

THE COMING OF AGE PROJECT CELEBRATES THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF OLDER PERSONS

by Josephine Stewart
Coming of Age Project Director



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The Coming of Age Project, organized by a group of workers in the aging field, takes its name from the words of the United Nation's declaration on the dignity of older persons. Throughout 1999, the Coming of Age Project has been using the occasion of the International Year to provide information to the general public on the value, contributions and needs of older adults in our communities. Its most important function has been to be the standard bearer and the town crier.

In consultation with a public relations firm, a media strategy, and www.comingofageproject.org, the project's dedicated WEB page was developed. Upcoming events and celebrations demonstrating the lives, concerns and contributions of seniors were posted weekly on the web events page.

With a view to the International Year's theme, "Toward a society for all ages,"

project strategy has been to pay particular attention to intergenerational events and programs by employing, what came to be one of the year's most important messages, the positive portrayal of older persons. Each intergenerational event has attempted to show the interdependence of the generations and thus engender mutual respect and care.

Society needs and indeed gets contributions made by older people and cannot afford to shelve, ignore or diminish those contributions. Since life expectancy is at least 30 years longer than it was at the turn of the century, the additional years can be lived in a healthy fashion, in an atmosphere reflecting the truth about seniors' lives and not the erroneous myths held by so many.

Public policy often reflects society's attitudes and the Coming of Age Project has made every effort to promote positive attitudes to public policy makers and the public at large. Perhaps a lasting effect of this year's work could be a shift in public attitude in the hope that the public policies that inevitably will follow, will contribute to a healthier environment for everyone. All media contacts had this upbeat, informative quality.

All the parties, award ceremonies, conferences, interviews, newspaper articles, radio and cable interviews that the Coming of Age Project stimulated has been a part of ushering in a new age for older adults.

Coming of Age was sponsored by the Retirement Research Foundation, Chicago Community Trust, Scholl, and WPWR. Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly, which serves a large in-home population, provided free office space and other office amenities.

GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

"The Illinois Response"

The Illinois Task Force on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in partnership continues to serve as an advocate for relative caregivers. Its mission is to identify issues and needs of kinship caregivers in order to impact services and programs at state and local levels. The Task Force is composed of 60 members who represent state agencies, private social service agencies, associations, universities and grandparents. The Task Force has a very active speaker's bureau and specialized committees which have developed numerous resources for distribution. Examples include a statewide resource guide for relative caregivers: "Starting Points", informational "TIP" sheets which clarify issues such as school enrollment and financial assistance programs; and the development of a statewide legal resource guide.

The membership has recently expanded to include groups representing housing and respite organizations, court advocates and state supported financial assistance programs. Future goals of the Task Force include continuing to work closely with state agencies to clarify enrollment and eligibility requirements for financial assistance programs and school enrollment, as well as research on housing and respite issues.

For information call the Senior HelpLine (1-800-252-8966 - Voice and TTY) or call Barbara Schwartz, IL Department on Aging, 217/524-5327.

What is Happening In Illinois?

Illinois Association for Institution Research's Awards Program

Illinois Association for Institution Research's (IAIR) presented awards for the first time this year. The Association is a group of 200 research and planning professionals from 2 year and 4 year public and private colleges and universities in the state. The awards process begins with a nomination from one or more members specifying the reasons that their colleague should be considered for a particular award. The Association's Steering Committee reviews nominations based on the criteria specified in the IAIR constitution. Awards are made at the discretion of a majority of the Association's Steering Committee and not necessarily on an annual or regular basis.

Special Recognition Award

Virginia McMillan, Illinois Community College Board, received the Special Recognition Award for her efforts to strengthen research and planning in Illinois higher education. The inscription on Virginia's plaque reads. . . Your colleagues recognize your outstanding contributions to the goals and aims of research and planning in higher education. You have played an active role in encouraging chief executive officers and other decision makers to embrace institutional effectiveness initiatives.

Leadership Award

Zelema Harris, President of Parkland College, received the Leadership Award for her work to advance higher education research, planning, and information-based management in Illinois. The inscription on Zelema's plaque reads. . . Your leadership and support of sound research and plan-

ning to promote institutional effectiveness make you an outstanding model for others in the profession to emulate. Your professional efforts have had a positive impact at the state and national levels.

Service Recognition Award

Dr. Nicholas Noe, Northern Illinois University, received the 1999 Service Recognition Award with the commendation. . . Your colleagues recognize the strategic leadership and exemplary service you have provided to the Association over the years. Your professional skills and willingness to serve have strengthened the Association and elevated its agenda.

Dr. Gordon White from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale was IAIR President during 1998-99 and Dr. Harlan Schweer from the College of DuPage has been selected as the 1999-2000 President.

As president of the Presidents Council, one may have some ideas regarding goals and initiatives for the Council, but much of the Council's activities are driven through collaboration with the Illinois Community College Board and the ICCTA as various issues arise," noted Huffman. "This year, though, I have encouraged the consideration of three questions to guide the Council's deliberations and actions: Will it benefit current or potential Illinois community college students? Will it contribute to workforce development? Does it demonstrate accountability?"

At the local level, Huffman feels that a community college and the district it serves have a symbiotic relationship, with the college drawing energy and purpose from the resources of the community and using its programs and services to develop a better community. He believes that excellence in customer service, educational offerings, and support services are vital to success as an institution. "Ultimately, no matter what the issue, a local college's interests will best be served through the enthusiastic delivery of programs and services which satisfy the clients' needs."

Council of Presidents Elects New President



Larry Huffman

Larry Huffman, president of Kankakee Community College for the past 12 years, is serving as the 1999-2000 president of the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents. Dr. Huffman previously served as secretary/treasurer and vice president of the Council before moving up to his current position. He has also chaired the student services and the curriculum committees of the Council. He is the first head of the Presidents Council to also have served as president of the Illinois Council of Community College Administrators."

Careers in Aging from page 21

Studying aging also provides insight into one's own aging and the aging of one's parents and grandparents. With knowledge about aging, we will be able to plan and prepare for our own later years more effectively and to empathize more appropriately and realistically with our older relatives and be better resource providers for them if the need arises. Association for Gerontology in Higher Education www.aghe.com

Gloria Heinemann is Director of the Interprofessional Team Training and Development Program and Primary Care Education Program, VA Western New York Healthcare System and Clinical Faculty, School of Medicine, University at Buffalo/SUNY

Education about Aging from pg. 21

Fran Pratt and Donna Couper are pioneers in the field of Learning about Aging. Pratt founded the Center for Understanding Aging in 1979 and



Fran Pratt, Founder, Center for Understanding Aging

later joined Couper and the University of North Texas in establishing the National Academy for Teaching and Learning about Aging. Their new book is called *Learning for Longer Life: Guide for Developers of K-12 Curriculum*. See the Academy web site for additional information. www.unt.edu/natla/new.html

You can teach a dog From page 17

So while there are certainly limits, there are limit-breakers as well.

What It Takes to Learn Changes with Age

While it is true that older people have, in general, weaker short-term memories than younger people, these deficits can be overcome with proper training. For instance, older people can significantly improve their short-term memory by making lists and training their memory with practice games. Admittedly, similarly trained young people do still better, but trained elders often do better than untrained young people.

There are many examples of ways in which older people can boost their performance when given the right opportunity for improvement. The key is for older people to develop at their own pace, and with respect for both their practical and emotional needs. One good example is the case of a large company that was converting to computer-controlled operation of a decentralized staff. They soon found that older workers were relatively slow, and reluctant to adapt to the new procedures. Young people, already computer proficient, were assigned as coaches, but the difficulties continued. In time, older clerks were seen staying at their desks beyond the usual working hours, in order to practice in relative privacy and at their own pace. And indeed, their performance improved significantly.

cantly. This episode illustrates several of the key requirements for learning new skills in old age. It is critical that older people be able to 1) work at their own pace; 2) practice new skills; and 3) avoid the embarrassment so common among older people when they cannot keep up to speed with their younger counterparts. From childhood, we become accustomed to older people teaching those who are younger. It is often difficult for older people to accept the reversal of roles in which the young become the mentors.

Teaching Institutions Haven't Adapted to Coming Needs

When it comes to learning, our society is still age-graded. Times have changed, the need for lifelong learning and relearning has increased, but our institutions have not caught up with the new realities. They operate as if life consisted of three compartmentalized periods—education, work, and retirement, in that order. There was a time when that was adequate. The traditional skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic were sufficient for many jobs. More specific skills, once learned, were practiced for the rest of one's working life. That time is long gone. Technological change means that most people will need to learn several new jobs in the course of their working lives. We now know that the capacity to learn is lifelong. The next step will be to create the conditions under which lifelong learning can be nurtured and achieved in our educational institutions.

“You can't teach botany without plants; You can't teach aging without older adults.” Fran Pratt

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