

President's Award for Collaboration & Advocacy

Renie Carniol

As the Executive Director of the Grotta Fund for Older Adults of the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater MetroWest, Renie Carniol knows that strategic planning and age-friendly communities do not just happen. It takes leadership, commitment, and collaboration across many sectors, organizations, and participants. Her passion for age-friendly work stems from her Wharton MBA, healthcare strategic planning and nonprofit consulting, and as an adjunct professor at Seton Hall University's Center for Public Service. Since 2015, Grotta has focused its grantmaking on age-friendly community development, furthering the Fund's 100-year-old mission of enhancing the lives of older adults in Essex, Union, Morris, Sussex, and Somerset counties.

Partnering with Julia Stoumbos, Program Director of The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation (HMTF), and their support in Bergen County, Renie and Julia have collaborated in grantmaking and guidance. Nine communities have planned and implemented initiatives in Grotta's region. As an example of impact, Renie cites South Orange/Maplewood's increased accessibility and inclusion of older adults in all aspects of their Master Plan, volunteer fairs, housing forums, repair cafes, dedicated communications, and age-friendly businesses.

Along with HMTF, the Rutgers School of Social Work, and other experts, numerous educational conferences were held, and the progression of the work is documented in several published articles in national journals.

To expand age-friendly communities, the Grotta Fund and others are collectively advocating for public grant funding at the county and state levels and developing a New Jersey Multi-Sector Plan for Aging as the next step in Governor Murphy's commitment to New Jersey being an age-friendly state.



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Julia Stoumbos

Ten years ago, The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation (HMTF) established an Aging in Place program and hired Julia Stoumbos as its Director. She created this program, driven by the realization that more people wish to age in their communities - active, independent, and engaged. Recognizing that land use and other policy decisions significantly impact the health and aging landscape, she steered HMTF to invest in an age-friendly community initiative to alter the trajectory of New Jersey's municipalities, which were not designed for healthy, equitable aging in place. Her work is co-created with partner organizations, including the Grotta Fund for Older Adults (Executive Director Renie Carniol), New Jersey Future, the Rutgers School of Social Work, local service providers, and national colleagues.

As a result of this partnership, an entire network of community leaders and affiliated organizations has formed, turning a small initiative into a multisector movement. It's the collaborative spirit among these individuals and organizations that drives progress. Their work creates opportunities to build leadership, strategize, and mobilize to integrate aging into local decision-making. Julia encourages community leaders to forge relationships with planners to advance age-friendly implementation at the local and county level. Professional planners are essential since their expertise spans the defining features of communities for all ages – mixed-use housing, accessory dwelling units, transportation options for non-drivers, pedestrian safety, and accessible parks/public spaces. The success of the age-friendly movement will be defined by state and local policies and practices created by an age-inclusive process that reflects the priorities of older adults.