



The Transition Network

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It's All About Community

By Mimi Grinker

Isolation can affect one's health. It's another area where TTN-NYC has taken the lead in creating the Caring Collaborative and then rolling it out to other communities.



Living Well Together (LWT) is an effective and cost-efficient model that creates a community of mutual support when health-related issues arise. LWT is the community-based version of TTN's Caring Collaborative (CC), which has been flourishing within the Transition Network for nearly a decade. Both projects, the CC and LWT, consist of a Service Corps, an Information Exchange, and community building through Neighborhood Forums.

The Original Model

The CC was started by Charlotte Frank who created the program following her retirement and a bout of serious illness. That program now boasts 16 neighborhood groups and 325 members in NYC.

Living Well Together

Two years ago, Charlotte, who recently passed away, and I created Living Well Together. As retirees with lots of experience in the nonprofit sector and mission-driven endeavors, we were drawn to the vision and success of the model. Most importantly, the grant that supported the original design and implementation of the CC stipulated that TTN would replicate the model in communities outside of TTN.

Our Rationale: Combating Isolation

We knew firsthand that the model was an antidote to the loneliness and isolation that are increasingly a part of getting older. Geographical mobility and the rise in one-person households can lead to social isolation, which has a negative impact on both psychological and physical health. Building a community of peers ready and willing to provide mutual support in times of health-related adversity, reduces stress, builds confidence, provides the pleasure of community, and improves the well-being of all.

Progress

My team of TTNers and I have been outreaching to community groups, apartment complexes, and religious organizations. We currently are working intensively with UJA-Federation of New York's Engage Jewish Service Corps, an organization that encourages



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volunteers to use their life-long skills, expertise, passion, and leadership to learn about and address issues including poverty, hunger, joblessness, and the needs of caregivers, isolated elderly, and people with special needs. Volunteers choose opportunities that fit their interests and availability or create opportunities of their own.

Engage Living Well Together

"Adding Living Well Together to Engage expands our array of services," notes Rabbi Brian Fink, Director of Engage. "While our main focus is community service, we encourage our members to create balance in their lives. We all need to resolve to spend time taking care of ourselves as we participate with the wider world, making sure that our needs are met as we work to help others in our community. In Hebrew, we call that Kavanah or balance. And, that's where Living Well Together comes in."

Rabbi Fink explains that through this initiative, Engage Living Well Together volunteers will be able to email each other about personal experiences related to medical conditions (such as sharing doctor reviews) or be matched to help each other with nonmedical needs that result from medical situations (such as accompanying other Engage Living Well Together volunteers to medical appointments or walking their dog after they return home from the hospital).

There are currently over 50 Engage Living Well Together members who have signed up for the program and undergone the mandatory orientation, which lays out how the system works, the boundaries of what are allowable and acceptable interactions and the scrupulous adherence to confidentiality. The project went live on February 1, 2017. It will begin with the Information Sharing Component -- the other components will be phased in by spring.

Our Team and Next Steps

A special thanks to TTNs, Linda Furman, Eileen Kobrin, Victoria Hagai, Betty Rauch, Barbara Stahura, and to all who contribute to these efforts.

Living Well Together staff offers technical assistance to community groups and religious institutions who wish to integrate the model into their organizations.

For more information or to start a Living Well Together initiative, **please contact Mimi Grinker at mgrinker@gmail.com**