An Intergenerational Alternative to Lonely Living

Art and Science of Aging Conference
February 17, 2017

Joan Borst, PhD, LMSW
Sally Pelon, PhD, LMSW
GVSU School of Social Work
BLUE ZONES

LOMA LINDA, CALIFORNIA
Stress-reducing, healthy diet practices of local Seventh Day Adventists rub off on the whole town

NICOYA, COSTA RICA
Water naturally rich in calcium and magnesium may help prevent heart disease and weak bones

SARDINIA, ITALY
Daily wine and laughter help Sardinian men enjoy the longest male lifespan

IKARIA, GREECE
Napping, occasional fasting and drinking goat milk may add years to life

OKINAWA, JAPAN
Dedication to family and friends lifts Okinawan women to the longest female lifespan
Blue Zone Principles

Move Naturally

Purpose in Life

Diet

Belong to a Group

Spirituality

Beuttnner, 2008
Research (Steptoe et al., 2012) states:

• Social relationships are central to human well-being.
• Relationships are critically involved in the maintenance of health.
• Social isolation is an objective and quantifiable reflection of a reduced social network.
• At older ages, decreasing economic resources, mobility impairment and the death of contemporaries conspire to limit.
• Socially isolated individuals are at increased risk for the development of cardiovascular disease, infectious illness, cognitive deterioration, and mortality.
• Loneliness itself has been linked with increased risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality, elevated blood pressure and cortisol and heightened inflammatory responses to stress.
“Loneliness often is regarded as the psychological embodiment of social isolation, reflecting the individual’s experienced dissatisfaction with the frequency and closeness of their social contacts or the discrepancy between the relationships they have and the relationships they would like to have”. Steptoe, et al., 2012
Loneliness and Mortality

Social isolation and loneliness associated with a higher risk of mortality in adults aged 52 and older

Steptoe et al., 2012
Loneliness and Health

Seniors who feel lonely and isolated are more likely to report having poor physical and/or mental health

NSHAP, 2009
Loneliness and Cognitive Decline

Feelings of loneliness are linked to poor cognitive performance and quicker cognitive decline

NSHAP, 2009
Loneliness and Depression

Feeling loneliness is associated with more depressive symptoms in both middle-aged and older adults

Andrews & Sanders, 2010
Loneliness

Living in a facility affords social exposure, yet does not guarantee access to close relationships, so that loneliness may be a result.

Gerontology literature has suggested that loneliness in late life may be a risk factor for serious mental health concerns such as depression.

Resource: Andrews & Sanders, 2010
Loneliness and Health Habits

Socially isolated or lonely more likely to report risky health behaviors such as poor diet, lack of physical activity, and smoking

ELSA, 2011
How can we reduce loneliness and isolation in seniors?
Success comes from interdependence

Though we idealize independence, the reality is that family, neighborhoods, community, services and networks are the foundation underlying individual success at every age — including healthier, dignified and economical aging.

Here are some examples:

Resource: Next Avenue
Netherlands

Humanitas Retirement Home, Deventer, Netherlands

6 students from two universities

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZgGb4p0xo0
Cleveland, Ohio

Judson Manor, Cleveland, Ohio

Students from Cleveland Institute of Music
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Clark Retirement Community

3 WMU students as part of a longitudinal study
New York, New York

‘Home Stay’ program

NYU students live in spare rooms of local senior citizens
Benefits for the Elderly

✓ Decreased loneliness and social isolation

✓ Health benefits: Fights dementia, regulates blood pressure, improves sleep, fights depression

✓ Skill development

✓ Opportunity to teach skills: purpose

Cacciopo et al., 2010; Hawkley et al., 2010
Benefits for College Students

- Less debt
- Increased knowledge of older adults/aging
- Decreased social isolation
- Opportunity to teach and learn skills
QUESTIONS?