

transitions

INSTITUTE OF GERONTOLOGY

Promoting Successful Aging in Detroit and Beyond

Spring 2007

IOG Leads Diverse Team to Create New Training Tool for OTs

Christopher Licavoli is a 50-year-old clinical services manager for the Visiting Nurse Association of Southeast Michigan. As a registered occupational therapist, Chris has helped hundreds of senior citizens improve their coordination, make their homes safer, and strengthen their abilities to perform basic activities of daily living. No one doubts that occupational therapy can improve patient's lives immensely. But as Chris has noted from his work in the field, sometimes older patients need more.

"I meet seniors who are depressed or anxious. I meet seniors who show signs of early dementia. I meet seniors who have problems with substance abuse," says Chris. "It's foolish to think we can separate their OT needs from these other issues. OTs need training to identify and work with mental health issues."



Christopher Licavoli explains safe kitchen practices to a patient.

The Retirement Research Foundation agrees. Headquartered in Chicago, the Foundation is dedicated to funding innovative solutions to the challenges facing older Americans. In support of this mission, RRF recently granted \$262,000 over two years to the IOG to create interactive DVDs that teach OTs about mental health issues in elderly patients. In addition, the training DVDs will be pilot-tested with community partners in the Detroit area.

The IOG's Drs. Peter Lichtenberg and Cathy Lysack head the 14-person team of Wayne State University experts in pharmacy, psychology, occupational therapy and physical therapy, as well as three strong community partners: Beaumont Rehabilitation of Troy, Michigan Health and Rehabilitation Services, and the Visiting Nurse Association of SE Michigan. "We are approaching this work from the perspective of the practicing therapist. What do they need to know? What skills and tools do they need to learn?" says Dr. Lichtenberg.

The training format is a standard DVD video taped by Pastways Director Brian Golden to demonstrate a variety of real-life interactions between OTs and older adult patients. "We want

continued on page 3



photo by Cheryl Deep

Queen Mother Maureen Rowark (It) attends the annual Art of Aging Successfully event with several members of the Port Huron chapter of the Red Hat Society.

research
education
outreach
partnerships



Inspiring Hope in the Homeless

by Cheryl Deep

Each night in Detroit, as many as 15,000 to 17,000 people have no home. About half of the city's homeless are African American and many of those are women, 50 or older. They shield themselves from the elements by sleeping between dumpsters, under bridges or near steam vents. The more fortunate women find temporary beds in crowded shelters. The days blur as they manage the crises needed to survive. The endless search for food, shelter and safety exhausts them. Homelessness robs them of health and youth.

The homeless problem has long plagued Detroit, but two Wayne State University researchers found an innovative way to bring fresh attention to the problem. Last year, they premiered a breakthrough event combining photographic artistry with honest autobiography to profile the often-forgotten older woman who becomes homeless. Olivia Washington, Ph.D., an associate professor at the Institute of Gerontology and the College of Nursing, and David Moxley, Ph.D., a professor formerly with the School of Social Work, have researched homelessness for nearly a decade. Out of their work emerged a unique perspective on the problem. "Finding Hope in Homelessness" features eight homeless women willing to share with the public the intimate and disturbing details of their journey.

The exhibit consists of eight photographic panels the size of classroom blackboards. Each panel represents the life of one of the African American women in the project. From a distance, the panels shimmer with flowing colors, photos and drawings layered into an aesthetic backdrop. Up close, specific images within the panels emerge. Photos of crumbling buildings, of garbage-filled yards, of empty churches take shape within the swirl of colors. You enter the mind and soul of homelessness in Detroit where hope vanishes and society is a closed door.



Formerly homeless Gilda proudly displays her photographic collage.

Imagine waking up in September in the back of your car parked at the edge of a city park. You shake with cold. This has been your home for four months. You rise early to bathe in the public bathrooms before the crowds arrive. You dress from the wardrobe in your trunk, comb your hair in the rear-view mirror and drive to work. No one must know that you left your violent husband with no plan and little money.

*"I was homeless.
I was never hopeless.
I was never helpless.
I was homeless."*

- Dona Tatum

You cannot risk losing your job. Your impulsive plan is working so far but winter is on the way. What then?

Dona Tatum, 61, had no answer. She never meant to be homeless. "I had to leave this man. Had to or die. Sleeping in my car seemed the best alternative." Dona didn't realize how hard it would be to find a place of her own again. Landlords and utility companies wanted security deposits equaling hundreds of dollars she didn't have. She was high-risk now with no

savings and no permanent address – on the outside looking in.

Carolyn, 57, had a well-maintained apartment until crack cocaine addiction overcame her and her landlord gave her an ultimatum. She had been selling drugs to an array of fellow addicts. The income paid her rent but the landlord hated the clientele. "Clean it up or move out," he warned her. She moved out. She had nowhere to go.

Iona, 59, stepped out for groceries on a sunny afternoon and returned to find flames consuming her family home. No one was injured but she lost everything. She had let the homeowner's insurance lapse to save money. She sat stunned on the charred porch stoop with a broken ankle for days, paralyzed with shock.

A hit-and-run driver killed Elaine's husband and she had few relatives or friends to provide support. She couldn't pay the \$100 rent increase that came shortly after his death and was evicted. "I was too ashamed to ask for help. I isolated myself from people who had never been homeless," she says, "I was afraid they would ridicule me." She was 53.

Rachel is 55. She was a single mother caring for two young sons when she lost her job of 17 years

continued on page 3

Bring “Finding Hope in Homelessness” to Your Venue

The traveling portrait exhibit, “Finding Hope in Homelessness,” has been displayed at the Blue Cross Blue Shield building in Detroit, the Wayne State College of Nursing, Mott Community College, and the Tiger Club at Comerica Park, with future plans including an

Training Tool for Occupational Therapists

continued from cover

the learning to come alive,” says Brian. “We want OTs to see and analyze interactions before they come face-to-face with them.”

Viewers see an interaction unfold and then hear experts comment on the encounter and suggest appropriate occupational therapy interventions. “If a therapist is confronted with a complex case or they have minimal experience with mental health conditions, they may not provide optimal services,” says Dr. Lysack. “We want to give them the tools to take a more active stance in facilitating patients’ well-being.”

Some issues covered in the six-section DVD are depression assessment and behavior changes, medications, falls, mobility within the community, and caregiver concerns. The DVDs will include assessment tools and other resource materials. Once completed, small groups of OTs will complete the DVD course to test its impact on their practice.

Chris’ subteam created the section on falls and balance by filming actual patients being interviewed by an OT in their home. Patients were able to react naturally despite the presence of the camera, Chris says. Dr. Lichtenberg’s sections on depression assessment and intervention were conducted with rehabilitation patients in a long-term care facility. “We want these to be realistic,” Dr. Lichtenberg says. “These offer OTs a birds-eye view of mental health issues they might never get otherwise. What a dynamic way to learn.”

installation in Detroit’s Focus Hope gallery.

If your organization would like to sponsor this extraordinary display, please call the Institute of Gerontology at 313-577-2297 for scheduling details and fees. Options vary from the full eight-panel display combined

with a research presentation and speeches by the women, to four of the panels and written materials. The IOG is pleased to collaborate with Wayne’s College of Nursing, School of Social Work, and the Humanities Center to create this enlightening exhibit.

Inspiring Hope in the Homeless

continued from page 2

and slipped deep into depression. Without health insurance she couldn’t afford therapy or medication. Without treatment she couldn’t work and lost her apartment.

Homelessness has many faces and many causes according to Dr. Washington. She and Dr. Moxley isolated six critical factors that can tip vulnerable people (low income, mid-life or older) into homelessness: changes in status due to divorce or death of a spouse or partner; accidents such as house fires; changes in employment due to the onset of serious health issues; limited retirement income; lack of affordable housing; and frequently the least influential, substance abuse or mental illness.

The pilot project provides innovative therapy intervention for participants. Group support meetings try to lessen the psychological trauma of homelessness while building self-esteem, trust and confidence. Women are encouraged to own their experience (primarily by sharing their story) and to take responsibility for the changes needed to move out of homelessness. “Group members are empowered,” Dr. Washington explains. “We help them to master their condi-

tions and the circumstances that encouraged them.”

The deeply moving exhibit is not about hope abandoned but about hope reborn. Today, all eight women are self-supporting and live in their own apartments. Elaine is remarrying. Iona is trying to start her own business. Carolyn teaches others how to live drug-free.

They heal themselves by helping other women travel the rough roads out of homelessness and by their willingness to expose the truths of their own journey.

Dona’s poetry and writing sustained her through many tragedies. She emerged from homelessness determined to become a famous writer. In 2005, she was inducted into the International Society of Poets as a distinguished member, receiving a trophy for poetic achievement and a bronze medal for poetic merit. She is a now newly employed as a peer support specialist for Detroit Central City.

For others, success is elusive but hope remains. “Although experiencing so many disappointments has made it harder for me to continue,” Rachel explains, “I have not given up on my American dream.”



Olivia Washington, Ph.D. and David Moxley, Ph.D. collaborated on the research that is the foundation of the artistic collages of older Detroit women emerging from homelessness.

Record Crowd Attends Art of Aging Event

Sunlight and seniors streamed into Detroit's Greater Grace Temple early on March 28 to brighten the halls at the IOG's eighth annual Art of Aging Successfully event. Storyteller Ivory Williams kicked off the morning with a rousing keynote speech full of old-time tall tales and good-natured teasing of an attentive audience. Williams emphasized the importance of listening over merely hearing as we get older. "Hearing is just sounds going into the ear," he said. "Listening means paying attention and understanding what is being said. When we really listen we use our ears, our eyes and our hearts."

Williams also advised seniors to "fear not." They should try new things, take a few risks and get over their fears. "Courage doesn't mean you aren't afraid. It means you're willing to face your fears and overcome them," he said.

After Williams finished to a cheering crowd, guests strolled the sponsorship tables and art gallery filled with paintings, sculptures, wood carvings, jewelry, and textile crafts. Artists must be at least 55 years of age to enter a piece; most presenting on March 28 were in their 80s and



ART OF AGING Keynote speaker and storyteller Ivory Williams is flanked by IOG staff and supporters, from left to right: Odessa Jackson, Ivory, Frank Singer of Southfield Cable, and Karen Daniels-Tucker.

90s. Art works are not for sale but displayed to inspire others and show the expansive creativity of older adults. Gerontology research point to the importance of meaningful, creative activity and positive social interactions for healthy aging.

Several participants of the Brown Adult Day Care Program in Southfield and West Bloomfield submitted painted mobiles and woven paper projects. Brown specializes in the care of patients with Alzheimer's disease. Julie Verriest, one of the coordinators of Brown's program, said that art is a very positive experience for a person with Alzheimer's. "It gives a sense of purpose," she said, "to those living with a disease over which they have no control."

Another of the day's artists was Richie Campbell of Detroit. He displayed a shimmering hand-blown sphere mounted on decorative iron roping. Sheila Dhandha of Bloomfield Hills created mixed media paintings. Her large oil and acrylic rendition of Asian women rowing boats to market came alive with vivid blues, purples and greens. When Sheila worked full time, painting dropped to a low priority. "Now with retirement," she said, "I am indulging in this wonderfully satisfying hobby."

Duane Smith of Dearborn created intricate silver jewelry pendants that he enjoys giving as gifts. "I get satisfaction not only in the end result," he said, "but in the process itself."

More than 100 participants displayed their art or wrote a memoir or poem for the event's Creative Expressions souvenir booklet. Most guests were Detroit residents but the suburbs were also well represented in Ann Arbor, Dearborn, Birmingham, Southfield, Walled-Lake, Novi, St. Clair Shores, Warren, Auburn

continued on page 5



Alice Belfie



Norma Howat



Ernest Kugler



Duane Smith

Record Crowd

continued from page 4

Hills and Waterford, to name a few.

After the gallery tour and visits to the many sponsors who help make the Art of Aging event successful, guests split into their choice of five smaller workshops on hobbies, storytelling and stretching your money. Local TV celebrity Peter Neilsen used audience volunteers to demonstrate tips for “Keeping Fitness Simple and Fun.” One lucky member won a guest appearance on one of Peter’s upcoming shows.

“The presentations and workshops are designed to educate and entertain our seniors,” said Jennifer Mendez, Ph.D., director of education at the IOG and the Art of Aging Successfully coordinator. “The Institute of Gerontology is committed to healthy, productive aging. This event spreads our commitment throughout the community.”

IOG Director Peter Lichtenberg, Ph.D., agrees. “Our work in aging starts with research and doesn’t stop until the results lead to positive changes in the community,” he said. Dr. Lichtenberg spent event day emceeding the formal program, greeting and assisting guests, and talking with them about their concerns as they age.

Donna MacDonald is the IOG’s assistant coordinator for the program. She especially likes the event’s emphasis on using talents and creative skills to promote successful aging. “The entire program is organized by seniors for seniors,” she added. “That’s also what makes it so special.”

The full day concluded with a hot sit-down lunch served in Greater Grace’s main ballroom and a final chance for friendly conversation and camaraderie. Louise Morman, founder of Eldercarelearnings.com, was last year’s keynote speaker and is a member of the IOG’s Board of Visitors. She flew in from New York to attend this year’s event. “I wouldn’t miss it,” she said of the creative celebration of aging. “The whole day is magical.”



Left to right: Barry Edelstein Ph.D, Rosemary Blieszner Ph.D, Peter Lichtenberg Ph.D, Toni Antonucci Ph.D, Diane Elmore Ph. D, Florence Denmark Ph.D.

IOG Director Peter Lichtenberg is seen here on Capitol Hill as a member of the APA Committee on Aging that advocated with members of Congress to include important mental health language into the Older Americans Act.

Make A Donation. Make A Difference

The IOG’s passion is healthy aging and we take pride in our many successes. We listen to seniors, credible experts and community organizations. We respond with relevant research, community events and educational forums.

But we can’t do it alone.

If your passion is positive aging, please consider making a donation to the IOG or sponsoring one of our events. Call Ms. Terri Bailey at 313-577-2297 to learn more about the many ways you might help.

Be Our Partner in Promoting Successful Aging

PARTNERSHIP CORNER



The IOG is proud to spread the word about quality health programs for older adults when provided free by one of our community partners. In this issue, we highlight SENIOR SPLASH BASH, free water aerobics classes offered at various metro Detroit locations by Health Alliance Plan (HAP). Water aerobics increases flexibility, endurance and muscle tone yet is gentle on joints, making it the perfect exercise for persons with arthritis or other joint problems.

Senior Splash Bash programs are one-hour water aerobics sessions taught by certified instructors. Classes begin the week of June 11 and running through August. Cities participating in the program include Detroit, Southfield, Livonia, Warren, Westland and Algonac. If you are interested in registering for classes or receiving further details about times and locations, please contact a HAP representative at 313-664-8420. HAP is a Detroit-based, nonprofit health care provider to 565,000 current members.

SAVE THE DATE!

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

June 16-19

Festival of International Conferences on Caregiving, Disability, Aging and Technology (FICCDAT)

This festival of five distinct conferences takes place in Toronto, Canada, and targets physicians, healthcare professionals, researchers, policy makers, caregivers, students and seniors. The IOG's Director of Education, Dr. Jenny Mendez, is co-chair of the "Growing Older with a Disability" conference within the festival. Details and registration through the website: www.ficcdat.ca.



The IOG's Jennifer Mendez, Ph.D. (middle row, second from left) is shown with fellow members of Michigan's Long Term Care Task Force as Gov. Granholm signs their bill into law.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

June 5

Healthier Black Elders Event

Add life to your years and years to your life with the free information and fun-filled activities of the 5th annual Healthier Black Elders event. Held from 10 am to 2:15 pm at the Charles Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, the program is open to seniors and their families. Activities include free health screenings, live music, dancing the hustle for health and happiness, an interactive exercise demonstration and lunch. Pre-registration is not required but seats fill fast. Call Karen Daniels-Tucker at 313-871-0735 for more information.

Oct. 18 & Nov. 8

Community Health Forums

The IOG's Healthier Black Elders Center organizes several health forums each year at convenient locations for seniors. The format includes breakfast, presentations by health experts and a question-and-answer period. Forums run from 10–11:30 am and are always free. Topics vary but have covered such areas as caring for diabetes, easing hypertension, aging after 80, and Medicare planning. Our fall topics and locations are not yet determined, so please call 313-871-0735 after July 1 for details.

Writing/Editing - **CHERYL DEEP** • Graphic Design - **CATHERINE BLASIO** • Photography - **RICK BIELACZYK**

**WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Institute of Gerontology

87 East Ferry Street
226 Knapp Building
Detroit, MI 48202
313.577.2297
www.iog.wayne.edu

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