

Your Home Or The Nursing Home?

DC Leads In New Approach To Helping Older Adults Stay in Their Homes

BY STEPHEN LILIENTHAL

Many Washingtonians are coming to see fledgling “villages” across the city as presenting a way to fulfill the deeply-held wishes of older Washingtonians to age in place. A “village” is an organization that meets the needs of an older population by making it possible for people to stay in their communities. Neighborhood residents create villages to help coordinate and deliver services and supports within their communities. This consumer-driven and person-centered approach can help delay or even prevent the need for institutional care. Now, DC’s operating villages have policymakers in the administration of Mayor Vincent Gray excited about a possible way to help older Washingtonians to remain in their homes and apartments longer rather than move to costly assisted living facilities or nursing homes.

Dr. John Thompson, executive director of the DC Office on Aging (DCOA) is one policymaker who believes that “it takes a village to help older Washingtonians to sustain their quality of life in the community.” Louis Davis, Jr., state director of the AARP-District of Columbia, chimes in, “As people live longer, they want amenities so they can stay in their homes longer.”

The reality is that more people will be growing older as baby boomers age, it costs lots of money to have older people stay in nursing homes, and most older folks, many of whom live alone, want to stay in their homes.

These realities lead Thompson to predict, “We’re on the next wave of villages in DC.” He and DCOA Community Planner Courtney Williams expect to spend the fall holding engagement workshops across the city including East of the River (EOTR) encouraging community leaders to seriously consider starting villages. “The workshops will take



In the Southeast Library, CHV members are offered computer assistance by Sidwell Friends students.

people through the steps on what’s involved in starting a village,” says Thompson.

One village DC policymakers are looking to as a model for the city is Capitol Hill Village (CHV), whose headquarters is located just over a half-mile up from the Capitol off of Pennsylvania Avenue, SE. But it is not the only one in the city since the list includes villages in Dupont Circle, Georgetown, Glover Park, Northwest Neighbors (Chevy Chase/Tenleytown), and Palisades. Andy Mollison, president of Palisades Village, says a meeting held in August of the newly formed Washington Area Village Exchange identified twenty-eight villages in the Greater Washington area, which includes the Maryland and Virginia suburbs, that are either operating or being formed.

Capitol Hill Village Leading By Example

Located in the basement of a 7th Street, SE townhouse of a benefactor, Capitol Hill Village’s offices is the nerve center of this busy organization. CHV is helping older Capitol Hill

residents to stay in their homes and in the community by providing volunteer services ranging from rides and shopping trips, to home chores such as fixing a dripping faucet. Contractor references are also provided.

Over 200 people, mostly from Capitol Hill, volunteer their services to CHV and its members. The commanding general of this army of altruists is an energetic woman named Katie McDonough, the new executive director, who has a master’s degree in social work from the University of Pennsylvania.

McDonough tells a story about the impact CHV can have on behalf of its members.

“A member of the village who has several chronic illnesses was in the hospital nearly a month. Before, the member had always refused home health care services. But the member could not live a home safely now,” McDonough explains. McDonough, at the time CHV’s director of community and social services, and then-executive director Gail Kohn helped to persuade the member to allow home health care services to provide care and CHV volunteers also provide services.

Because home health care alerted CHV that a laptop computer would better serve the member’s needs when bedridden, a volunteer purchased one for the bedridden member and provided instructions on its use.

Statistics for June 2011 demonstrate the importance of CHV in the lives of its 250 member households. Transportation assistance, often to and from doctor visits, was provided 127 times. Twenty-nine shopping trips were taken. Home maintenance assistance was provided twenty-two times.

And McDonough makes clear that it is not all about receiving by CHV members. She tells the story of an elderly member who is an avid gardener and knows a lot about a particular vine that was growing in another member’s garden. A picture was taken of the vine and given to the homebound member who said the vine was invasive and needed to be removed.

CHV offers opportunities for its members to take advantage of cultural programming such as yoga and balance classes, helps to sponsor AARP-DC Driver Safety classes for its members, and organizes dinners and theatre performances, often at discounted rates.

Villages Not Just For The Oldest Or The Richest

McDonough says that people of any age can benefit from joining CHV. Many volunteers who aid older members are high school students performing community service. “We want people to join early. We do not want people to wait until they become disabled.” Too many Americans, she thinks, have a negative view of aging and hesitate to ask for help. McDonough is initiating an Inter-generational Skills Exchange that will rely on social networking to link people with needs to people who have the requisite knowledge and skills.

Many CHV members own their homes even though not all have much disposable income. Regular dues are \$530 for an individual and \$800 for a household. Thanks to a special fund that was created, individuals with incomes below \$40,000 (individuals) can seek "membership plus" assistance that limits their dues to \$100. Households of two or more persons with incomes below \$50,000 have their dues priced at \$200. Plus, they can request financial assistance to help pay for services not offered by volunteers. However, the fund relies upon special donations and grants which leads CHV's webpage to caution that "membership plus" is dependent upon "the extent that monies are available" in the fund.

Capitol Hill Village, initiated by Geoff Lewis, who read a New York Times article about the first village, Beacon Hill Village, in Boston, is considered to be the best developed village in the city. Other leading villages in the city include Palisades, DuPont Circle, and Northwest Neighbors Village (Chevy Chase/Tenleytown).

Pennsylvania Avenue Village East, a fledgling village EOTR, has a webpage but one of its organizers, Rev. Ethel Wilson, declined to discuss its plans. DCOA Community Planner Williams suggests churches might be able to combine to forge villages for their members, setting up discounted memberships for people in need. Some activities related to a village already take place through churches, but there will be greater pay-off with the combined power of several churches or organizations working together.

What Comes Next?

Some village activists like villages because they are free of top-down bureaucracy. "It's about people reaching out to each other," says one Northwest DC village organizer. Palisades' Mollison says the relationship between villages and government can be positive in the way it has been with government supporting -- not micro-managing -- other nonprofits. "Villages are not a city agency and key to their success is their complete flexibility to meeting their members' needs," he says. Burdensome rules and guidelines will not be welcome by villages.

Candace Baldwin of the Village to Village Network, the national peer to peer network for villages, says when AARP's magazine published an article about villages her office was inundated with phone calls and e-mails expressing interest. She cautions that obtaining support for villages on the federal level might be more difficult given that policymakers would demand extensive and expensive longitudinal studies to prove their value.

"Villages," says Baldwin, "make common sense. People get it. They like it." She expects a "groundswell that may push [forming villages] faster than any longitudinal study."

Stephen Lilienthal, a freelance writer, lives in Washington, D.C. ●

Villages In DC

Capitol Hill Village

Box 15126
Washington, DC 20003-0126
phone: 202-543-1778
e-mail: info@capitolhillvillage.org
website: www.capitolhillvillage.org/

Chevy Chase/Tenleytown/AU Park

Northwest Neighbors Village
5425 Western Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20015
phone: 202-237-1895
e-mail: nnvccdc@aol.com
website: <http://www.nwnv.org/>

Dupont Circle Village

Dupont Circle Community Resource Center
9 Dupont Circle, NW
Washington, DC 20036
phone: 202-436-5252
e-mail: bernice@dupontcirclevillage.org
website: <http://dupontcirclevillage.org/>

Georgetown Village, Inc.

Sharon Lockwood, Chair
3238 O Street, NW
Washington, DC
Mailing address
P.O. Box 3563
Washington, DC 20027
phone: 202-999-8988
e-mail: sharonlockwood100@hotmail.com
website: <http://georgetown-village.org/>

Glover Park Village, Inc.

P.O. Box 32255
Washington, D.C. 20007
phone: 202-436-5545
e-mail: GloverParkVillage@gmail.com

Kalorama Village*

(in redevelopment)
2126 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Apt. 52
Washington, DC 20008
e-mail: info@kaloramavillage.org
website: www.kaloramavillage.org/Home.html

Palisades Village

PO Box 40403
Washington, DC 20016-0403
phone: 202 244-3310
e-mail: info@palisadesvillage.org
website: <http://www.palisadesvillage.org/>

Pennsylvania Avenue Village East*

phone 202-657-6160
website: www.pavillageeast.org/Welcom.html

West End/Foggy Bottom*

phone: 202-331-1495
e-mail: jglemire@aol.com
mwright@theunitedchurch.org
* Considered to be "in development" as opposed to fully operating.

Source: Village to Village Network Membership Directory, Washington Area Village Exchange, web search for Pennsylvania Avenue Village East.



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