

Focus Group Results: Washtenaw County Senior and Community Center Director's Network

BFA Core Leadership Team Executive Summary Report March 16, 2009

Event Overview

Last February (2008), with support of the Washtenaw County Blueprint for Aging, a network of Senior and Community Center Directors of Washtenaw County was established. The network has been meeting regularly over the past year. On March 12, 2009, the Washtenaw County Senior and Community Center Directors were gathered for the 2nd Annual Washtenaw Day of Dialogue and Focus Group. With coordination from the Washtenaw County Blueprint for Aging, the event included a progress report from the Blueprint for Aging (V. Boyce), an update on Area Agency on Aging 1-B issues pertaining to senior centers (J. McGuire), a discussion on marketing innovations (XXX), and the focus group facilitation.

Purpose of the Focus Group, Methodology

The focus group was designed to capture the experiences and perspectives of the Senior and Community Center leaders involved with the network over the past year. The focus group was comprised of 8 center directors and 5 other community stakeholders. Focus group members responded to questions about the network's accomplishment, facilitators/enablers, barriers, and potential areas of impact for the year ahead. The 45-minute focus group was facilitated by Sue Ann Savas, Blueprint for Aging project evaluator.

Focus Group Themes

What was accomplished? What were the benefits of coming together as a network?

- Commitment between and among the Center Directors
- Collegial/peer support for a stressful job
- Supportive atmosphere without competition among members
- Shared expertise
- Share and reinforce their common goal of programming for seniors of Washtenaw County
- Increased awareness of other Center's programming and community
- Understanding that center programming is tailored to the membership and often reflects the Director's strengths, vision, and personal philosophy
- Increase understanding of various center funding models (millage, membership fees, funding streams) operating in Washtenaw County
- Increased awareness of and access to available resources (i.e. BFA, AAA 1-B), funding sources (i.e. Rislov Foundation), and shared programming (i.e. transportation, music therapy)
- Opportunity to develop a network web-site off of the Blueprint for Aging website, web-site support

What were the facilitating factors or enablers to the network's impact?

- Commitment by the Center Director's and staff
- Natural leadership within the network
- Development of Washtenaw County Senior Center Directory
- Established a master Calendar of Washtenaw County wide Senior Center events
- Rotating the network meetings so that various Center Director's had the opportunity to host the network meeting and provide the group with a tour of the space/programming
- Meeting host had the opportunity to set the agenda and lead the discussion
- AAA 1-B's involvement and commitment to the work of the network

What were the barriers or challenges faced by the network? What got in the way of the work of the network?

- Taking time away from the center to attend the network meetings
- Distance and time needed to travel to and from meetings
- Limited number of staff available to cover for the Director attending network meetings
- Competition for event scheduling

Where do we, as a network of Center Directors, go from here? What are the next steps for the work of the network in the upcoming year?

- Provide an orientation or refresher for new center Directors in Washtenaw County, mentoring
- Schedule quarterly meeting days/times and location in advance
- Continue to rotate meetings at various centers
- Conduct outreach to center Directors who have not yet attended
- Continue resource sharing and collaborative programming
- Plan for a training on Google Groups, perhaps at the Saline Center
- Collaborate on grant writing and maximize use of AAA 1-B grant writing assistance
- Continue to form linkages with AAA 1-B
- Contact the press and media to increase awareness of the network, include center success stories and volunteer efforts (i.e. Dresses for Africa)
- Develop a network brochure with members and affiliated partners (AAA 1-B, BFA)
- Create a matrix/grid describing the various center models within Washtenaw County

Reporting

BFA will distribute the focus group results to the Senior Center and Community Center Directors Network, the Blueprint for Aging Core Leadership Team, and the AAA 1-B for short term planning. Interpretation of results will include a discussion to identify strategic areas where network activities intersect with BFA initiatives and committee work.