

May Diversity Tip Sheet: Older Americans Month

By Denise J. Abston – Fenton Fenton Smith Reneau & Moon
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Many of us would not consider ourselves “Older Americans,” but some of us may already be approaching the eligibility age, or we know of someone who is, or we are caring for someone who is. Additionally, with knowledge, we can assist others who are unaware of some of the services offered by The Older Americans Act.

The Older Americans Act was enacted in 1965 to be sure the certain essential services were provided to older Americans. The eligibility age is 60 years. Many states, however, target individuals with the greatest economic and social needs and pay particular attention to those with low-incomes and live in rural areas. Approximately 3 million people receive Title III services which include meals, family caregiver support, adult day care, transportation, and health promotion according to a study conducted in 2010.

My elderly mother received services without our truly being aware of it. After my father died, she was lonely and although she lived with my husband and me, she was unable to drive and went into depression. I located a local senior center and took her there. She was hooked! I would drop her off on my way to work and she arrived for breakfast provided free of charge to her. She played Canasta, Uno, and other card games. She attended dances for the seniors, outings, and, if she wanted she could have attended a Bible study, water and oil painting, quilting or sewing classes. There was a library on site in a quiet room, a grand piano in the main room, and some exercise equipment. She stayed all day and enjoyed lunch free of charge as well as an afternoon snack.

Let’s not let our older Americans become part of the following statistic: an estimated 19 percent of low-income older adults are food insecure, and 90 percent did not receive any meal services. And, the U.S. government agency, Government Accountability Office (“GAO”) found that many people age 60 and older had difficulties in their daily activities received limited or no home-based care.

One of the requirements of an Introduction to Philosophy course that I teach at a university is for students to interview a person over 70 years of age. They are to ask them what the older American used to place emphasis on; what they do now; how things have changed; what, if anything, they regret. These kick-starter questions allow them to connect with an older American. Many of our Older Americans have served in the military service, have worked in careers and have contributed a great deal to our generation. They helped build America after WWII and we are reaping the benefits. All this is to say that we need to be observant, listen carefully in the presence of older Americans and honor them. And, if necessary, direct them to services that they need.

Resources:

“The Older Americans Act,” http://www.aoa.gov/AoA_Programs/OAA/Index.aspx

“The Older Americans Act, Insight on the Issues 92,” AARP Public Policy Institute (May 2014)

http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/public_policy_institute/health/2014/the-older-americans-act-AARP-ppi-health.pdf

“Older Americans Month,” <http://oam.acl.gov>