



SENIOR VOICES

Seniors & Neighborhood Centers Inc.

Through our Senior Services programs, Neighborhood Centers Inc. offers a continuum of care that supports seniors living independently in the community.

Neighborhood Centers started working with seniors more than 40 years ago with the creation of Senior Citizen Day Care at Ripley House.

Today, we manage 22 Senior Center sites in low income neighborhoods throughout Houston. Our senior centers are a vital link to a healthier, happier lifestyle for Houston-area older adults. The cornerstone of our senior centers is the congregate meal program. In partnership with the Harris County Area Agency on Aging, **we serve more than 750 nutritious meals each day.**

We grew to provide physical activity programming based on statistically significant, proven results, which is also called evidence-based programming. This programming has become standard across all senior center sites. By remaining physically active, seniors maintain muscle and bone strength, balance, and flexibility, which enable them to accomplish tasks of daily living that directly impact their ability to live independently. We have also enhanced seniors' access to nutrition education, physical activity, health information, recreation and resources.

In 2009, we began to address other barriers to older adults' ability to age in place. With grant funding from the **Administration on Aging's Community Initiatives for Aging in Place**, we established the **Houston Aging in Place Innovations (HAPI) program**. The HAPI program is designed to provide geriatric case management and a more complete array of evidenced-based programming.

Currently, case managers are stationed at three area senior centers and provide case management services to the surrounding older adult community, including home-bound seniors. In addition to case management services, the HAPI program provides evidence based programming which teaches older adults skills and behaviors that better prepare them to age in place. The programs are offered at senior centers, as well as local churches, senior apartment complexes, and local health centers.



Population Demographic

The HAPI project operates in three target communities: East End, Fifth Ward and Sunnyside. As its name suggests, the purpose of the HAPI project is to help older adults to optimally age in place.

The target communities were selected because of the extremely vulnerable nature of the older adult populations there and the vibrant senior centers in those areas.

Seniors in HAPI communities compared to the rest of Harris County

Population Data	HAPI Coverage Area (East End, Fifth Ward, Sunnyside)	Harris County
Older adults living in the area	17%	10%
Seniors serving as Head of Household	28%	13%
Seniors living in the same residence for more than 30 years	79%	51%
Seniors who are renters	53%	23%
Seniors classified as being in poverty	31%	11%
Seniors at 150% of the poverty level	47%	20%
Seniors lacking access to a vehicle	33%	16%
Seniors with disabilities	61%	44%

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is process that Neighborhood Centers uses to build vibrant communities. It engages community members in questions asked specifically to build upon on the strengths of the community and the people in the community. As a process it helps them to identify their dreams, hopes and goals.

Appreciative Inquiry has proven to be an effective tool in helping to focus constructively on capacities and opportunities while working for systematic change.

More than 430 older adults attended one-on-one interviews or Appreciative Inquiry forums which looked at old age as a stage in life that offers opportunities and challenges. Seniors were able to discuss what strengths and resources they needed in order to age comfortably and improve their individual quality of life.



Working Toward the Vision

Visions for the Future



A key purpose of the HAPI program and this Appreciative Inquiry process is to determine how communities can better support older adults' ability to age in place. Two key focus areas emerged from this process:

- Transportation
- Healthy living

Transportation

Seniors defined transportation as, *"a means of connecting seniors to appropriate facilities with convenience, stability, reliability and responsive services throughout the community & city, allowing seniors to have independence and mobility."*

Previous community-wide surveys found access to transportation to be a major barrier for seniors. Care for Elders' Consumer Input survey, conducted from 2009–2010, found that 58% of respondents cite the need for current transportation programs to improve the way they operate so they can better meet seniors' needs.

Seniors suggested:

- Volunteer driver voucher program—allows passengers to recruit their own volunteer driver and provides vouchers to reimburse drivers for the cost of the trip.

- Transportation options counselor—someone who can help older adults navigate the complex transportation systems available in the community, including applications, eligibility and scheduling
- Buses (or jitneys) that transport seniors to needed goods and services
- More reliable para-transit

Healthy Living

Throughout the Appreciative Inquiry process, seniors stressed the importance of healthy eating and physical activity in order to healthfully age in place. To promote a healthy lifestyle, seniors envisioned their communities with:

- Access to grocery stores with affordable, fresh foods
- Senior-friendly farmer's markets
- Fewer fast food and convenience stores
- Healthy cooking classes
- Nutrition classes
- More exercise classes and daily physical activity

Building an Ideal Community for Aging in Place

The HAPI program strives to ensure that our communities are suited for older adults to age in place. Our work with seniors continues as we help them to make their desires for their community a reality.



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