

To Our Clients and Friends...

October 2008 marks the beginning of our seventh year providing home care services for area seniors and others with disabilities. It seems like only yesterday that Ready Hands was just a dream. Yet each year since our inception has seen substantial growth, to the point where we now provide more hours of care in ten days that we did in our entire first year. We are deeply thankful for this success to the many clients, families and senior-serving profession-

als who have placed their trust in us.

In this issue we feature the topic of socialization in the elderly. Below we report the benefits on mortality and mental function. On page two, we provide information on the many local government-operated senior centers in our area, where older adults can make new friends, enjoy a variety of group activities and programs and just have fun!

Granger Benson, M.D.

Sue Benson, R.N.

Social Activities Offer Major Benefits for Seniors

Physical activity and fitness have long been known to improve health and longevity, even if initiated late in life. Until recent years, however, less attention has been paid to the beneficial impact of social activities.

In a landmark article published in the British Medical Journal in 1999, researchers reported the results of a study of 2761 men and women over age 65 monitored annually for 13 years. They were examining the association between social, productive and physical activity and overall survival. They found that social and productive activities that involve little or no enhancement of fitness lower the risk of all cause mortality as much as fitness activities do. The "social and productive" activities studied included such things as attending church, outings, card and board games, participating in social groups, cooking, preparing meals, shopping and volunteering. Other studies have similarly shown protective effects of social relationships on mortality in the elderly population.

Besides the survival benefit, it appears that an active social life also lowers the risk of dementia and delays memory loss. For example, a 12-year investigation by the same researchers of 2812 seniors found that the odds of mental decline were twice as great among subjects with no social ties as in those with active social contacts. Numerous other studies have reported similar results.

More recently, researchers have reported a link between socialization and memory decline, which is a major risk factor for the



development of dementia. Their findings are published in the July 2008 issue of the American Journal of Public Health. They collected data on almost 17,000 older Americans, assessing social integration by marital status, volunteer activities and frequency of contact with children and neighbors. The study participants who were the most socially integrated experienced memory decline at less than half the rate of those who were the least socially integrated.

The investigators concluded that being socially active may increase feelings of self-worth and emotional validation that could end up helping maintain memory. Social interaction may also present older minds with new challenges, keeping the brain more agile.

More research needs to be done, especially to clarify the specific types of social integration most important for preserving mental function and prolonging life. But the emerging message is already clear that an active social life is extremely important for the health and well-being of seniors.

Fairfax County Senior Centers Offer Diverse Programs for Older Adults

Throughout the Washington area various communities offer a rich variety of senior services at nominal or no cost. A prominent example is the availability of senior centers where older adults can engage in a broad range of group activities. This article focuses on Fairfax County, but residents of other jurisdictions in our area have similar opportunities available to them (see box below).

Fairfax County Community and Recreation Services (CRS) provides residents age 55 and older with numerous programs and activities through the Senior Services division. Senior Services operates 13 senior centers throughout the county. Activities include classes in fitness, computers, art, drama, music, dance and many other interest areas. The centers also present special events with guest speakers or entertainers. Discussion groups, workshops and health and educational programs are also offered.

Each center regularly schedules outings such as trips and tours to local places of interest as well as weekly shopping trips. County-wide events are held at various times during the year, such as the annual senior recognition ceremony and the holiday luncheon.

For participants requiring help with transportation, the Fastran bus service is available for a nominal fee of

\$1.00. In addition, a nutritionally balanced noon meal is served at each center with a suggested donation of \$2.00-\$6.00 based on age and income. Admission to all of the county's senior centers and participation in most of their programs is otherwise free.

One of the county's premier centers is the Hollin Hall facility 1500 Shenandoah Road—the first “clubhouse model” within Community and Recreation Services. The center is run by several paid staff members under the direction of Director Julie Ellis, assisted by 120 dedicated volunteers. The center's 33-page summer catalogue displays a veritable smorgasbord of enticing leisure and educational pursuits. Exercise enthusiasts can choose everything from jazzercise to strength training to line dance to Tai Chi. For those with music and arts interests, offerings include such things as harmonica classes, piano club, ceramics or opera appreciation. And the list goes on and on.

Fairfax County older residents are truly fortunate to have so many readily available seniors centers designed to meet the physical, intellectual, social and recreational needs of seniors.

For more information, call (703) 324-4FUN or check the CRS website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/rec.

Contact Numbers for Seniors Centers in Other Northern Virginia Communities

Falls Church City (703) 248-5020

Offers social and recreational services as well as hot lunches at its Senior Center, 223 Little Falls St.

Fairfax City (703) 359-2487

The City of Fairfax Senior Center is located at 4401 Sideburn Road.

Alexandria City (703) 838-4831

Offers senior programs at several senior and community centers in Alexandria.

Arlington County (703) 228-4744

Operates six senior centers along with four additional centers that offer senior programs.

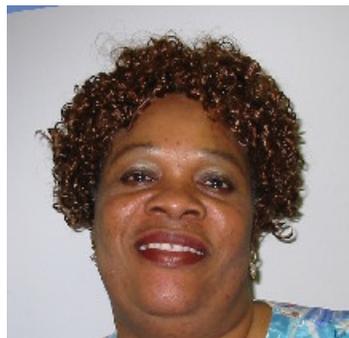
Prince William County (703) 792-4990

The Prince William County Senior Day Program is located in Woodbridge at 15941 Donald Curtis Drive.

Loudoun County (703) 777-0343

Four centers located throughout the county.

Joanna Oppong Receives Quarterly Recognition Award



It is often difficult for us to fairly single out one employee for recognition, when so many of our Ready Hands aides do such an excellent job. Sometimes an aide stands out because of unusual praise by clients or some particularly noteworthy incident. In Joanna's case, what stands out is a consistent record of dedication and commitment.

Joanna joined Ready Hands in February, 2006. Since then her steady, reliable and competent performance have been of great value both to her principle client and to our organization. Joanna has shown a consistently cheerful, uncomplaining attitude over the long haul. We are grateful for the opportunity of employing her. Thank you, Joanna, for doing such a great job for us!

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