

Community Empowerment Grants Announced

New York State Office for the Aging Director Michael Burgess announced that \$490,000 in State grants has been awarded to fifteen not-for-profit organizations and local governments to support the creation of communities in which older adults can successfully age in place.

The grants will provide funding for innovative programs and activities that support and enhance opportunities for community participation in planning and creating aging friendly neighborhoods.

Applicants submitted proposals to either:

- a. Organize and undertake a planning process that will lead to development of a community empowerment plan; or
- b. Implement innovative strategies, programs services or activities resulting from a community empowerment planning process that has already been undertaken to enable aging in the community.

More than seventy applications were received reflecting a wide variety of exciting and innovative projects. Although only fifteen could be funded at this time, NYSOFA is encouraging all applicants to continue their work toward the development of aging friendly communities. To support this work, NYSOFA will provide training opportunities and technical assistance for interested individuals and groups and the Office will also advocate for additional funding for aging in place efforts.

Following is a listing of the Community Empowerment grants awarded by the New York State Office for the Aging.

- Allegany/Western Steuben Rural Health Network, Inc.
- Albany County Department of Social Services
- Chemung County Department of Aging and Long Term Care
- Claire Heureuse Community Center, Inc.
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Sullivan County
- Family of Woodstock, Inc.
- Grand Street Settlement
- Heights and Hill Community Council
- Isabella Geriatric Center
- Mental Health Association of Rockland County
- Mercy Care of the Adirondacks
- North Fork Women for Women Fund, Inc.
- Steuben County Office for the Aging
- Town of North Hempstead Department of Services for the Aging
- Upper Hudson Primary Care Consortium

The following are brief summaries the funded proposals:

- Allegany/Western Steuben Rural Health Network, Inc.

The Allegany/Western Steuben Rural Health Network facilitates the Allegany County Community Partnerships on Aging, a collaboration of health and human services organizations, governmental agencies, community and civic leaders, hospitals, older adults and other community members, that has carried out a comprehensive planning process to promote senior wellbeing, maximize independence, and improve the aging delivery system. This process identified eight priority concerns that affect older adults' ability to remain independent.

The Community Empowerment grant proposal focuses on implementing three services/initiatives that reflect these priority concerns and are not currently being addressed by the aging service delivery system in Allegany County. These include:

- Implementing an Allegany County Older Driver Assistance Network to support and provide access to screening and educational resources for individuals attempting to help potentially at-risk older drivers.
- Establishing an Allegany County Senior Housing Consortium to promote universal design and home repair and modification strategies to improve seniors' ability to age in place.
- Establishing an Allegany County Comprehensive Fall Prevention Initiative that will assist seniors in remaining healthy, living independently and avoiding falls through a multi-disciplinary approach involving caregivers, healthcare providers, senior centers and other partners.

- Albany County Department of Social Services

The proposed project involves a two-pronged approach to planning for and creating aging and disabled friendly communities. First, the initiative will conduct broad-based outreach, education and awareness activities about the creation of aging and disabled friendly communities. Secondly, the initiative will focus on working with specific municipalities, business groups, agencies, older adults and other stakeholders to assess current levels of aging and disabled friendliness, identify and prioritize opportunities for short and/or long-term changes and develop strategies for implementation. The proposal indicates that "A diverse population of stakeholders will be targeted for participation in these activities, including but not limited to municipal planners, parks and recreational staff, housing providers, community service providers, businesses, faith-based organizations, seniors and persons with disabilities."

- Chemung County Department of Aging and Long Term Care

This initiative will include collaborations between the Department, local and regional not-for-profit organizations, business groups, government entities, aging services organizations, educational institutions, community associations, faith-based organizations, older adults and other interested individuals. In addition to involving Baby Boomers and over 65-age groups, this initiative will include all ages, with a special emphasis on the 19-39 year older population, in planning efforts for future improvement. The exodus of the 19-39 year old population has been identified as a community-wide concern. The initiative will build on the efforts to create a shared vision for livable communities which kicked off on June 19, 2009 with a Community Empowerment Conference designed to engage interested individuals and organizations, generate support for the effort, and identify individuals interested in serving on the steering committee and workgroups for the initiative.

- Claire Heureuse Community Center, Inc.

This proposed planning process will assess the unmet needs of the aging population in this community with a focus on the immigrant aged residing in the target area who face language and cultural barriers when attempting to access services. Members of the Steering Committee will work to: a) identify factors that prevent older individuals from receiving care; b) identify strategies to improve access to needed services and health care; and c) determine how prevention and access services for the aging population can be made cost effective and efficient since independent living for older persons is reliant on good health. A wide range of partners are to be involved in the planning process including older adults, health care providers, local centers and providers serving the Haitian community, faith-based groups, governmental entities, and representatives of elected officials.

- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Sullivan County

The proposed project will build on the collaborations that have resulted from the formation of the Sullivan County TRIAD, a group established last year to prevent elder abuse/senior violence and promote an improve quality of life for older adults. The collaboration involves law enforcement, Aging Network organizations—including many which provide support for caregivers, governmental entities, health agencies and consumers. The Steering Committee, which will recruit members from TRIAD and other sources, will undertake a needs assessment survey to gather a snapshot of key senior issues to enhance aging in place and social/civic engagement opportunities. An open forum will be conducted in the fall to elicit information from older adults and caregivers about their visions for an aging friendly county. The Steering Committee will assess the survey results and recommendations from the forum to identify at least three priority areas that will serve as the focus of a community action plan.

- Family of Woodstock, Inc.

The impetus for this project comes from a newly formed group, Staying in Place, comprised of skilled, experienced older adults who initially participated in the Senior

Recreation Program established in Woodstock. This group will partner with other existing local civic, social service and arts organizations to design and implement a comprehensive support system that will allow older adults to not only continue to live in their homes, but continue to be contributing, active participants in their communities. The goal of this collaboration is to create and maintain a non-profit membership “village”, similar to more than one hundred such communities which exist nationally as part of a movement to make mixed age neighborhoods safe and comfortable places in which to grow old.

- Grand Street Settlement

This planning process will encourage older adults living in the Lower East Side to articulate needs and create a vision for how they wish to age in place. Input will be obtained through surveys, focus groups and town hall meetings. A key feature of the process is giving community members a voice as well as a new role in their community in order to shape the supports and programs that will enable them to age in place and live healthy, productive lives. To create a Steering Committee, outreach will be done to existing senior groups, service providers, hospitals, churches and faith-based groups, police, community improvement groups/organizations, and schools.

- Heights and Hill Community Council

This project, which will feature a needs assessment and research about short and long term needs, had as its impetus a burgeoning partnership among a small group of older community members in Park Slope interested in developing more livable communities. Of special interest in this planning process are older adults who do not live with family and are adversely affected by the gentrification of their neighborhoods. To introduce this planning process to the community and identify active and engaged residents willing to assume leadership roles and become the Steering Committee, outreach will be done with the Park Slope Civic Council, Boerum Hill Association, Cobble Hill Association, Brooklyn Heights Association, and Community Boards 2 and 6.

- Isabella Geriatric Center

This planning project, entitled the Upper Manhattan Age and Community Initiative, targets communities that are racially and ethnically diverse and will build on the work of the Upper Manhattan Partnership for Senior Independence, a partnership of eight community agencies providing case management service for older persons. The Initiative will be a comprehensive planning process that explores how to enhance the supports for older adults within the targeted communities and develop a plan to make the environment more conducive the aging in place. Through assessments, surveys, focus groups and other strategies, the partners will enhance their knowledge of community residents’ needs. Focal areas include: community outreach/civic engagement, community infrastructure development, relationship building, community development, organizing and advocacy for institutional change in attitudes toward older adults, and community research and evaluation.

- Mental Health Association of Rockland County

This endeavor builds on the “Project Tomorrow”, a three-year public/private planning and program development initiative which identified eight key goals for aging in place. One of the goals, implementing a project entitled “Strong Brain, Smart Brain and Fit Brain, A Mental Wellness Awareness, Education and Brain Strengthening Initiative” is the focus of this proposal and is a far-reaching mental wellness awareness project for older adults of diverse ethnicities. It will promote Rockland County as an age-friendly venue because it provides a structure for lifelong mental wellness and cognitive engagement. Both professionals in the field of aging and lay citizens will receive train the trainer education on teaching aspects of mental wellness. Media outreach, social message dissemination and creation of brain fitness centers are strategies that will be carried out.

- Mercy Care of the Adirondacks

A Steering Committee, composed of professional, community and consumer partners will guide a comprehensive needs assessment of four areas considered essential to creating an elder friendly community: a) basic needs such as housing, safety and nutrition; b) optimizing physical and mental health and wellbeing; c) maximizing independence for the frail and disabled; and d) promoting social and civic engagement. The assessment process and the development of community partnerships, will lead to development of a community empowerment action plan. Local partnerships will include elders, their families, faith-based groups, community leaders and organizations. Mercy Care will also partner with the Center for Inclusive Design & Environmental Access (IDeA) of the State University of New York at Buffalo to bring the Center’s efforts to make buildings, products and civic environments more usable, safe and healthier for diverse populations to a rural area.

- North Fork Women for Women Fund, Inc.

This planning process, which targets the lesbian community in Riverhead and Southhold, will include four key steps: a) a needs assessment on aging in place; b) focus groups bringing together community residents who are over 70 years of age; c) a scan of the broader social service network in the North Fork; and d) all-community meetings to present survey data and preliminary information about potential naturally occurring aging community models. Efforts will be made to partner with local and regional not-for-profit groups, governmental entities, Aging Network organizations, educational institutions, community associations and faith-based organizations.

- Steuben County Office for the Aging

An Aging in Place Leadership Team was recently formed in recognition that there are “naturally occurring retirement communities” in the County. The Team is committed to planning efforts that will lead to the creation of aging friendly communities. The Leadership team will serve as the cornerstone of the proposed county-wide Community Empowerment Planning Project and will help identify community work groups

(comprised of local civic groups, faith communities, older adults, caregivers) to carry out a community survey process . In the survey process, particular attention will be paid to reaching special needs populations and older individuals who have not had a voice in previous planning efforts.

- Town of North Hempstead Department of Services for the Aging

Following a comprehensive planning process, the Town proposes the establishment of the Senior Home Assistance Registry Project (SHARP). SHARP is a collaborative project designed to identify and reach out to individuals who are aged, isolated, frail or disabled. Regular communication with program participants will be done through volunteers and staff with the goal of providing assistance in navigating various governmental, health and not-for-profit networks. The project also seeks to connect these older residents with the community through a variety of strategies which will facilitate aging in place. Implementation activities will include work with multiple community partners to identify interested seniors, establish regular volunteer phone contacts, conduct home assessments, and link seniors with needed services. In particular, home sharing programs and/or home maintenance programs that make it possible for them to remain in their own homes will be made available.

- Upper Hudson Primary Care Consortium

The Adirondack Rural Health Network will invite broad participation of consumers, service providers and community leaders in the planning process. This process will assess the scope and need for services and identify existing assets and resources that support the health and security of older adults aging in place in rural areas. Particular emphasis will be placed on exploring the development of a rural model of a naturally occurring retirement community.