

~ Employment ~

Life Options South Bay - Chula Vista

This article is the fourth in a series on innovative and promising practices that expand upon six domains featured in our recent publication, "A Healthy Community Perspective on Aging Well." The domains are: Varied Housing Options, Transportation, Community Involvement, Employment, Lifelong Learning, and Supportive Services.

Forget the gold watch and the retirement party at age 65. Today, most baby boomers—a whopping 69 percent—plan to work into their late 60s or beyond, according to AARP.¹ In 2006, about one-quarter of Californians ages 65 to 69 were still employed, up from 19.6 in 1995, according to the California Budget Project.² Among California residents ages 55 to 65, 61.6 percent were still employed, compared with 54.2 percent in 1995.³

Why stay in the work force? Money, mostly. But also personal satisfaction. 72 percent of employees ages 55 to 59, and 60 percent ages 60 to 65 say money is their main reason for working.⁴ But for people in their late 60s, money is only part of the drive. More than half of these workers cite "staying active" and "meaningful work" as their primary motivation.⁵ As a result, many older workers are looking for second careers in more meaningful fields, or part-time work using their skills on their own terms.

To help this growing group of older job seekers and career changers, the Norman Park Center in Chula Vista, near San Diego, created Life Options South Bay. Under the umbrella of the recreation department and housed in the senior center, the program is aimed at people 50 and over who want to explore a second career, seek paid work or find volunteer opportunities.

"The overall idea for Life Options is to learn how to cultivate your undiscovered talents and share them with others," says Kathy Wigginton, the Chula Vista recreation supervisor in charge of Life Options South Bay. That includes retirement counseling,

where program staff and volunteers talk with older adults about their personal vision of retirement, and the new balance they'd like to strike between work, volunteering and leisure.

The program was created in 2002 with a grant from San Diego County's Aging and Independent Services division. A staff member and volunteers spend time researching job resources and training options, scouting and screening job openings that might work well for seniors, and sharing information on volunteering, recreation and fitness.

"We do interviews with people who come in to find out what they've done in the past, whether they're still working, and if they've ever volunteered before," says Sue Wright, a volunteer with Life Options South Bay. The program maintains a notebook and website (www.lifeoptionssouthbay.com) of current job leads. They also maintain a list of "senior-friendly" temp agencies and employers, like Wal-Mart and Borders.

The job openings list also includes volunteer jobs that pay a stipend, like working as a senior mentor for school kids or meeting with older people at senior residences to talk about health. "Many seniors don't have a lot of assets and they want a job to bring in some extra money," says Wright. "They don't always need a lot, just a little something more." For those people, the \$200 stipend for 20 hours a week of senior mentoring could make a big difference, she says.

Life Options South Bay also serves as a clearinghouse for volunteer opportunities, where counselors help people find positions that fit their interests and skills.

Life Options South Bay doesn't just wait for seniors to walk in the door (although about 700 people a year do). The program holds monthly outreach sessions at the public library,



Life Options South Bay, Chula Vista

bringing guest speakers to talk about exhibitions at local museums or cultural institutions. "Those have been very popular," says Wigginton. "So someone can come learn about the Dead Sea Scrolls, but also learn about what docents do." The library location, she says, attracts people who might not visit the Life Options center at Norman Park. "We realized that baby boomers will go to a program at the library, but not the senior center."

For more information on Life Options South Bay, visit <http://www.lifeoptionssouthbay.com/>



¹ MSNBC, "Baby Boomers Will Spend Golden Years at Work" by Eve Tahmincioglu, Aug. 8, 2007. Quoting Deborah Russell, Director of Workplace Issues, AARP.

² California Budget Project, "More Californians Are Working Later in Life." *Policy Points*, April 2007.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

This article was featured in *Connections*, Fall 2007, Vol. 19, No. 1. *Connections* is a publication of California Healthy Cities and Communities (CHCC). CHCC is conducted by the Center for Civic Partnerships, Public Health Institute, under Contract #04-35633 with the California Department of Public Health supported by the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.