

Adjusting to Aging

06/06/2008

New 'FOCIS': Group aims to help people adjust to aging

By: Sean Dieterich , The Independent

A new name brings a new "FOCIS," as the former Elder Abuse Task Force seeks to show the community the positive aspects of aging.

It's that positive perspective that led those behind the task force to rename their organization. Now called FOCIS - Focus on Community Initiatives for Seniors - the group seeks to do more than help seniors who have been exploited. They now want to give seniors the tools to empower themselves.

The Elder Abuse Task Force was formed in November 2003 to raise awareness of elder abuse. Judy Gorman-Prow, a caseworker for Adult Protective Services, said the group decided to expand its priorities because they felt too much of the necessary information on how to adapt to senior living was being overlooked.

"We hear so much of the negative," she said. "Let's refocus on how do we empower people."

One way FOCIS is seeking to do this is with a conference at Hon-Dah Conference Center on June 19, titled "A Celebration of Aging - Exploring Alternative Living." Gorman-Prow said the group has held conferences before, but this will be the first year under the new name and new outlook.

"(We will give) people new ideas on how to age well," she said.

The conference starts at 8 a.m., with a 7 a.m. registration, and will continue to 4:30 p.m. The cost of the conference is \$30 before June 10 and \$35 at the door. The cost includes a continental breakfast and a luncheon.

Gorman-Prow said conferences of this sort usually take place in cities like Phoenix or Flagstaff, and are much more expensive.

"We are unique in bringing this conference to the area," she said.

Maria Donaghy, bereavement coordinator for RTA Hospice, said 10 people have been working on a committee to put this conference together, all from a wide range of organizations and disciplines. She said the end result will be a conference that is more positive than the ones the organization has put on in years past.

"We can show people how to age more successfully," she said.

The conference starts with emcee Barbara Bruce welcoming everybody and an Apache prayer and song by Cline Griggs. Afterwards, the conference's keynote speaker, Eric Haider, will give his speech. Gorman-Prow said Haider is recognized throughout the nation and will be speaking on long-term care.

"He's going to address the new ways of long-term living for seniors," she said.

Haider's focus is on "less administration, more patient care," Donaghy added.

Some of the conference's sessions will show attendees how to live a healthy life through physical activity and alternative therapy. Some other topics, Donaghy said, seek to empower widowed seniors with skills they may not have learned while married, such as cooking, home maintenance and finance management.

"A lot of our surviving family members are at a complete loss," she said. "This is a way to show you how to get through that."

And the hot topic of past conferences, Gorman-Prow said, is back for another year. A session on "Advance Directives" will be available, presenting the right way to direct family members on

how to handle the death of a loved one.

Another new thing at this conference is the presentation of awards for successful seniors. Donaghy said it was another way to show attendees on how to age gracefully and successfully.

"Some of the most successful people I encounter are seniors," she said. "We want to promote seniors who have been successful in their lives. Someone who can be a mentor, someone you can look up to."

Not only are they providing an informative and fun session, Gorman-Prow said, they are doing it at a fraction of the cost of other conferences. She said the main reason is generous donations from multiple organizations, such as City of Show Low, Town of Pinetop-Lakeside and White Mountain Woman's Club.

"We've been able to do all this because we've had donors," she said. "It is affordable to people."

Gorman-Prow said anyone who is able to should attend, whether they are an elder, a caregiver or just a member of the community.

"I think people in the community should just take advantage of this opportunity," she said.

Donaghy sees the conference as a way for people to get together, to share stories and help each other out.

"This is to plant a seed to gain information," she said. "It's also a good networking opportunity."

While FOCIS has received help with putting on this conference, Gorman-Prow said they could always use some more help from professionals in law enforcement, medicine, religious organizations and financial institutions. She added she would like to see the community more involved in their organization and help to plan forums, events and future conferences.

But focusing on the now, Gorman-Prow said the conference they have planned should greatly serve the community. She said if there was anything people should take from the conference, it is that there is nothing to be afraid of when it comes to growing old.

"They can look forward to aging," she said. "Maybe it'll show them there's hope."

For more information about FOCIS, the upcoming conference or to register, call Linda Haynes at (928) 521-3944, Georgina Cromwell at (928) 338-3674 or e-mail FOCIS.navco@yahoo.com.

Published at:

http://www.wmicentral.com:80/site/news.cfm?newsid=19750304&BRD=2264&PAG=461&dept_id=506172&rfi=6

**Reach the reporter at seand@wmicentral.com*