



Building an age-friendly Hamilton

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Talk will focus on issues around aging well

Margaret Denton

“By the year 2020, the year of perfect vision, the old will outnumber the young” so predicted Maggie Kuhn (August 3, 1905 – April 22, 1995) an American activist known for founding the Gray Panthers movement after she was forced to retire at the age of 65. We live in an era of longevity. For the first time in Canadian history there are now more adults 65+ than children under the age of 14. In Hamilton there are 167,000 adults 55+ and 93,000 65+ and the senior population is expected to double by 2041.

Realities about aging have changed but, in general, attitudes and beliefs have not kept pace. Age, in and of itself, may not be a barrier but ageism can be. Unfortunately, ageism, which is stereotyping and discrimination on the basis of a person’s age is systemic and pervasive in our public and private institutions and it impacts the relationships and interactions we have with others. This is unfortunate because older adults are a highly diverse group. They contribute rich wisdom and experience to every sector of society. In this year of perfect vision, the Hamilton Council on Aging is committing to 12 opinion editorials that discuss important topics related to positive aging. We begin by telling you a little about ourselves and about what you can expect in these editorials.

The Hamilton Council on Aging is a non-profit charitable organization whose mission is to promote positive aging. Since 2005, our working board has been guided by and responsive to the voices of older adults in identifying issues of concerns and advocating for solutions. We have collaborated with every level of government and with nearly every organization in the region that works with older adults to implement many innovative projects to promote the health and well-being of older adults in Hamilton.

Our organization founded the major initiative to make Hamilton Age Friendly. We have partnered with the City of Hamilton and their Seniors Advisory Committee to develop and implement Hamilton's Plan for an Age Friendly City (2014). This is a 5-year plan and we are currently in the process of renewing it for the period 2020-2025. Over the past 8 months we have engaged with over 4000 older adults in Hamilton through individual surveys, discussion groups and special events to learn about their experiences, challenges and ideas to aging in our community. Moving forward we will use the information we have collected to form recommendations to renew our Age Friendly Hamilton Plan 2.0.

In partnership with 6 other organizations in Hamilton we worked collaboratively to reduce social isolation among older adults in Hamilton. This project was funded by a grant from a Pan Canadian New Horizons Grant and the Retired Teachers of Ontario Foundation. It is estimated that about 15% of older adults are socially isolated. Over a 3-year period we were able to connect 1556 isolated older adults to community health and social services and/or recreational/leisure activities thereby significantly reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

In addition, we have also worked on significant initiatives such as the Let's Get Moving Workshops (that included our highly successful workshops on Let's Take the Bus and Let's Get Moving) and partnered with the GERAS Centre for Aging Research to offer Seniors4Change, a series of free 6-week courses for men and women taught by healthcare professionals.

In this 12-part series we plan to discuss a number of topics important to older adults, their families and the broader community. Look forward to hearing about the Hamilton's Age Friendly Plan 2.0, and the results of Hamilton's work to reduce social isolation in our community. Other opinion editorials will discuss topics such as Dating and the Older Adult, Why does Ageism Matter? Nutrition for Positive Aging, What Every Older Adult Should Know About their Financial Entitlements, Scams and Frauds, Lifelong Learning, Safety including Elder Abuse and Senior Bullying, Employment and Older Workers, How Technology Can Contribute to Positive Aging.

The year 2020 ushers in a brand new decade and an opportunity for all of us to contribute to a clear vision about what is important to us as a community. While we look forward to sharing our editorials, we also look forward to hearing your thoughts about these topics.

We think you will find the first one, 'Dating and the Older Adult', perfectly timed to coincide with Valentine's Day in February. Stay tuned!

Margaret Denton is the vice president of the Hamilton Council on Aging. For more information and to join our membership or make a donation please see

www.coahamilton.ca