

Skyway Senior Center Progress Report

January 2003

The Skyway Senior Center works! During its brief existence, the center has quickly become a popular asset to the downtown community because of the strength of its programs, the attractiveness of its space, its convenient location and its dedicated volunteers. All this has been made possible by the contributions of its partners – the City of Minneapolis, the Ryan Companies, Target Corporation, the Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association and more than 40 program sponsors and partners.

Mission

The Skyway Senior Center, operated by the City of Minneapolis, provides a safe, friendly, comfortable place for people age 55 and over to gather downtown, participate in a variety of enrichment activities and wellness services, connect to community resources and explore community service opportunities.

Impact

In just 15 months, the Skyway Senior Center has had a significant impact on the lives of older adults in the community. Its holistic approach as a vital aging center has attracted an impressive number of people. New friendships have been formed, older volunteers are using their time and talents, computer skills are improved, folks are connecting to services such as veteran's benefits, health status is being monitored, information is shared, fitness is improving and attitudes about aging are more positive. The numbers listed below illustrate this impact.

- Total number of visitors November 2001-January 2003 – 18,419
- Daily average of visitors as of January 2003 – 74
- Number of programs offered January-December 2002 – 241
- Number of program participants – 4,886
- Average number of participants per program – 20
- Newsletter circulation – 3,500 per month
- Volunteer hours January-December 2002 – 2,281
- Value of volunteer hours equal one full-time staff position
- Response to newsletter request for contributions from center participants - \$3,000

Leadership

The City of Minneapolis Senior Citizen Advisory Committee to the Mayor and City Council recognized that a downtown senior center would address senior isolation and provide seniors who live and visit downtown with a safe place to socialize, explore enrichment opportunities and link with resources.

The City operates the Skyway Senior Center through the City of Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support's Senior Ombudsman Office. The center is staffed by a full-time coordinator employed by the City of Minneapolis, two part-time Senior Aides paid through the Federal Older Worker Program and 45 dedicated volunteers.

The center is guided by the Skyway Senior Center Advisory Committee, comprised of active center participants. These 14 leaders advise staff on overall direction of the center and assist with program implementation and evaluation. The committee is working on strategic planning, fund raising and establishing a nonprofit Friends of the Skyway Senior Center organization.

More than Numbers

Behind the numbers are the personal stories of the Skyway Senior Center.

- Twenty-four individuals participated in a health screening for diabetes, vision and hearing problems. The screeners reported that our group had the highest percentage of problems identified of any in the community. Many participants reported that they haven't seen a physician in months and even years.
- The very popular English Conversation Group filled to over capacity during a pilot project phase. Focus groups were initiated to find out what would attract the sizable local Eastern European elder population and the English Conversation Group was formed. Not only are participants forming strong relationships with American volunteers, they are attending other Skyway Senior Center programs. These include computer instruction, blood-pressure screening, movies, lectures, defensive driving classes and other services. In fact, we are exploring the need to offer defensive driving classes in Russian.
- Seniors who no longer drive or have access to a car find it easy to access the center by bus and/or skyway. For many, it is easier to get to the Skyway Senior Center than to their neighborhood senior program.
- A south Minneapolis resident attended an information session on veteran's benefits at the center. He discovered he is eligible for financial assistance and now receives additional income each month.
- The Skyway Senior Center attracts a diverse group of visitors. There are more male visitors than most senior centers. We span the generations from World War II to Viet Nam veterans. Many of our visitors deal with mental health issues. Participants come from all income levels. We serve homeless individuals as well as retired executives and college faculty. Racial diversity is evident at the center as well.
- Volunteers are eager to share their skills. They staff the reception desk, administer blood pressure screenings, teach t'ai chi exercise, lead committees, teach memoir writing, organize the chess club, help other seniors navigate the computer, write a column for the newsletter, promote the center and help out where needed.

“The Skyway Senior Center is the most wonderful gathering place with great staff, wonderful volunteers and interesting programs that are extremely helpful. I love it!”