

You're Invited! OLLI's newest Special Interest Group: Thriving in Community (continued)

by Judy LaMée

Member participation is a key element of each meeting. We count on SIG members to exchange ideas, compare experiences, learn what works and what doesn't in different types of communities, and to benefit from the expertise of other members.

The Thriving in Community leadership, with Amy Davison as chair, envisions the SIG as a communication and information hub for neighborhood-based groups that will develop in places where interested OLLI members live.

As part of OLLI's Life Transitions Committee, the SIG will draw on the knowledge and experience of our membership, seeking input from the OLLI community on topics related to sustaining our ability to live safely in our homes as long as we are able. Courses and seminars may develop as interest warrants.

The group has identified short- and long-term goals:

- Short-term: support formation of neighborhood-based groups that will facilitate volunteer assistance, such as helping with short-term needs, i.e. rides to the airport or doctor offices, meals for neighbors recovering from illness, shopping, pet-sitting, and the like. Sharing items such as tools and equipment, including durable medical equipment, can be helpful to people trying to down-size.
- Long term: Realizing that volunteer assistance is only appropriate for acute, short-term needs and that certain situations require ongoing support, the SIG anticipates developing models for neighborhood-based organizations that help members sustain themselves in their homes and postpone or avoid moving to more institutional residential care. The SIG will help neighborhood groups develop support services based on national prototypes such as the Village-to-Village Network (<http://www.vtvnetwork.org>), as well as other innovative concepts such as using technology. These long-term support services could include basic vetting and referrals of professionals, similar to OLLITalk, but could also extend to neighborhoods negotiating service contracts at group prices for residents. You may think of it as a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) without walls.

As the concept becomes more concrete, the hope is that neighborhood groups will develop all around the area: some neighborhood groups could be as small as an apartment building or condominium; others like those forming in Biltmore Lake, will likely include hundreds of residents. Solutions that work in one community may not be adaptable to another; solutions will of necessity be very neighborhood-specific, not only tailored to a particular neighborhood but developed by that neighborhood.