Creative New Jersey’s Statewide Conversations – COVID-19 Response

Call #7 – May 13, 2020

Editor’s note: This summary covers the general topics and resources shared during the seventh call in a series of statewide conversations hosted by Creative New Jersey to bring together our network and help people across our state keep connected, share information, and unite in solidarity as we navigate the Coronavirus response in New Jersey.

To register for Creative New Jersey’s Statewide Conversations on COVID-19 Response, click the following link: https://bit.ly/34WETWm. For screen reader-friendly registration, use the following link: https://forms.gle/9kUlVvyK8akMENA6 Calls take place every Wednesday in April and May 2020 (April 1, 8, 15,22 and 29; May 6, 13, and 20) at 10am.

SUMMARY

Topic: Resilient Senior Living during COVID-19

Guest speaker #1: Michael Oakes, Senior Vice President – Springpoint Senior Living Foundation
https://springpointsl.org/foundation/

Guest speaker #2: Janet Sharma, Project Coordinator – Age-Friendly Englewood
https://www.age-friendlyenglewood.org/

Resources shared by speakers and participants during the call include:

- Affordable Housing Resources across the state
- Food, drug and supplies resources
- Ideas for reducing isolation among seniors
- Activities and Arts resources for seniors
- Affordable house maintenance and repair services
- Information about starting age-friendly coalitions in your town or city
- Resources from foundations supporting age-friendly efforts

Watch the full recording of this conversation here: https://youtu.be/GLNHCotViHI
Michael Oakes (Springpoint Senior Living Foundation)
https://springpointsl.org/foundation/

Michael Oakes, VP of the Springpoint Foundation spoke about what challenges our seniors are facing and how Springpoint is leveraging their influence, access and partnerships to support their residents. If you’d like to connect with Michael about possible partnerships, collaborations or help, email him at: moakes@springpointsl.org.

Springpoint Senior Living is the largest nonprofit provider of senior housing in New Jersey and manages different types of senior properties and facilities including:
- 8 Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC) around New Jersey – which include independent living and progressive care as residents age, and also includes a clinic, healthcare & rehab.
- 19 affordable housing communities throughout New Jersey, which are subsidized by HUD. Most of the communities managed are at the low end of the poverty line. These affordable care facilities spread throughout 12 counties in New Jersey and are only for seniors who are living at or below the poverty level.

The Springpoint Foundation focuses on tapping resources for the benefit of their residents, including resident financial assistance and spiritual care programs, affordable housing support, and an internship program for youth interested in senior living careers. https://springpointsl.org/

Challenges for seniors during COVID-19
- **Social Isolation** has been one of the biggest challenges, and particularly for seniors who live in affordable housing communities, though it affects both communities. Seniors have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and residents have high anxiety about whether or not their community will be affected.
  - Seniors are processing news and information about COVID-19 differently than the rest of us (the senior population experiencing a huge surge in illness and death). Isolation is causing heightened anxiety.
- **Food and supplies access**, particularly felt, again, in affordable housing communities
  - The increase in price for food and the access to get the food in the affordable housing senior communities has been a challenge, as most seniors are living on fixed incomes.
- **Mask affordability**
- **Many seniors are unable to get transportation**
  - Grocery stores are doing early hours for seniors but some of the seniors are saying that the early senior hours are not that helpful because they are not ready to be up and out that early. Springpoint has been working to provide them transportation to get to the store.
- **Financial resources**: The pandemic has changed the way Springpoint is reaching out to their vendors to see how they can work with them to provide these essentials. Some residents are living off of $7,000 annually - so increased costs of food and supplies drastically affect them. Springpoint staff are always staying mindful of the financial restrictions that these seniors carry.
Mitigating challenges for seniors

Communication, communication, communication

- Springpoint is in constant communications with the residents, their families, healthcare providers and employees to make sure everyone is on the same page.
- Springpoint reports within each community the number of residents with COVID-19, the number of residents who have passed away from it, the number of employees that have it and the safety protocols in place.

Dealing with Social Isolation

- Staff post messages and are reaching out to their residents as much as possible
- The affordable housing communities lie all over the state and staff have been trying to connect them with local schools/children and have created a pen pal program.
  - The East Windsor and Hightstown campuses have a huge Mandarin-speaking population. The schools have started to use senior pen pals as a way for children to practice writing Mandarin.
  - These kinds of connections provide an opportunity for the kids as well as the senior residents. Kids have been taking pictures of themselves and sending it to seniors as well with letters.
- The CCRC campuses have a Springpoint Channel they can watch on TV – and Springpoint has been streaming a variety of content, like yoga classes, for people to watch. Springpoint also makes sure that the channel is used to share positive messages (you are safe, you are OK, we are taking care of you, you are not alone).
- The Springpoint Foundation has reached out to their Benefits Administration (Aetna) and Monmouth Health Association to provide some healthy (mental and physical) programming for the community, as well.
- Staff at the Foundation have been working to raise money to meet these needs. Additionally, development staff are recording quick 1-minute videos saying personalized hellos to residents through an app on their phones and send those to residents. There’s been lots of appreciative feedback on that, as well as handwritten notes that the Foundation staff are sending to residents.

Food and Supplies Access

- Springpoint is leaning on partnerships that already exist and are working with them even more closely during this time:
  - Monmouth and Ocean foodbank and Mercer Street Partners, have been incredible partners in food and supplies access.
  - The Foundation has been reaching out to local restaurants that have positioned themselves as a means to support those in need. For example, if restaurants have been helping to support first responders, Springpoint will reach out to them to see if they may also be able to support seniors. Some can and some can’t, but it never hurts to ask. There are seniors who cannot cook for themselves or leave their homes to get food, and so the Foundation is working with the residential staff to find creative solutions to address the need.
  - Springpoint also reached out to local farmers who may have some excess
    - 4 Communities (spread over Union, Monmouth and Mercer counties) are now getting monthly delivery of fresh fruits and produce by a local farmer in Hightstown
- The Foundation has written a few grants to help buy food from those restaurants and other resources.
In the beginning of March the board allowed them to use some unrestricted funds to stock food pantries in all 19 affordable housing communities, and have done two rounds of stocking so far. This provides the seniors a bit of safety to be able to have access to the staples they need and not have to worry about traveling.

**Masks**

- Springpoint has been working with many vendors and partners and have secured masks for each resident. The access and costs of masks is also a challenge – for seniors on a fixed income, $5 for a mask can be a lot.

**What can I do?**

- Reach out to your board if you are a nonprofit. Springpoint has a corporate and a foundation board and has been able to access resources they never thought they would have a connection with to donate. The board wants to help and are there to be your support and provide resources.
- Reach out to your local Office of Emergency Management to see what is needed and what resources they may have to help. This is not the time to be shy in asking for help!

**Comments and questions for Springpoint included:**

**C: Hearing loss, an invisible disability**

In the senior population, about half have a hearing loss. Medicare does not cover hearing aids, and when people are wearing masks, even those seniors with partial hearing are rendered basically deaf. The ones you hear the least are the ones who can’t hear the most, and sometimes people who are experiencing hearing loss hide it. We know that isolation is deadly, and for those who cannot hear, they can’t pick up the phone and just talk to someone. There’s a need for creative ideas to help combat the isolation. (This participant is following up with Springpoint to brainstorm creative ways to help address this issue.)

**Q: What are the resources for people who cannot afford the graduated care community but whose income exceeds the limits for the low-income housing?**

A: It can be a challenge for people who fall in-between the requirements of different housing options. There are often long waiting lists to get into affordable care facilities. Here are two resources:

- It is best to check with your county office on aging/social services (scroll down to see contact info for each county’s office: [https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/home/saaaa.html](https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/home/saaaa.html)
- NJ State Housing Resource Center: [https://www.nj.gov/njhrc/](https://www.nj.gov/njhrc/)

**Q: Are there resources to help seniors (I’m 74) to assist people with property taxes and reasonably priced home repair?**

A: Springpoint is based off of state regulations that they must follow as a nonprofit. There are resources available - The State’s Department of Human Services Division of Aging would be a great place to look: [https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/home/saaaa.html](https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/home/saaaa.html)
(Janet Sharma response) There are tax freezes you can get at your local tax office if you meet the income requirements. Rebuilding Together North Jersey is a great resource of this type of service: https://rtnorthjersey.org/. Some community development organizations may also be able to assist.

(Participant suggestion) Another organization to consider is Umbrella, which provides affordable home repair and other services – national service area, and in northern NJ. www.askumbrella.com

Q: Are there things that faith-based organizations can do to support nonprofits that may be providing food and other supports for seniors?
A: Absolutely. If faith-based organizations have programs or are doing work in communities there are definitely opportunities to work together. The best thing to do is reach out to each other and start a conversation.

Janet Sharma (Age-Friendly Englewood)
https://www.age-friendlyenglewood.org/

Janet Sharma retired in 2015 from the Bergen County Volunteer Center, but saw an initiative ramping up by the Grotta Fund (Grotta Fund for Senior Care: https://grottafund.org/) and the Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation. You can reach out to Janet at: janet.sharma.44@gmail.com.

These foundations put out a request for proposals for communities to form coalitions to help people Age in Place. Englewood has a very diverse community and a lot of low-income residents, and it seemed like a good candidate for this initiative. Janet submitted a proposal and subsequently received a planning grant, and a continuation grant for this work.

- The first thing that Age-Friendly Englewood did was put out a survey to find where there were gaps in service. They found out that there was a lack of and therefore need of information. Bergen county is a media desert and lacked local reporting sources, particularly after the Bergen Record was purchased by Gannett.
  - To address this issue, Age-Friendly Englewood started a newsletter and created a directory of senior services, which they printed (4,000 in circulation) since many people in the population they are trying to serve either don’t have access to or have difficulty navigating technology. Before COVID-19 hit, the local hospital is going to redesign and reprint the directory but they’re obviously busy right now.
  - Began doing a newsletter every day since the shut down because there was so much information to provide those populations in Englewood the information they desperately needed.
  - The newsletter has been very successful - about 700 people read it a day (42,000 readers so far). Did a survey and 100% of people said they want to get the newsletter every day and the information was useful. Pulling all types of information:
    - Resources and stats
- Programs or supplies that are available to seniors
- Information on testing and contact tracing
- AARP resources
- Info on Food, masks, and other supplies, what the rules are around patronizing restaurants
  - World Center Kitchen (org that helps pay local food providers to provide food to those in need) – Family Promise in Englewood is partnering with them to hand out frozen prepared meals: https://wck.org/
- Plus uplifting videos/messages.

- Got more involved in the network of nonprofits and providing programs that involved seniors and work with other groups to include seniors and get more engaged in the community:
  - Concerts at the library
  - Public art project
  - Pedestrian task force focused on walkability and helping with getting more benches around town
  - Promoting a doo-wop concert at the Bergen Performing Arts Center
  - Blood pressure measuring with the Department of Health
  - Community garden at the low-income senior building
  - Organizing a mental health conference that would address isolation in seniors
  - Intergenerational program working with a local high school to work with seniors

- Age-Friendly Englewood participates on daily call with other social service providers to network and see who needs what.
  - Example - the schools have asked students if they have access to the internet and they said yes, but turns out they meant they had internet access only through their phones - they can't really do their homework off the phone.
    - Worked on getting chromebooks and then Sharma was able to connect the group with Verizon and other providers who offer disaster services.

- Combating Isolation:
  - Age-Friendly Englewood is putting together a list of 20-30 volunteer callers and matching them with people who would like a call. Local Fire and Police Departments can check in on seniors living along, but they aren’t there to chat – it’s a quick call. This is more of a friendly chat.
  - Age-Friendly Englewood has people volunteer to assist seniors and others with technology over the phone, as well, particularly for smartphones.
  - Every Door Direct: Delivering a postcard to every person in town (must be a specific size and bundled a certain way). The postcard Age-Friendly Englewood has created is from the Mayor, Twon Council and Age Friendly Englewood letting people know that they can receive help connecting to resources and to ask if they would like a call or need other services.
    - Every Door Direct Mail: https://www.usps.com/business/every-door-direct-mail.htm
  - Working hard to really find where there are gaps in services and utilizing the connections they already have. Focusing on all who are isolated, not just seniors (single or single-parents home
with kids). Englewood is very interconnected so relying on people to reach out to their neighbors as well

- The town’s Recreation Department has taken on the challenge. Initially of getting food to kids who used to receive subsidized meals at school and other people. They are stationed at local spots to provide food, and partnered with local restaurants. This has expanded to others, as well -- there are no requirements, anyone who needs food can come and get it.
  - Center for Food Action is doing this as well: [https://cfanj.org/](https://cfanj.org/)

**It’s critical to keep sharing information:** You don’t know you need a service until you need it, and then you need it immediately, so keep sharing information about resources that are out there!

**Other resources from Age-Friendly Englewood:**
- Age-Friendly Englewood Resource Links: [https://www.age-friendlyenglewood.org/helpful-links-.html](https://www.age-friendlyenglewood.org/helpful-links-.html)
- Age-Friendly Englewood’s Plan: [https://www.age-friendlyenglewood.org/our-plan.html](https://www.age-friendlyenglewood.org/our-plan.html)

**Comments and questions for Age-Friendly Englewood included:**

**Q:** Premiere Stages at Kean University has created a playwriting award for Seniors living in assisted and independent communities. Who can I reach out to at Spring Point and Age Friendly Englewood to get this information out to residents/contacts? [http://www.premierestagesatkean.com/announcing-new-award](http://www.premierestagesatkean.com/announcing-new-award)

**A:** Send to both Janet and Michael. Englewood public library would be another great place to provide this information.

(Resource from participant) Music Moments has started providing singing telegrams – you can call and request a song and message be delivered to someone else, and can be on the call when that happens. For more info email Singing Telegrams at themusicmoment@gmail.com

**Q:** Are there other organizations like Age-Friendly Englewood, operating in other communities around NJ?

**A:** There are age-friendly groups in Bergen County towns and cities including: Englewood, Ridgewood, Westwood, Garfield, Teaneck, and Fairlawn. In other counties there are: South Orange-Maplewood, Tri-Town – Chathams and Madison, Elizabeth, Montclair (through the city), Princeton, New Providence, and Livingston.

**Renie Carniol, Executive Director of the Grotta Fund for Senior Care shared information, as well (https://grottafund.org/):** You can get in touch with Renie for more info at: r.carniol@jfedgmw.org

- These Age-Friendly groups are all working to meet the individual needs within these communities. For example: in Essex County -the group was able to get Meals On Wheels into public housing which hadn’t been able to bring those services in locally. Grotta also helped with a GoFundMe page to raise funds. Age Friendly Coordinators are working with Mayors to ensure services are being made available and that
partnerships with nonprofits are happening. Where these communities had established relationships are now strengthening relationships.

- Jewish Family Service in Central Jersey is looking for food for the City of Elizabeth – the Food Pantry is in desperate need! If you can help, please help!
- People are struggling not only with their grandparents, but those who care for their grandchildren.
- Trinitas and Jewish Family Services are working to helping to provide resources for people who leave the hospital to come home - the care and the supplies.
- Grotta Fund is holding a virtual conference soon: https://grottafund.org/conference-agenda/

**Q: Can people start an age-friendly program in their community?**
Contact Janet Sharma or Renie Carniol - they are happy to share what they know and help where they can. There are pop up opportunities for grants sometimes as well. In addition, **Livable Communities (facet of AARP)** can help you get started, workbooks available for free.

- Janet Sharma: janet.sharma.44@gmail.com
- Renie Carniol: rcarniol@jfedgmw.org
- Livable Communities AARP: https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/

**RESOURCES**

Additional resources shared by participants on our call:

**Activities and Arts resources for seniors:**
- Music Momentum – music therapy practice is providing singing telegrams. Email: themusicmoment@gmail.com
- The Sparta Camera Club is providing online training for basic photography. Photoshop, Lightroom and photography programs for our members.
- NJ Federation of Camera Clubs: http://www.njfcc.org/
- Many community colleges allow seniors to take tuition-free classes online, and some also provide Microsoft Office for free and Adobe products at deep discounts. Contact your local community college to learn more.
- NJ State Library has a lot of resources, including books, movies, music, and health information, as well: https://www.njla.org/

**Affordable Housing Resources for South Jersey:**
- Springpoint is in Burlington and Atlantic County. There is a limited supply on the affordable housing side, unfortunately there tends to be a very long waiting list.
- County Offices on aging/social services (scroll down to see contact info for each county’s office: https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/home/saaaa.html
- NJ State Housing Resource Center: https://www.nj.gov/njhrc/
- Atlantic County resource for housing https://mhaac.info/housing-and-rental-assistance.html
**Housing Navigators:**
Bergen County has Navigators to help seniors navigate housing. There may be Navigators in other counties, as well:

- Navigator Notes can be found on Bergen County website/ Senior Services page: [https://www.co.bergen.nj.us/division-of-senior-services](https://www.co.bergen.nj.us/division-of-senior-services)
- To be included to get Navigator Notes on a regular basis, with any Hot Topic interim blasts: email seniors@co.bergen.nj.us or call Maureen McCormick at 201-336-7435. For any senior age 60+ who has any questions about programs and services in Bergen County can call the Senior Help Line at 201-336-7400.

**Food delivery and drug information:**
- Paterson NJ Volunteer food delivery: Neighbor Express Volunteer Grocery delivery in Paterson: [https://tinyurl.com/ycjp4bs](https://tinyurl.com/ycjp4bs)
- MedlinePlus - government info source for drugs: [https://medlineplus.gov/](https://medlineplus.gov/)

**Affordable house maintenance and repair services:**
- The State’s Department of Human Services Division of Aging: [https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/home/saaaa.html](https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/home/saaaa.html)
- Rebuilding Together North Jersey is a great resource of this type of service: [https://rtnorthjersey.org/](https://rtnorthjersey.org/). Some community development organizations may also be able to assist.
- Umbrella, which provides affordable home repair and other services – national service area, and in northern NJ. [www.askumbrella.com](http://www.askumbrella.com)

**Resources for Older Adults from Age-Friendly Englewood’s Newsletter:**
COVID-19 Checklist for Older Adults from AARP: [https://bit.ly/3dEt7TP](https://bit.ly/3dEt7TP)

If you are lonely or isolated:
The Englewood Fire Department checks daily on the welfare of older adults, differently-abled residents, or those who may have special needs, but who live alone, with no one to look in on them on a daily basis. To sign up, click on the link above or call 201-568-6304.

- Friendly Callers - If you would like a call from a friendly local volunteer, email agefriendlyenglewood@gmail.com
- Check with your local fire or police department about wellness checks.

**Beware of Scammers!**
- Scammers Turn to Extortion Emails: [https://tinyurl.com/y8p4v8vl](https://tinyurl.com/y8p4v8vl)
- Call AARP's Fraud Watch Hotline 1-877-908-3360
- and check out [www.aarp.org/fraudwatchnetwork](http://www.aarp.org/fraudwatchnetwork)

**Exercises for older adults**
Pandemic Makes Clear the Case for Advance Care Planning

- Five Wishes is an approach to discussing your care and comfort choices.
- Free webinar about "Five Wishes" Wed., May 13 - call 201-592-5783
- https://tinyurl.com/y9rp6hko

Face Coverings

- How to Clean and Re-Use a Facemask: https://tinyurl.com/yazjxkvu
- Click here for CDC guidelines: https://tinyurl.com/yden73x4