

African American older adult community forum

Thank you to everyone who participated in the African American older adult community forum that was held at Mt. Zion Baptist Church on November 14, 2017.

Pam Bracey, Cultural Diversity Specialist from the North/Eastside Senior Coalition (NESCO), began the forum by welcoming and introducing our guest facilitators: Dr. Ruben Anthony Jr., President and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Madison and Rev. Marcus Allen, the Pastor at Mount Zion Baptist Church in Madison.

Toya Johnson from United Way of Dane County and Angela Velasquez of the Area on Agency of Dane County then discussed their agencies role in funding the county-wide cultural diversity program for older adults.

Jim Krueger, Executive Director of NESCO then discussed the purpose of the forum: to identify the issues and concerns impacting the lives of older adults in the African American community in Dane County. The information gathered will be used to develop the next strategic plan for county-wide African American older adult programming.

Pam Bracey followed with a brief overview of the current African American cultural diversity programming that she coordinates with the funding allocated by Dane County and United Way.

Participants were divided into five groups to discuss the following questions and each group then reported back to the large group.

- 1) What are the issues, concerns or needs that the older adults in our African American community are facing today?
- 2) What gets in the way of addressing these issues, concerns or needs?
- 3) What solutions do you recommend to address these issues, concerns or needs?
- 4) What community strengths and resources currently exist to address these issues and needs? How can we better work together?
- 5) What additional community resources do we need in place to address these needs?

Dr. Anthony and Rev. Marcus Allen facilitated the small group discussion and report outs by each group.

The tone of the discussion was respectful and some valuable feedback was generated. At the end of the forum an African American participant suggested a follow up meeting of just the African Americans to discuss these issues further. The African Americans would then report back on their discussion to NESCO, Dane County and the United Way.

A special thank you to Dr. Rueben Anthony and Rev. Marcus Allen for leading this community discussion. We hope this is the beginning of many fruitful discussions in the future. From these conversations we will develop and implement a county wide action plan to address the

issues and concerns impacting the lives of older adults in the African American community in Dane County.

The main issues, concerns and needs brought up include:

- Affordable housing and housing in safe neighborhoods
- Transportation
- Social isolation
- Health literacy
- Awareness/access to community resources (who to go to, where to go).
- Cultural understanding of African Americans
- Advocacy

The main barriers identified include:

- Funding/money
- Cultural understanding
- Lack of advocacy and information or lack sufficient education
- Trust/fear
- Mental state/mental health issues

Some of the suggested solutions were:

- 1) Increased culturally competent care and activities
- 2) Revisit current advocacy plans to identify more effective ways to involve more people of color, in the aging population, in giving input on programming and policy & decision-making
- 3) More educational opportunities on mental health and available resources
- 4) Hire people of color for equity
- 5) Community agencies/organizations/churches coordinate to better pool their resources (and services)
- 6) Neighbor to neighbor support network
- 7) Have more ongoing discussions like this one

8) Agencies/coalitions in places that we need to adapt

Additional community resources that might be helpful include:

- 1) Look at each other as a resource and opportunity
- 2) Community Organizers- identify Champions w/time to lead targeted efforts and goals and African American older adults to help coordinate things
- 3) Additional African American staff to help with outreach and networking for African American older adults
- 4) \$ (more funding)
- 5) Community resource list for African American older adults
- 6) Develop a Task force of these agencies today to move forward

Next Steps:

- 1) A follow up meeting of African Americans to discuss these issues further will be held on January ____, from 11:30am -2:30pm at the Urban League of Greater Madison. Lunch will be served at 11:30am.
Please contact Lois Gerbitz at 608-243-5252, Ext. 210 or lgerbitz@nescoinc.org if you plan to attend. Limited transportation is available. Please let Lois know if you need a ride.
- 2) African American older adult representatives from the January meeting will meet with staff from NESCO, Dane County and United Way to discuss and develop an action plan.