

Full Service for Seniors



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A study on continual programming options for seniors, marked by high flexibility and low cost, thereby benefitting senior patrons and the library alike.

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It's not surprising that many libraries offer programs geared toward seniors. In a society where the elderly population is only growing by percent, it makes sense to reach out to this community of people who may need library services more than ever and still have a say in the future of libraries. What is surprising is the fact that many libraries offer one or two programs on an occasional basis but have no continuing commitment to providing a constant stream of relevant and timely programs to serve this frequently underserved population.

With this spotty-at-best service creating frustration at the lack of consistency, libraries are likely losing ground with one of our most valuable resources: our seniors. It can be witnessed firsthand in libraries anywhere the difficulties seniors have: lack of money, poor health, disability, lack of technology training, even social isolation. If these libraries truly want to serve and increase the loyalty of their local senior populations, there has to be more offered than a class here and there every few months. There has to be a dedication to providing a series of classes geared specifically toward their needs on a regular basis. This program, Full-Service for Seniors, aims to do just that, with little to no cost to the libraries or their elderly patrons. It offers flexibility in its ability to be added onto or modified as seasonal needs may change and calls upon community groups and organizations to get involved with the populations they serve, strengthening connections between the library and its community.

The program as currently proposed consists of five categories of classes or activities designed specifically with seniors in mind: financial assistance, health and wellness, technology, social, and outreach. As previously stated, new categories could easily be added as needs that aren't being met become apparent or interest is expressed by local senior populations. Below is detailed a brief description of each of the proposed classes.

Financial Assistance Classes

Taxes for Seniors – Help navigating the new challenges involved with retirement, social security, inheritance, and more when filing taxes.

Signing up for Medicare/Medicaid – Class teaching the process and paperwork of the initial sign-up for Medicare and/or Medicaid; understanding the way the systems work.

Paperwork Assistance – Help filling out various paperwork that often involves online forms and other technologies seniors may not understand, along with helping those with disabilities affecting dexterity and mobility fill out these forms.

Estate Planning – Workshops on the basis of end-of-life planning: wills, what to do when a spouse passes away, inheritances, safeguarding your assets, etc.

Extreme Couponing – Informal classes teaching how better to find, organize, and bulk up coupon collections for maximum discount. Also would include a trading component.

Health and Wellness Classes

Senior Fitness – Simple, low-impact workouts focused on easing pain and staying healthy, including attention paid to common problems such as arthritis, back pain, poor mobility, relaxation, good heart health, better circulation, and more.

Nutrition – Series of classes focusing on good eating habits in general and specifically for seniors who may have higher need for certain dietary supplements. Also would focus on diets for special diseases such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes. Ideally would work in tandem with a simple cooking class (below).

Cooking Made Simple – Series of classes that focus on teaching seniors who need guidance in the kitchen in a world increasingly filled with unhealthy convenience foods. Focus on simple preparations that do not challenge students with limited dexterity or mobility. Introduction of kitchen tools designed to make the food preparation process easier.

Technology Classes

Computer Basics for Seniors – Perhaps would function best as a series of classes beginning with how to turn a computer on, use a mouse, use a keyboard. Would focus on challenges inherent to the elderly as

well, such as changing screen resolution, enlarging text, etc. Ideally, “graduates” of these classes would then be mainstreamed into any pre-existing computer classes that move beyond basics.

Social Networking – A class designed to help seniors stay in touch with loved ones that are far away.

Could include Email/Chat, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, and blogs.

Screen Readers and Other Adaptive Technologies – Programs that teach library users about the existence of and how to use both in-house technologies and online or other tools for download or purchase in their own homes that might aid those with visual, hearing, or cognitive disabilities.

Social Activities

Storytime for Seniors (Audio Book Club) – Geared specifically toward the visually impaired but open to all seniors. This weekly gathering would bring together seniors to listen, together, to an audiobook, with discussion following the completion of the title. A cross between story time and a book club, giving seniors both the ability to enjoy books but also the social interaction that comes with storytimes traditionally reserved for children.

Classic Movie Night – A weekly movie night open to all library patrons but focusing on movies from the older generations’ classic films.

Ice Cream Socials – Music, ice cream, games, possibly limited only to seniors in an attempt to create an environment less overwhelmed with people and more focused on their specific social etiquette and interests.

Wii Night – A great opportunity for fun and for exercise, while the seniors get a chance to interact with one another in a cheerful environment. A focus on games like bowling and baseball in order to encourage maximum enjoyment by all present (those playing and watching).

Outreach

Rotating Audio Book and Large-Print Book Collections – A collection of books not housed in the library

building but at senior centers and retirement homes that rotates from location to location, getting refreshed with new materials when the cycle completes its course.

The cost for this series of programs need not be prohibitive. The resources available for seniors and the organizations existing with programs already developed with an eye toward their specific needs could be put to great use.

Financial assistance classes, for example, can be run with retired professionals from local groups...CPAs, tax attorneys, estate planners, even volunteers from local church organizations who simply have an ability to aid someone filling out paperwork online. These individuals and organizations frequently have as part of their group goals the betterment of the community, and chances are, they are eager to find new ways to reach out and make a difference. A partnership with the local library may be the opportunity they are looking for. Fitness and nutrition classes could easily be run by individuals working as nurses, doctors, or even personal trainers at local organizations such as the YMCA. Even if a small fee is offered to these professionals to come in and run a weekly or monthly class, the investment wouldn't be exorbitant if most classes are kept to a maximum of one hour. Technology courses and social activities could easily be run in-house by the existing professional library staff and would give librarians the opportunity to meet with, get to know, and understand their senior patrons, thus strengthening the community bond further. In addition to local organizations, national organizations such as the AARP, NIH, the Administration on Aging, and Easter Seals are fantastic resources that exist solely for the purpose of aiding seniors in just these types of areas. Grants may even be available through them.

The culmination of all these programs would ultimately result in not only a better quality of life for the seniors involved, it would also build community relations, increase the physical and mental health of the community's senior population, create a more educated senior population, strengthen support for the library, and increase circulation/reference/attendance statistics for the library as a whole.