

# ~ Lifelong Learning ~

## New and Innovative Library and Educational Services

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

A lifelong learning framework encompasses learning throughout the life cycle, and in different learning environments, with a range of formality. It can be learning in the classroom or elsewhere as a way to study new subjects. It can also be educational travel to learn about new cultures and traditions. Lifelong learning can even be someone engaging in community service to improve society.

Lifelong learning is a crucial component for cities planning for aging populations. As many Boomers near retirement, many are choosing to focus their energy on new careers or endeavors where new skills and knowledge are required. Opportunities are offered on a global scale. In the late 1990's, countries in Europe embraced the concept of Learning Towns and Cities. "Learning towns, cities or communities promote learning widely; develop effective local partnerships between all sectors of the community; and support and motivate individuals and employers to participate in learning."<sup>1</sup>

In formal settings such as colleges and universities, many University of California campuses and satellite campuses have Osher Institutes for older adults. Online, older adults from around the world are able to convene through University of the Third Age (U3A). Other formal settings include OASIS and Elderhostel.

Lifelong learning also occurs in non-formal settings such as senior centers, community centers, churches, libraries, and museums. Informal learning environments include volunteer work, book clubs, media, and the Internet.

### Libraries of the Future

Libraries are a key in creating livable communities. According to Jose Aponte, Director of the San Diego County Library, "libraries are more than just the library we knew growing up." The San Diego County Library system has adapted to meet the needs of its older adults. The library partnered with Aging Independent Services, the local senior nutrition provider, to offer yoga classes and a gourmet box lunch at local libraries. The program is known as Food for Thought. Older adults receive a good, nutritious meal, and are also engaged in physical activity. Due to the success of the Food for Thought program, the library now offers similar nutrition programs for children.


The San Diego County Library system provides space for events where older adults can bring in their medications for review by a pharmacist to identify medication-related problems and reduce medicine waste. The library also hosts more than 30 book clubs for all ages, eight of which are Spanish-speaking clubs. In addition to all of these new, innovative programs encouraging community involvement and continuous learning, the library still offers traditional programs such as books by mail for older adults unable to get to the library.

Over 22% of library patrons are 55 years of age and older.<sup>2</sup> This percentage is only expected to increase over the next decade. California's library leaders are helping to design creative library responses to the surge



Nutrition, yoga and the Vista Library create Food for Thought.  
(Photo courtesy of Mary Dreibelis, McClellan Senior Center, City of Vista, California)

in Californians reaching retirement age and wanting to explore new directions. A statewide initiative, "Transforming Life After 50", was launched in the summer of 2007 by the Lifelong Access Libraries Initiative where librarians throughout California met to begin "redefining and delivering new and innovative services to older adults."<sup>3</sup> The Initiative's next steps include conducting a community assessment followed by test model programs in 2008–09.

Libraries present the perfect opportunity for cities to encourage and promote lifelong learning in their community. Libraries are "a free institution where the individual has open access to great quantities of information and for older adults, they are a familiar place," stated Connie Van Fleet, Ph.D. in a conference sponsored by the National Institute on Postsecondary Education, Libraries and Lifelong Learning, Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>4</sup> Local governments play important roles to ensure libraries are well supported, adequately funded, and able to continue their critical work.<sup>5</sup> The library makes a difference in the lives of millions of residents across the age span every day by providing a variety of learning opportunities. 

## Lifelong Learning Opportunities

**Universities of the Third Age (U3As)** are self-help, self-managed, lifelong learning co-operatives for older people no longer in full time work, providing opportunities to share learning experiences in a wide range of interest groups and to pursue learning for fun. [www.u3a.org.uk/](http://www.u3a.org.uk/)

Established to develop vibrant learning communities for older adults, the **Osher Foundation** has initiated Lifelong Learning Institutes at more than 70 colleges throughout the country. Courses do not include homework or exams, but focus on topics of interest to older adults, and are structured to facilitate the joy of learning. [www.usm.maine.edu/olli/national/](http://www.usm.maine.edu/olli/national/)

**OASIS** is a national nonprofit educational organization designed to enhance the quality of life for mature adults. OASIS offers challenging programs in the arts, humanities, wellness, technology and volunteer service. OASIS creates opportunities for older adults to continue their personal growth and provide meaningful service to the community. [www.oasisnet.org/](http://www.oasisnet.org/)

**Elderhostel** [www.elderhostel.org/default.asp](http://www.elderhostel.org/default.asp) and **Senior Summer School, Inc.** [www.seniorsummerschool.com](http://www.seniorsummerschool.com) provide educational travel programs offering participants a combination of lectures, field trips and free time.

**Social Networking Sites** are becoming more and more popular among Baby Boomers. The website [www.eons.com](http://www.eons.com) is often described as the “Top Boomer Site” and [www.BoomJ.com](http://www.BoomJ.com) is a site targeted for Baby Boomers and Generation Jones.

**Senior Net** is a nonprofit organization of computer-using adults, age 50 and older. It seeks to provide older adults education about and access to computer technologies to enhance their lives and enable them to share their knowledge and wisdom. [www.seniornet.org](http://www.seniornet.org)

Members of the **Lifetime Education and Renewal Network (LEARN)** are involved in all aspects of education for older adults. They represent the growing variety of settings and programs offering opportunities for lifetime learners. [www.asaging.org/networks/index.cfm?cg=LEARN](http://www.asaging.org/networks/index.cfm?cg=LEARN)

**Senior Corps' RSVP** provides older Americans the opportunity to apply their life experience to meeting community needs in a diverse range of nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and faith-based groups. [www.seniorcorps.org](http://www.seniorcorps.org)



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### References

<sup>1</sup> Learning Towns and Cities, Learning Towns and Cities. Retrieved March 14, 2008, from Learning Towns and Cities Web site: <http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/learningcities/>

<sup>2</sup> Lifelong Access Library Initiative, Lifelong Access Library Initiative. Retrieved March 14, 2008, from Lifelong Access Library Initiative Web site: <http://www.lifelonglibraries.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Lifelong Access Library Initiative, Lifelong Access Library Initiative. Retrieved March 14, 2008, from

Lifelong Access Library Initiative Web site: <http://www.lifelonglibraries.org/>

<sup>4</sup> Van Fleet, Ph.D., C. Public Libraries, Lifelong Learning, and Older Adults: Background and Recommendations. from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/PLLIconf95/vanfleet.html>

<sup>5</sup> Pollard, B. (2008). Libraries: Partners in Sustaining Communities. Public Management. March 2008, 18-22.

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