

4 Ways Senior Living Breaks Down Community Walls

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Expanding a senior living community's resources to seniors outside campus walls not only meets many seniors' desire to age in place, but it improves that senior living community's marketability as well.

Creating café spaces that serve multiple functions, partnering with other organizations and offering education opportunities that can be accessed via phone and online are some ways that Mather LifeWays expands its footprint beyond its four senior senior living residences, said Betsie Sassen during Mather LifeWays' Tuesday webinar "5 Ways to Make More of Your Outreach." Mather LifeWays operates three communities in the Chicagoland area and one in Tucson, Az.

"Our goal in these community initiatives is to expand Mather LifeWays' ability to reach older adults in their own communities and homes," Sassen, vice president of community initiatives at Mather LifeWays, said, adding that duplicate models of many of their outreach initiatives can be seen nationwide. "The majority of older adults will not move — that's 98 to 99% of [older adults] we won't be serving unless we have some type of community program to reach them."

Here are four outreach models operators can implement to expand their footprint and serve older adults outside of their communities.

1. Café Plus Model

This bricks and mortar model meets seniors where they're at — in their communities. Mather LifeWays operates three cafés in Chicago, Ill., and chose sites in areas densely populated with seniors, but with few senior-oriented services. These areas' seniors may have too much money to qualify for subsidies, but not enough to afford many needed services.

"They're house rich and cash poor," Sassen said.

While the café is an eatery, there's more to the restaurant than meets the eye.

"Food brings people together," she said. "It's 'Cheers' without the beer — and we marry that with an environment of renewal, support and opportunity. The benefit is much more than food and nutrition."

The café is open to the public, which encourages intergenerational relationships, and offers a variety of health and wellness programming on site.

Yoga, strength training, and live music events and just some of the additional programs the cafés offer.

The primary funding for the cafés comes from food sales, fees for classes, grants and additional support from Mather LifeWays, she said, noting that prices are kept low so that services are affordable.

2. Café Without Walls

While similar to the café plus model — in which socialization and wellness promotion are key — the café without walls model differs through its reliance on partnerships to provide a location for senior-oriented programming.

The cornerstone of the program is a monthly luncheon, and additional programming is housed in a space provided by another entity. For Mather LifeWays's model, programming is hosted in an office provided by a local church that identified a need for senior services in its community.



“We receive that space free of charge,” Sassen said. “We know this program is having a strong

impact — 85% of participants have self reported improvement in overall health.”

The program also offers a variety of classes and field trips, which participants pay a nominal fee to attend, she said.

3. Neighbor-to-Neighbor

There are about 55 neighbor-to-neighbor programs in the United States, with about 120 in development, Sassen said.

The program charges an annual fee for its services, including connection to a pre-screened network of volunteers to assist with day-to-day tasks and a variety of interest groups, social activities and more.

Mather LifeWays provides for the office space and salary of the executive director of North Shore Village, which runs the program. That relationship has led to the move in of 12 new residents who learned about Mather LifeWays through their use of the neighbor-to-neighbor program, Sassen said.

4. Telephone Topics and Online Community

Offering learning opportunities for older Americans that they can access via phone, from anywhere nationwide, encourages ongoing education and spreads awareness of a senior living's brand.

“We arrange for speakers to offer classes via phone regarding topics, such as health, politics, celebrities, nutrition, art [and more],” Sassen said. “It’s an easy way to engage older adults, and it’s a good way to reach new customers.”

A virtual online community with resources to a variety of topics of interest to older Americans can also establish a provider as a leader in the industry, and attract prospects from all over the country.

In addition to articles, an online resource hub should offer upcoming community event schedules, videos to accompany tutorials and more to capture the breadth of expertise of the senior living provider managing the site, Sassen said, adding that following senior living consumer sites can provide good insight into what types of content are grabbing older Americans’ attention.

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