

Project Descriptions 2011–2012

North Hennepin Community College

Lisa Cook

Plan B Connections. Social isolation is rising in our society due the increase in the number of Americans who live alone as well as television, the Internet, and day-to-day busyness that takes a toll on the frequency and depth of face-to-face social interactions. Social isolation leads to physical and mental health problems. This project creates and maintains sustainable avenues for stakeholders to make social connections by organizing a “Resilience Circle” in Windsor Green and a Meaningful Connections Book Club for boomers.

Lyn Culbert

Ataxia Video Project. There is little public awareness of the rare, genetic disease category of inherited ataxias. Awareness is needed to promote funding for researching treatments and a cure. I have an opportunity to make a difference in this area due to my experience as the parent of an ataxian, Dave Lewis, and the memoir he wrote about his life with ataxia. The short term goal is to collaborate on the making of a video presentation about ataxia research and Dave’s life with ataxia. The longer term goal is to put together a presentation package that includes my personal story as the parent of an ataxian, Dave’s book which tells his story, the video, and additional facts about ataxia and the status of research for a cure.

Carol Neumann

Start a Time Bank in Brooklyn Park. Brooklyn Park is one of the most diverse cities in Minnesota with over 48% minority population. In this city, 9.5% of the residents are below the poverty level. With the large number of people living in poverty, financial needs are many. This project is designed to help people use their skills, talents, and abilities to get some of their needs met and to increase their self esteem. This project will set up a Time Bank in Brooklyn Park that will allow people to donate time, bank time, and use their banked time for other services. The time bank will be up and running with at least ten members by September 1, 2012.

Chris Wilson

Community Legacy and Accessible Art Space. Chris has inherited 35 acres with an old farmstead. Chris’s goal is to take half of the property and create a community green space nature trail and garden and to use the farmstead buildings to create accessible art classes. “Artists don’t retire,” says Chris. “The best we can do is facilitate living and studio space that is flexible and has accessibility.”

Saint Paul College

Brad Blackett

Eco-Connect. Loss of connectiveness after Minnesota Master Naturalist Volunteer Training Program combined with agencies and organizations feeling the affects of Baby Boomers retiring creates a opportunity for each to benefit one another. These two groups, at the opposite ends of an employment spectrum, can sometimes feel forgotten, ignored, and left out. Left unchecked, these feelings can lead to rejection, sense of inadequacy, isolation and disillusionment. This project will create a peer-to-peer social networking group among Minnesota Master Naturalist Trainers and Volunteers with Three Rivers Park District staff and retirees. By bringing together individuals across all career stages through networking and peer mentoring, the participating individuals targeted from early and late career stages will stay connected and motivated about continuing to contribute to their lifelong passions as stewards of the natural world. The resulting working/ personal relationships will foster excellence in the next generation of managers, leaders, technicians and programmers through sharing of resources, information and ideas.

Bette Forberg

Developing a Volunteer Coordinator Role at Resurrection Lutheran Church. Resurrection Lutheran Church is a relatively new church (14 years old) which is growing quite rapidly. Members who have been there since the church first started (aka Established Members) have traditionally taken on leadership roles to accomplish the volunteer work of the church's mission. They are now beginning to feel burned out and wanting others to step into their roles. At the same time, there are many new members who have joined the congregation who bring a wealth of experience and talent who would like to take on some of these volunteer activities. They are feeling frustrated and left out because they don't know where to turn for help to find volunteer activities that would help them feel a part of the congregation. Presently, there is no established method to help the two groups find each other except by happenstance. The goal of this project is to provide a means of connecting new and established members of Resurrection Lutheran Church's congregation to know each other's interests and abilities so that up to 50% of the congregation's membership will be engaged in volunteer work of their choosing by December, 2012.

Tracy Godfrey

Helping Employers Make the Most of the Maturing Workforce. There is a lack of awareness and disconnect on how employers can use older workers. Employers are ill-equipped to attract and make the most of the aging workforce. Older workers are facing barriers in finding employment and sometimes are not valued for what they do. The fact is that the workforce is aging as the Baby Boomer generation approaches retirement, and this trend will continue for 20 years. Views of work and retirement are changing: some need to continue to work because they need to; but many work because they want to – although maybe in a different way. Policies, practice and perception have not caught up with this reality. Employers need new approaches and creativity to make the use of this talent pool that is available. This project aims to help employers make the most of the maturing workforce and build age-friendly work environments to head off shortages of workers and talent gaps. It also hopes to open channels to transfer knowledge and wisdom to coming generations. Tracy will start to achieve these outcomes by organizing a VAN Forum on how employers can make the most of a maturing workforce.

Chris McGinty

Caregivers Support Group. Caregivers must deal with their own strong emotions such as fear, confusion, powerlessness at the same time as they meet the needs of their loved ones. This project

will use the 12-step program to help caregivers balance the demands of disease and disability with recovery and support. Chris will work with a social worker at the Ramsey County Nursing Home to establish an ongoing support group for caregivers. The group will be conveniently held in the nursing home where the caregivers regularly visit. Members will share experiences, hope, and growth and they honestly discuss insights about care giving using the 12-steps.

Nancy O'Brien

ElderNomics – Improving Economic Security for Seniors. The older adults of the West Seventh and Highland Park neighborhoods of St. Paul have diverse ethnicities and incomes. The large numbers of older adults living independently in their own homes or apartments in these two neighborhoods, led to the formation of the Highland Park West Seventh (HPWS) Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC). The NORC is coordinated by Jewish Family Services and connects four other organizations serving seniors in this area. The economic insecurity of the older adults that live in the Highland Park West Seventh Neighborhoods negatively impacts how they can address their needs and share their assets. This project will enhance the future economic security for seniors in the Highland Park/West Seventh area of Saint Paul by engaging them in addressing their most pressing economic issue through policy making and community action.

Mary Peterson

Intergenerational event between Little Brothers and Kinship. Little Brothers – Friends of the Elderly (LBFE) has a mission to relieve isolation and loneliness among older adults in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Opportunities to interact with children is minimal. This project will develop and host a special event that will bring youth and seniors together to share and enjoy each other's gifts.

Merry Roth

Fulfilling Elder Needs Through Online Neighborhood Networks. Needy elder community members are missing vital information and resources available through online neighborhood networks. Because they are not online, the elderly are “invisible” to other members of the neighborhood. These elder members who are already at a disadvantage become more isolated, more lonely and more impoverished, which contributes to their social, financial and emotional decline and ultimate loss of personal independence. This project engages active members of the online neighborhood networks to respond to the needs of their offline elder neighbors, sharing goods, programs and services that aid in their well-being and independence.

Saifu Shukarey and Yadesa Washo

Establishing Oromo Elders' Network. Traditionally, Oromo elders play active and important roles in Oromo society. They are the ones who are responsible for settling all kinds of disputes involving families, individuals and groups. In other words, they have been playing important role in maintaining peace, order and unity of Oromo people. Oromo elders also give advices and orientation to younger generation about Oromo cultural and democratic values that have been admired by scholars and taken as an indigenous political system of Oromo society. In this country, Oromo elders are not in position to fulfill their traditional roles. Most don't speak English and, as such, can't watch TV or listen to other media. They can't shop by themselves. Many can't even use phones to call each other to communicate. It is difficult for them to use public transportation. As a result, they feel that they are deactivated and have lost their importance. In the first phase of this project, Saifu and Yadesa will engage Oromo elders in learning basic English, health education, sporting activities, and entertainment. The result of these actions will be to help Oromo elders regain purpose in their lives and to once again fulfill the

important roles they traditionally have filled. In the long run, Saifu and Yadesa will use the Oromo Elders Association (OEA), which they legally established in 2007, to activate Oromo elders so that they can live the life of healthy aging Oromo Americans.

Rick Ziton

Caring For the Caregiver. I have been caring for my father in law and mother in law who are 91 and 86 at this time, and have Alzheimer's and dementia. My mother-in-law is fairly gentle about the process. My father-in-law is very belligerent, resistant, angry to family and those that are around him. He does not want any help, and insists that all the help is for mom. He is very belligerent towards her and to the family and to me. There appears to be many opportunities for help for people/ helpers in that position, but not much, if anything for caregivers to take care of themselves. This project will provide a comprehensive listing of opportunities, websites, and sites where people in the position of care giving can get help to take care of themselves.