Neighborhood Networks

FACT SHEET

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development • Office of Housing—Multifamily

Seniors Live and Learn Independently at Neighborhood Networks Centers

Neighborhood Networks centers nationwide offer seniors an arena to use wisdom gained from decades of experience. For example, a 70+ year-old resident at a Neighborhood Networks center in Louisiana was able to supplement his income with skills learned in the center's computer repair classes. After four months disassembling and reassembling computers at the center, the senior resident found work as a part-time computer technician through the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Senior Community Service Employment Program. He started installing and repairing computers for AARP at nearby schools and helped troubleshoot computers in the center. While his previous job required a 90-minute commute, "Now," the senior resident said, "all I have to do is go downstairs!"

What role do seniors play at Neighborhood Networks centers?

Seniors are the primary population at 20 percent of HUD-assisted and/or -insured properties with Neighborhood Networks centers. This translates to thousands of potential senior candidates for center programs. Many seniors teach and learn from young residents through intergenerational programs at the centers.

Do seniors have unique needs?

Yes. Among issues unique to aging populations are: an increase in available time following retirement, reduced mobility, lower energy levels, diminishing income, an increased need for health services, a need for guidance regarding retirement finances and age-related discrimination when seeking employment or services.

How do social service programs at Neighborhood Networks centers address senior issues?

Programs for seniors vary according to the resources and priorities of the specific center, and the interests of senior residents active at the center. Some centers offer basic social programs that help reduce isolation by drawing seniors out of their apartments. One center in Georgia has a buddy system of senior volunteers who participate in a daily "calling tree." A senior volunteer begins the day by calling the first senior resident on the "calling tree" list, who then calls the next person on the list, and so on throughout the day until all senior residents have been contacted. This service is especially critical for older residents without nearby relatives. Other center programs are more sophisticated, such as a Michigan center's Internet Café, where seniors can sip coffee while sending e-mail messages nationwide. The Internet Café helps connect these residents to distant friends and family.

What national organizations fund programs for aging populations?

Five of the nation's top organizations providing grants for aging issues and services include

Neighborhood Networks Facts...

WHAT: Neighborhood Networks is a community-based initiative launched by HUD's Office of Multifamily Housing in September 1995 that encourages the development of resource and computer learning centers in HUD-assisted and/or -insured housing.

- More than 620 centers in operation*
- Thousands of business, community and government partners
- More than 744 properties with centers in planning*

WHO: Serves HUD-assisted and/or -insured housing residents, owners, managers, partners and communities.

*as of 08/00

the **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** (*www.rwjf.org/main.html*), the **Pew Charitable Trusts** (*www.pewtrusts.com*), the **Commonwealth Fund** (*www.cmwf.org*), the **Surdna Foundation** (*www.surdna.org/surdna*) and the **American Federation for Aging Research** (*www.afar.org*). These organizations offer hundreds of grants annually totaling as much as $180 million. Visit the websites listed above for further information about grant application requirements and deadlines.

Who currently works in partnership with centers to assist seniors?

Many national, regional and local organizations are working with Neighborhood Networks centers to help seniors. These partners range from groups serving seniors nationwide, such as the **Area Agencies on Aging**, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), to local groups such as the **Senior Employment Program** (*www.sremploy.org*) which serves the Greater Baton Rouge area in Louisiana. This program offers guidance, counseling and referrals to people aged 55 and over seeking work. Visit the Neighborhood Networks website at *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org* to find information on other organizations.

How can I get involved?

- **Seniors** and other residents can organize and participate in social service programs at their Neighborhood Networks centers, as students, teachers and volunteers.
- **Center staff** can develop programs that meet the unique needs of seniors, by addressing aging issues such as reduced mobility and helping seniors engage in stimulating activities including Internet classes.
- **Partner organizations** can provide funding and staff with expertise in senior programs and materials. Materials may include high-tech equipment, such as Pentium computers, or basic supplies, such as books for continuing education classes. These organizations also can collaborate with centers when seeking grants.
- **Community-based organizations and Public Housing Authorities** can encourage their employees and residents to participate in activities at centers that serve senior populations. Some centers are developing joint programs with these groups.

The **Interactive Aging Network** based in New York City helps nonprofits improve service delivery to the aging population via the Internet by offering training on Internet use and assistance developing websites. The Network provides resource information on its website, such as funding, consultants, discussion groups and program ideas. It also helps nonprofits market their services on the Web. Visit the website at *www.ianet.org.*

For more information, contact:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Neighborhood Networks
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031-1207

Website www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

e-mail mail@neighborhoodnetworks.org

Neighborhood Networks Information Center
(888) 312-2743

TTY: (703) 934-3230

Visit our website at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

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