindset (changing the term to reference "older adults" not "seniors")
- Many older adults tend to self-medicate (substance abuse)
- Grandparents raising grandchildren
- In need of list of Community Based Programs such as Today Not Tomorrow
- Not being apart of an evidence based program- our experiences are not always included
- Employment Opportunities for older adults –Not just opportunities that involve cultural diversity
- Organized Advocacy (How we as African Americans tell our story)
- Volunteering challenges due to personal obligations, not because we're not interested in doing it
- More Activities or Socialization geared toward African Americans (Events, trips, movies)
- Offering of better foods-watch our plates- medication usage is tied to what we put in our bodies
- Isolation of older adults (ex. Churches- Elders to take their place in leading younger folk and sharing their ideas and experiences)
- Safety Issues in housing complex (Horizon)
- Housing – difficult to find decent affordable housing for older adults because many apt. are going market rate
- Homeless Veterans need to be addressed



Group Discussion to prioritize the most immediate needs of African American older adults rendered the following:

Concerns:

1. Awareness & Access to Community Resources
2. Programming that caters to the African American Culture
3. Health Education

Solutions:

1. Community Resource List / Navigator
2. Activities such as Spades, Stepping, Ethnic meals at the community/senior centers
3. Health Advocate to accompany aging adults to medical appointments; Offer classes that will help African Americans advocate for themselves and understand medical reports given to them by their doctors

Below details some initial steps that were discussed to begin addressing these needs.

Action Steps:

Concise Resource List

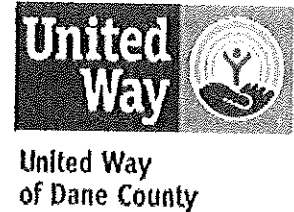
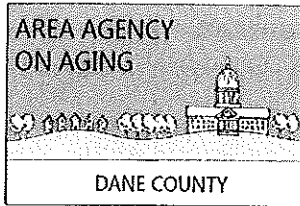
Having a list of Community Resources available to older adults was “hands down” a high priority for all of those present. While many lists of resources exist through the Aging and Disabilities Resource Center (ADRC), Area Agency on Aging (AAA) of Dane County, United Way 211, etc., a comprehensive list of resources that are commonly used among aging adults is not readily available in a one pager.

United Way will take lead working with all resource groups and organizations to come up with that comprehensive list. For the older adults in the African American community, highlighting programs like Today Not Tomorrow (TNT), a family resource center located on the East Side of Madison at 8 Straubel Court, not only provides resources to young parents and their children, but they also provide resources to grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren. How to best distribute this resource will be determined at future meetings

Culturally Diverse Activities & Meals

It is imperative that if we are serious about ensuring that we have participation from African American (AA) older adults that we include activities where they feel welcomed to participate and caters to their cultural needs of choice such as Spades, Pitty Pat, etc. as opposed to Euchre. Seek African American older adults that are willing to get involved and offer their time and talent to shape programming for older adults (ex. Pam Bracey’s group of older adults). The offering of food choices that cater to the delicacies of African American culture would be a welcomed change. If it was offered at least once per month, that would attract them to attend the meal sites. Integrating the exercise programs currently offered to older adults with class offering such as Chicago-Style Stepping, which is an urban dance that originated in Chicago and continues to evolve while defining its unique style and culture within the context of mainstream Swing.

These classes are being coordinated through Safe Communities. It would be ideal to bring these classes to the senior centers and senior housing.



Health Education & Social Isolation

The sharing of information among participants was dynamic. Many attendees were enlightened to learn of programs that they had no knowledge of; programs such as the Allied Welcomer Group. A welcomer is someone who serves like a first responder. They help make residents feel welcomed, secure and connected to resources needed. They attend medical appointments with residents and are looked at as that trusted advisor for that resident. This volunteer group can be replicated in various communities. Many of them are trained as community health workers. Is there an option available that would allow a position or a certain number of hours dedicated to having a person serve in this role specifically to accompany African American older adults to their medical appointments and help them to understand their medical reports? Are there currently classes being offered that help older adults advocate for themselves at a time where they can attend? It is perceived that before now, various systems have not made the effort to focus on African American programming, but instead has tried to fit African American older adults into the cookie cutter existing programs, which many not even touch on the need that they have at a time when it is literally impossible, due to many of them caring for their grandchildren.

Some Key Takeaways from this meeting:

- Need to **both** be aware of and understand how to access community resources
- Need to feel welcomed and comfortable in community social settings. Cultural sensitivity and familiar food and activities is needed to encourage African American participation
- Need for healthcare support in accessing, understanding, self- advocacy and compliance to improve individual health management
- Need for African Americans to have periodic dialogue amongst one another without the presence of other ethnic groups
- Intergenerational Education – vast wisdom of elders shared with younger generations to help them learn and prosper

Next Steps

- 1) A follow-up meeting will be held in Mid-March and attendees have asked that this meeting be hosted in the Allied Drive Community.
- 2) Agencies/Organizations that serve as resources to older adults are invited. There is a special interest in ensuring that agencies specific to housing, medical/healthcare and disability are present as well. Toya Johnson will work with AAA of Dane County and NESCO to identify these resources. MGE would like to have someone present to talk about their programs specifically for older adults. Other requests were for Project Home, Habitat for Humanity, Urban League, Safe at Home Program, and City of Madison (Homeowners).

