Public Libraries as Invaluable Resources for Older Adults

Age-Friendly New Jersey and Local Public Libraries

PARTNERSHIP TOOLKIT

Age-Friendly New Jersey
Quarterly Meeting
Leonia Public Library
Leonia, NJ
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Public Libraries as Invaluable Resources for Older Adults

Age Friendly New Jersey/Public Libraries Partnership Toolkit

Age-friendly leaders and local libraries are natural allies—both committed to fostering inclusive, connected, and resource-rich communities. When they join forces, the impact on older adults can be transformative. Here are some powerful strategies to spark collaboration:

🤝 Build Strategic Partnerships

- **Co-host programs**: Partner on workshops, tech help sessions, health screenings, or intergenerational events tailored to older adults.
- **Cross-promote services**: Feature library offerings in age-friendly newsletters and vice versa.
- **Shared planning**: Include library staff in age-friendly coalition meetings and strategic planning sessions.

📚 Expand Lifelong Learning & Resource Navigation

- **Curate age-friendly collections**: Books, toolkits, and digital resources on aging, caregiving, and local services.
- **Offer navigation support**: Train librarians to guide patrons to local aging services, benefits, and community programs.
- **Create a "Lifelong Strong" hub**: Dedicate a space or webpage for older adult resources, events, and pledge info.

🧠 Foster Social Connection & Mental Wellness

- **Combat isolation**: Libraries can host social hours, memory cafés, or storytelling circles.
- **Support caregivers**: Provide respite programs, support groups, and curated materials.
- **Promote volunteerism**: Engage older adults as library volunteers, mentors, or program facilitators.

🛠️ Improve Accessibility & Inclusion

- **Audit library spaces**: Collaborate on age-friendly assessments for seating, signage, lighting, and tech.
- **Offer adaptive tech**: Magnifiers, hearing assistance devices, and large-print materials.
- **Train staff**: Provide age-friendly customer service training and dementia-friendly practices.

📊 Use Data to Drive Impact

- **Survey older patrons**: Gather input on needs, preferences, and barriers.
- **Track engagement**: Use attendance and feedback to refine programs and demonstrate impact.
- **Share success stories**: Highlight outcomes in reports, grant applications, and community presentations.

📘 Age-Friendly NJ + Public Libraries

Partnering for Lifelong Connection & Community Impact

💡 Why Libraries Matter

Public libraries are trusted, welcoming spaces—especially for older adults. They offer access to learning, connection, and community resources. By partnering with libraries, age-friendly leaders can:

- Expand access to vital services
- Foster social connection and reduce isolation
- Promote lifelong learning and digital inclusion
- Strengthen intergenerational engagement

🤝 Partnership Opportunities

✓ Co-host tech help sessions, memory cafés, or wellness workshops
✓ Curate age-friendly resource corners or digital hubs
✓ Train staff in age-friendly and dementia-friendly practices
✓ Promote the Lifelong Strong NJ pledge and local services
✓ Collaborate on outreach, surveys, and program design

✅ Kickoff Checklist

Use this guide to initiate collaboration with your local library:

- Identify library contacts and schedule an intro meeting
- Share AFNJ goals and explore shared priorities
- Choose one pilot initiative to launch together
- Promote jointly via newsletters, flyers, and social media
- Evaluate impact and plan next steps

🖂 SAMPLE OUTREACH MESSAGE

“We believe [Library Name] is a vital partner in building an age-friendly New Jersey. Let’s connect to explore how we can collaborate to support older adults through programs, outreach, and shared resources.”

📍 Ready to Partner?

Connect with the AFNJ team or reach out to your local library today.

Actionable Checklist and Outreach Template

Designed to help AFNJ leaders initiate and strengthen partnerships with local libraries.

📘 Age-Friendly NJ and Public Libraries

Partnership Kickoff Checklist

Goal: Build sustainable collaborations that position libraries as hubs for older adult engagement, resource navigation, and lifelong learning.

✅ Step 1: Identify & Connect

- [ ] Compile a list of local libraries in your region
- [ ] Identify key contacts (e.g., library director, adult services coordinator)
- [ ] Send personalized outreach email (see template below)
- [ ] Schedule an introductory meeting or site visit

✅ Step 2: Align Missions & Explore Opportunities

- [ ] Share AFNJ goals
- [ ] Learn about the library's current programs for older adults
- [ ] Discuss shared priorities: social connection, tech access, health literacy, etc.
- [ ] Explore co-hosting events or resource distribution

✅ Step 3: Co-Design & Pilot

- [ ] Choose one collaborative initiative to launch (e.g., memory café, ASK kiosk, tech help desk) (See below re: AKS kiosk and Memory Café)
- [ ] Develop a simple action plan with roles and timelines
- [ ] Create branded materials or signage if needed
- [ ] Promote jointly via newsletters, social media, and flyers

✅ Step 4: Evaluate & Expand

- [ ] Collect feedback from participants and staff
- [ ] Track attendance and engagement metrics
- [ ] Debrief with library partners to refine approach
- [ ] Plan next steps or scale to additional branches

Sample Outreach Template Email

TEMPLATE TO LIBRARIES

To: Library Director
From: _____ AFNJ Member
Subject: Exploring a Partnership: Age-Friendly NJ & [Library Name]

Dear [Library Contact Name],
I hope this message finds you well. I'm reaching out on behalf of Age-Friendly _____ [Town, NJ] , an affiliate of Age-Friendly New Jersey, to explore a potential partnership with [Library Name] that supports older adults in our community.
Libraries are trusted, welcoming spaces—and we believe they're uniquely positioned to serve as hubs for lifelong learning, social connection, and resource navigation. We'd love to connect and discuss how we might collaborate on programs, outreach, or shared initiatives that align with your mission and the goals of our statewide age-friendly movement.
Would you be open to a brief meeting in the coming weeks? We're excited about the possibilities and look forward to learning more about your work.

Warm regards,

[Your Name]
[Your Title / Organization]
[Contact Info]

MEMORY CAFE

A **Memory Café** is a welcoming, stigma-free gathering space designed for people living with memory loss, dementia, or cognitive changes—and their care partners, family, and friends. It's not a clinic or a lecture. It's a place to connect, relax, and enjoy meaningful activities in a supportive environment.

🧠 What Happens at a Memory Café?

- **Socializing without pressure**: No one is asked about diagnoses. It's about people, not conditions.
- **Engaging activities**: Music, storytelling, art, movement, or themed discussions that spark joy and connection.
- **Peer support**: Caregivers and participants can share experiences and build community.
- **Safe public outings**: Especially helpful for those who may feel isolated or anxious in traditional settings.

📍 **Where They're Held**

Memory Cafés often take place in libraries, museums, community centers, coffee shops, or faith-based spaces. Some meet monthly, others more frequently—and many are free or low-cost.

💡 **Why They Matter**

They offer a rare blend of dignity, belonging, and fun, helping people live graciously alongside dementia while reducing isolation and stress for caregivers.

🏛️ Union County Adult ASK Initiative

Aging Services Kiosk: Libraries as Gateways to Vital Resources

📌 **Overview.** The Adult ASK (Aging Services Kiosk) initiative is a collaborative model launched in Union County, NJ, that positions public libraries as trusted access points for older adults seeking health and social services. By embedding trained professionals within library spaces, ASK bridges gaps in service delivery and fosters age-friendly, inclusive communities.

🤝 **Partners**

- Union County Division on Aging
- Local Health Departments
- Public Library Leadership
- Community-Based Organizations

🛠️ **How It Works**

- Designated Hours: ASK staff available weekly at library branches
- Services Offered:
  - Medicare & Medicaid navigation
  - SNAP and housing assistance
  - Mental health referrals
  - Printed guides and digital access
- **Approach**: Welcoming, confidential, and culturally responsive

📊 **Impact Highlights**

- Hundreds of older adults served annually
- Increased access to benefits and referrals
- Strengthened trust between libraries and underserved populations
- Positive feedback from patrons and staff

🔄 Lessons & Replication

- **Success Factors**:
  - Cross-sector collaboration
  - Staff training and clear protocols
  - Community trust and visibility
- **Challenges**:
  - Staffing sustainability
- Privacy and space constraints

Scalability: ASK is adaptable to other counties and library systems

📣 Call to Action:

- Interested in replicating the ASK model in your community?
- Connect with Union County Division of Aging to share resources, lessons, and strategies.
- Connect with Age-Friendly New Jersey to share resources, lessons, and strategies.
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🌐 **Learn more:**

Age-Friendly New Jersey: www.agefriendlynj.org

New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well: www.njaaw.org

Lifelong Strong New Jersey: https://lifelongstrongnj.org/

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Take the Lifelong Strong NJ Pledge!

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