

Senior Centers on the Move!

Florida's Senior Centers Offer Everything Under the Sun!



Best Practices in Florida's Senior Centers

Computer Training Program

Donna DeFronzo

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Northeast Focal Point Senior Center provides one-on-one computer lessons for seniors. The Senior Computer Training Program is coordinated by the center's recreation therapist in conjunction with a student volunteer. The instructional training is provided by six volunteers of various ages. Donations of computer equipment and software have been made by local individuals, the City of Deerfield Beach, Florida Power & Light, Bank Atlantic, and Comp USA. The cost of \$29.99 per month for Internet connection is sponsored by the Kiwanis Club. The annual budget is \$359.88.

Generating Revenue Through a Private Foundation

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The City of Tallahassee Senior Center and Tallahassee Senior Citizens Foundation work together to provide enhanced, quality services and programs for active seniors, baby boomers, and caregivers. This best practice for generating revenue through a private foundation begins with existing city staff and an existing facility. In addition to fundraising through general donations and event sponsors, the foundation also requests a suggested donation for each group or organization using the center based on the space they occupy and the amount of time occupied.

Expanding Services Through Community Collaboration

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The Sunshine Center Multi-Service Senior Center in St. Petersburg is an excellent example of how a senior center can become the focal point for community collaboration and avoid having to be the driver of all the senior services, programming and activities for their constituency. The Sunshine Center has grown from having an emphasis primarily on social activities, to focusing on community-based services, to broadening its narrow focus on older adults by including the entire community and expanding their range of services through collaboration.

The Neighborly Pharmacy at the Sunshine Center

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The Neighborly Pharmacy opened in January 2004 at the Sunshine Center Multi-Service Senior Center in St. Petersburg. The pharmacy is operated by the nonprofit organization Neighborly Care Network and offers prescription drugs at cost. The Neighborly Pharmacy offers Pinellas County residents an alternative to the national drug chains. While the pharmacy is open to all ages, its primary goal is to provide the age-60-and-older population with the best possible prices for prescription medications. Customers also receive free consultation and free delivery in Pinellas County. Neighborly also offers other services on a fee-for-service basis to seniors and others in need. For more information about Neighborly Care Network, call (727) 573-9444.

Connecting Participants Hard of Hearing with Specialized Telephones

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The Florida Association of Senior Centers (FASC) and Florida Telecommunications Relay, Inc. (FTRI) have partnered to connect more seniors with FTRI communications equipment. FTRI, a statewide not-for-profit organization, distributes specialized telephone equipment and ring-signaling devices to Floridians who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf/blind and speech impaired – at no charge, for as long as they need it. Through FASC’s partnership with FTRI, special workshops and presentations can be scheduled in senior centers to educate seniors about available equipment. FTRI has the equipment to keep seniors connected, and senior centers have participants who need the phones and the space to distribute the equipment.

Beyond Meat & Potatoes: A Strategy for Expanding Dining Choices

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For more than 30 years, St. Johns County Council on Aging has had a legendary food service program to support the Older Americans Act (OAA) contract. The offerings (which must meet the federal requirement of a minimum of one-third of the daily recommended dietary allowance) are truly popular, yet current funding provides meals for only 75 seniors each day, while daily attendance is more than 140. This situation – along with the changing needs of seniors, especially younger seniors – inspired the establishment of “The Coastal Café.” It occupies a corner of the center with a full deli of “real food,” i.e., whole grains, olive oil – no processed products. Freshly prepared gourmet sandwiches, salads and soups are offered at a value price to the entire community, and delivery service is available. OAA participants typically leave soon after lunch, and many other seniors then come to the center for life-long learning activities. The Coastal Café, which is open 11 a.m. until 2 p.m., accommodates the needs of the second group of participants.

Filling the Gaps with Senior Resource Cards

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Numerous inquiries from seniors, caregivers and professionals regarding senior issues and services in the community inspired the Tallahassee Senior Services Resource Assistance Program. While the extremes of the spectrum – basic information and referral on one end, and complete case management on the other – are adequately served by the area agency on aging and local service provider, the center found a need to address inquiries that fell in the middle of the spectrum. “Senior Resource Cards” were produced, listing various services available in the community, including transportation, housing, safety, caregiver support, education, social services and pets. The Senior Resource Cards provide resources and/or significant information only on a requested topic, helping the inquirer avoid “information overload.” Cards are easily re-printed in limited quantities, making it possible to keep the information current.

Healthy Living Fairs Offer Depression Screenings

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A grant from the Department of Elder Affairs provided for depression screenings, yet the need existed to develop a strategy to entice seniors to participate in them. To meet this need, two “Healthy Living Fairs” were held, and through partnerships with local businesses and health care providers, health screenings such as bone density, blood pressures and oxygen level testing were also provided. Flu shots as well as information from local businesses were also available. The open-house type of event brought in several new clients, and several attendees participated in the depression screening.

Training Future CNAs Through Senior Center Activities

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A partnership was formed with the local high school's Health Occupational Services of America program to include training at the senior center for future certified nursing assistants (CNA). The high-school seniors, wearing a uniform and security name tag, spend a class period at the Indian River Council on Aging, shadowing staff members in the daily program to acclimate them to senior activities. The students experience both senior center activities and adult day services, including snack service, assisting clients to the restrooms, conversation, board games and ballroom dancing. The training program also requires students to spend time at a nursing home, the hospital, the emergency room and surgery. The students' time at the senior center provides them interaction with healthy, active seniors.

Partnering to Develop a Nutritional Guide and Cookbook

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Through collaboration with the Diabetes Center at a local hospital, the SNAPS (Senior Nutrition and Prevention Support) program developed a nutritional guide and cookbook. The book is distinguished from other cookbooks by virtue of its primary goal as an educational tool. Not only does it archive favorite and often historical family recipes, but the recipes have undergone comprehensive nutritional analysis. There are also sections that address the many nutritional issues relevant to seniors such as eating alone, diabetes, obesity, gastrointestinal changes and heart disease. The book also includes charts on calculating body mass index, vitamin function, low-fat/low-sodium substitutions, and tips for safe food handling, shopping and eating out.

Providing Responsible Gaming Activities for Senior Centers – A How-to Kit

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Problem gambling among elders is a growing concern. At the same time, gambling as a recreational and social activity continues to be popular among older adults. Organizations providing recreational and social opportunities such as gambling continue to struggle with the risks of making such activities available. This program is designed to assist senior centers and other agencies to provide gambling opportunities in the most responsible way by providing information about the possible risks and how to minimize them and how to seek help for a problem. An awareness kit provides information on how to offer gaming opportunities in the senior center setting, or through outside activities, in a responsible way. The program provides educational information on problem gambling, signs of a problem, how to gamble responsibly and includes videos, brochures, educational materials and giveaways with information for seeking help with a gambling problem.

“If the Facility Doesn’t Happen, Nothing Happens”: Developing a Philosophy of Senior Center Management

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The operational philosophy of the management and staff of the nationally accredited Tallahassee Senior Center is, “If the facility doesn’t happen, nothing happens.” In other words, programming and facility management must work together. This philosophy includes effective facility maintenance, planning for renovations and maximizing the use of space to accommodate as many activities as possible. Facility management also includes making the facility “user friendly” in terms of health and safety on a limited budget. This philosophy recognizes that the primary concern is customer satisfaction and strives to answer, “How do you make your center look like a country club with a limited budget?”

Senior Club TV Show

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Through a partnership with a local television station, Citrus County Senior Club TV show became a weekly, one-hour live television show that includes educational resources, game components, sponsorships and promotional activities. The Senior Club TV show is filled with educational information aimed at Citrus County's growing senior population. Local professionals in the health and human service fields, financial establishments, and government officials are guests. The only cost associated with this best practice is county staff time.

Valuing Volunteers in Senior Programs

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A strong, well-managed volunteer program is essential to the success and growth of a senior center. At the Tallahassee Senior Center, more than 250 volunteers of all ages (18-80+) bring to the center a variety of skills, interests and motivations for volunteering. The main ingredients of volunteer management include recruitment, orientation, retention, training, recognition and tracking. Recruitment strategies include organizational publications and word-of-mouth advertising. Volunteers become "unofficial" public relations agents of the organization, thus requiring the need for a good orientation process and excellent training. Success in retaining volunteers is a result of keeping them informed and feeling that they are contributing to the mission of the organization. Recognition of volunteer contributions is also important to express appreciation, and tracking the monetary value volunteers invest is useful in grant applications and in demonstrating the service provided beyond what paid staff can accomplish.

Taking Community Resources to Underserved Areas

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Community resources can be made available to underserved areas through Senior Days – mini senior centers captured in a monthly two-hour event. Senior center-type services can be facilitated and coordinated at community centers, churches, schools, or any other facility with adequate space. Senior Days provide access to community resources for people who may have difficulty traveling into the city or out of their neighborhood for services or information. Senior Days feature a brief presentation, exhibitors, health screenings and lunch or refreshments.

The above best practices have been presented at the Florida Department of Elder Affairs Best Practices ExCHANGE conferences.

Contact the Florida Association of Senior Centers president, Yolanda Rodriguez, at (954) 973-0300 or yrodriguez@margatefl.com.

Contact the Florida Department of Elder Affairs at (850) 414-2000 or information@elderaffairs.org.