

N.O.W. (Novel Outreach Ways)

WEST SPRINGFIELD COUNCIL ON AGING/SENIOR CENTER

Reaching Up, Over, Out, Down, Here & There

When I was hired as Director of the West Springfield Council on Aging a little more than 1 1/2 years ago, I was confident my 25+ years of experience working with older adults in many of my surrounding communities would aid me in the Council on Aging arena.

What I wasn't prepared for was the shock of finding out how quickly paced life is within a Senior Center; activities moving and grooving, room setups, scheduling, meetings, networking, home visits, supervising employees & volunteers, meeting with vendors, salespeople, etc. It's amazing how quickly one day morphs into another.

One of the first things my staff and I did, that greatly enhanced our presence in the community, was to partner with a fundraising project in Town to benefit Arts in the Schools. This event enabled me to meet people whose



Your Outreach Can Be (Greatly) Enhanced By The Connections You Make Within Your Community.

backgrounds I would not have normally come into contact with; artists, Park & Rec., local businesses, school professionals, publicists, etc.

The lessons learned from this experience prompted me to think of other ways to engage people who knew people who knew people; hosting a craft fair, pancake breakfast and meal donations for a local food pantry all put my staff and I in contact with so many wonder-

ful people who knew of so many more wonderful people. It's that 6 degrees of separation factor that all of us can use to our advantage quite easily.

The Golden Outreach Rule? Outreach = Change! You must be willing to risk to get a benefit. You must be willing to stop what you are doing to meet with someone who pops in at your Center. You must be willing to switch things up in order to keep changing!!

Link-To-Peers-And-Professionals

If you don't already meet with peers a local professional social media outlet, Linked-In, is a great tool to help you keep connected with your peers. So many of us are now using this type of service that in many ways it replaces standard

email. The beauty of Linked-In is that your message is delivered to all your connections. If you create a group in Linked-In you could distribute your message with more focus and intensity. Outreach is different in every city/town and what

works for one doesn't necessarily work for another. But experience is a grand teacher! Many may have tried or dealt with what you are dealing with, so pick someone's brain—you may just find a wealth of information readily at hand.

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- Rule #1—You will never know everything.
- Rule #2—You will make mistakes, learn from them.
- Rule #3—Keep your emotions in check
- Rule #4—You don't have to go it alone—help is available... ASK!

Tips & Tidbits

- Host a Meet & Greet with local officials to let them know who you are and what you are doing;
- Invite your local Area Agency on Aging to visit your Center and show off yourself/your programs/your services;
- Go and visit your local Area Agency on Aging—meet your local case managers, meet the Director, ask how you can work together to benefit older adults in your area;
- Join a local clergy/parish association or multi-denominational group in order to network;
- Use social media like Facebook, Twitter or Picasa Google to spread messages;
- Use standard message outlets (Radio, T.V., Cable, Newspapers, Local Publications to help spread your message); &
- Meet with local housing authority representatives.

WEST SPRINGFIELD COUNCIL ON AGING/SENIOR CENTER

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MISSION STATEMENT

The West Springfield Council on Aging/Senior Center (the Center) is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of adults regardless of age, income, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation by offering services and recreational opportunities that strive to enhance and promote each person's independence and autonomy; identifying needs and conveying such with local officials, aging professionals, and the community at large.



- Write an article for your monthly newsletter;
- Take time to take care of yourself;
- Spend time learning about senior issues;
- Pay attention to repeating problem patterns;
- Conduct home visits to stay in touch.

Assessing Outreach... a time-worthy process



Your Center's telephone number is but one way people reach you. Consider the importance of multiple communication methods: phone, answering machines, voice mail, posts on Facebook, websites, walk-in hours, etc.

Have you ever put yourself in someone else's shoes? I'd like to think that if I needed my own Outreach Department's guidance on behalf of myself or someone I knew that my experience would be valuable and helpful to me.

Some questions you could hypothetically ask yourself if you wanted to do this sort of exercise could include:

- Are the days/times Outreach is available consistent and convenient for the general public?
- Are Outreach personnel knowledgeable, professional, reliable, experienced and thorough?
- What is the general feedback from your visiting public like with their experience

with Outreach?

- If it is necessary to leave a message, what is the general 'turnaround time' for a return call?
- Is my confidential information protected?
- If I spoke a different language what efforts would the Outreach take in order to communicate with me?
- Could I bring an advocate/family member with me and how would that be received?

Taking a look at any program (as if you were the 'user') is a beneficial exercise. Polling, canvassing or surveys are other good ways to assess your effectiveness. Just remember: Keep an objective viewpoint when assessing & engage your staff to collaborate with the initiative so you are not putting anyone on defense. "The best defense is a good offense," which means an objective look at your is worthwhile.

Helpful Resource Links

Benefits Checkup—<http://www.benefitscheckup.org/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/>

Federal Social Security Administration—<http://www.ssa.gov/>

Mass Councils on Aging—<http://www.mcoonline.com/>

National Institute of Mental Health—<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/older-adults-and-mental-health/index.shtml>

Reaching Senior Publications (SNAP)—www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/.../senior_outreach.pdf