



Successful Aging for All

By Teresa Amaral Beshwate, MPH

The mission of Masterpiece Living is no small task: to change the experience and perception of aging. Our vision is a society in which aging means growth, engagement, vitality and purpose. We believe that all people should be able to age successfully, no matter where they live. In late 2011, Masterpiece Living was fortunate to have a MacArthur Foundation funded opportunity to work in Affordable Housing thanks to the University of Michigan and ABHOW's Beacon Communities. This marked the first ever application of Masterpiece Living concepts and resources in an Affordable Housing environment.

Drs. Robert Kahn and Toni Antonucci of the University of Michigan (and members of the Masterpiece Living advisory board) were the co-principal investigators of the case/control study, which took place at Beacon's Casa de la Vista and Fern Lodge communities in Redlands, CA, with the control group/community being Mt. Rubidoux Manor in Riverside, CA. The two-year project involved baseline Lifestyle and Mobility Reviews followed by a lifestyle coaching session and a multi-faceted approach to providing successful aging opportunities throughout the communities, and ended with follow up Lifestyle and Mobility Reviews at Casa de la Vista and Fern Lodge. Baseline and follow up Lifestyle and Mobility Reviews without an intervention were conducted at Mt. Rubidoux Manor. The project had generous support from NuStep (<http://www.beaconcommunities.org/stories/videos/2015/01/06/casa-de-la-vista.1298061>), Keiser Corporation and Kay Van Norman's Brilliant Aging.

Residents' self-identified goals included spiritual growth, maintaining independence, volunteerism and increased social connection, to name a few.

Outcomes

At Casa de la Vista and Fern Lodge (Casa/Fern), modest improvements in each area of successful aging – social, spiritual, intellectual and physical – were observed. There was a significant increase in spiritual activity participation from baseline to follow up, along with significantly improved satisfaction with availability of transportation, meals, the availability of staff, help received from staff, and the amount of information provided to residents.

Participation in successful aging offerings was grouped into three categories: 1) Mt. Rubidoux (no intervention); 2) low participators; and 3) high participators at Casa/Fern. "There were many interesting findings that showcase the association between participation and improvements in health and well-being," explained Dr. Toni Antonucci. Here is a summary of these findings:



Residents of Casa/Fern reported a significant increase in energy from baseline to follow-up compared to residents of Mt. Rubidoux.

Residents of Casa/Fern who were high participators (i.e., participated in 10 or more successful aging offerings over the course of the project) reported a significant increase in self-rated health and energy and a significant decrease in ER visits as compared to their peers who were low participators (i.e., participated in less than 10 offerings) and compared to residents of Mt. Rubidoux.

High Casa/Fern participators also reported a significant decrease in functional limitations compared to low participators. Also, high Casa/Fern participators reported a significant decrease in the number of falls experienced as compared to Mt. Rubidoux residents.

Casa/Fern residents who were high participators in physical health offerings (i.e., participated in 5 or more physical health activities) reported a significant increase in self-rated health and a significant decrease in ER visits compared to low participators and compared to residents of Mt. Rubidoux. Also, high Casa/Fern physical participators reported a significant increase in energy and a significant decrease in depressive symptoms from baseline to follow-up compared to Mt. Rubidoux residents.

Casa/Fern residents who used the fitness center at least one time over the course of the project reported an increase in energy as compared to those who did not use the fitness center at all, and compared to Mt. Rubidoux residents.

Casa/Fern residents who participated in intellectual and spiritual offerings at all during the project reported a significant increase in self-rated health when compared to non-participators and Mt. Rubidoux residents. Intellectual participators at Casa/Fern also reported an increase in life satisfaction as compared to Mt. Rubidoux residents.

High participators in general and in physical activities and the fitness center specifically, had a significant increase in some aspects of mobility as compared to Mt. Rubidoux residents (e.g., 30-second chair stand, back scratch and leg balance improved). However, the timed walk, arm curl, and chair sit and reach got worse for participants.

National data usually point to declines across many health dimensions at this age. Therefore the findings showing stability in many areas and improvement in a few were impressive.

“These outcomes are impressive and show us emphatically that with creativity and commitment, we can indeed create cultures of growth and successful aging in communities with limited in-house resources. We are thrilled with these results and emboldened to expand



this work,” stated Masterpiece Living president and author of Live Long, Die Short, Dr. Roger Landry.

“Overall, the project showed that many things stayed nearly the same at the communities we worked with, which indicates success; some things improved, which is ground breaking; and some things declined, which indicates more work needs to be done,” Dr. Toni Antonucci summarizes. “Building on and leveraging findings from the current project, we plan to conduct and explore future implementation research. We believe we have identified several best practices for facilitating successful aging in the context of affordable senior housing communities that, while perhaps are in need of further refinement, can be immediately implemented. These future activities will continue to build upon the collaborative working relationships developed between the partners involved in this project.”

Recommendations and Next steps

The lessons learned from this project point to a few key areas of importance.

First, it highlighted the importance of leaders and team members creating , maintaining and leveraging relationships in the greater community. Local businesses, universities and other organizations can fill many needs from fundraising to providing services to residents. This is a strength of Eaton Senior Communities

(http://www.leadingage.org/Building_a_Culture_of_Wellness_in_Affordable_Housing_V4N5.aspx?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=Building+a+Culture+of+Wellness+in+Affordable+Housing&utm_campaign=LTW+09%2f10%2f2014), in Lakewood, CO and can be reproduced anywhere.

Second, Beacon leadership identified four areas that indicate the highest level of readiness to embrace a culture of successful aging: 1) The community administrator is a seasoned leader with a long-term commitment to the organization; 2) The Service Coordinator fully endorses successful aging and any new team members who have been added to lead the successful aging efforts; 3) The community’s Advisory board members are well connected in the greater community and actively engaged with the Affordable Housing Community; and 4) The resident council is long-standing and functional, and made up of members who are willing to actively embrace and endorse successful aging efforts.

Third, it is critical that leadership and team members maintain an awareness of grant opportunities such as those provided by the Hartford Foundation, the Harry and Jeanette



Weinberg Foundation, and Leading Age Innovations Fund, along with local community grant funding sources such as local banks, Indian gaming organizations, and philanthropic businesses such as Chili's and Panera.

Finally, resources in the area of Affordable Housing and Wellness are becoming more widely available. One example is Leading Age's *Housing and Healthcare: Partners in Healthy Aging - A Guide to Collaboration* (<http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/2ae492e9#/2ae492e9/1>).

Summary

At Masterpiece Living, we consider it a moral imperative to be the voice of successful aging research and to bridge the gap between what research proves possible and the individual, organizational and societal choices we make each day. Thanks to our partners at the University of Michigan, these and additional findings will be presented to public policy makers in Washington. But these findings are merely a beginning step in understanding how successful aging can truly be accessible to all people no matter where they live. At Masterpiece Living, it is our hope to continually grow our experience in Affordable Housing and continue to share our learnings so that collectively we can indeed improve the experience of aging for all people.