

COMMISSION ON THE AGING
4 Brush Hill Road
New Fairfield, CT 06812

COMMUNITY FORUM

“THE OTHER TALK”

MINUTES

April 26, 2014

The Commission on the Aging hosted a Community Forum on Saturday, April 26, 2014 at the Senior Center from 10:00am-12:00pm. The topic was “The Other Talk” with guest speaker Dr. Nancy Humphreys. Secretary, Laurie Busse, took the minutes.

PRESENT: Maureen Salerno, Chairperson, Jeannette Sweeney, Katy Johannssen, Kathy Hull, Roberta Ilardo, Stephanie Shaughnessy, and Julia MacMillan

ABSENT: Cindy LaCour, Vice Chairman, & Janet Loya

SPEAKER: Dr. Nancy Humphreys, UCONN School of Social Work

At 10:25am Maureen Salerno introduced Dr. Nancy Humphreys. Originally from Southern California, Dr. Humphreys will be retiring this year after dedicating 54 years to social work. Her extensive career includes Chair and Professor of Policy & Practice at the UCONN School of Social Work. She served as Dean of the School from 1987-1995 and is the former Director of Michigan State University School of Social Work.

Dr. Humphreys apologized for being late and often made jokes about seeing a sign on the sidewalk with her name on it. Dr. Humphreys explained she remembers having the talk with her mom about the birds and the bees when she was 11. It was her parents who decided when it was time for “that talk”. As we age, parents and children must decide when to have the *other* talk. The end of life discussion can be difficult to bring up. Sometimes it is the children who bring it up and sometimes the parents need to bring it up. Dr. Humphrey’s reflected on how her parents made it easy for her. After her mom had a stroke, her dad became a remarkable care giver. Sometime after her mom passed her dad decided to sell his home and move to a retirement community at the age of 90. This decision he made on his own. After having a car accident, he told her it was the other person’s fault. Since her dad had a relatively safe driving record she believed him. After visiting him however, she realized the car had been in several accidents and that it would be a good time to have someone check in with him on a regular basis. She hired a friend of hers to be his case worker. Thanks to her friend’s coaxing her dad finally gave up driving.

It is becoming increasingly important to have these conversations with your elderly parents and adult children. Ideally families would sit around having a conversation like this, but the reality is, is that they don't. Sometimes the parents take care of everything, but do not relay this information to their children or their significant others until the end or they never tell them at all and the families are left second guessing their loved ones wishes.

The baby boomers have demographically altered everything, from expanding schools and colleges to straining social security. When social security was first introduced in 1935 there were 17 workers for every retiree. When the bulk of the baby boomers retire, there will be 2 workers for every retiree. The country is not ready for this. At the biggest point in baby boomer retirement 20%-25% of the country will be over age 65. With today's new lifestyles child bearing is delayed and will not help offset the over 65 population. The 2010 census showed that the over age 65 population grew by 8.5% while the rest of the population grew only 3%. To compound matters the 2000 census indicted 13% of the population was 85 years and older with the age group of 95-100 years being the fastest growing population.

A short intermission took place for coffee and refreshments.

Questions and Answer

Dr. Humphreys addressed questions from the audience

Q: How do you handle when the kids are ready to talk and the parents are not and vice versa.

A: The one who is ready should try to bring up the conversation. The earlier the better. If the other party isn't willing to talk about it, try bringing it up at a later point in time, and using a different approach. Remember this is a difficult conversation and you and the other party will probably be on edge. Try keeping the atmosphere as relaxed as possible. Once the conversation is started, keep it going.

Several members of the audience shared their vastly different experiences on this topic. Regardless if they had the conversation or if they had been the one left second guessing their loved ones final wishes, all of them emphasized the importance of having this conversation. Make sure your children or loved ones know your wishes. Make sure they know your financial status. At a time of medical emergency you do not want to have a nurse or social worker asking your children what finances are available for care and or what type of care you want and not have them know the answers to those questions.

Maureen Salerno concluded the Community Forum by saying "The Conversation Starter Kit" is a wonderful tool to help you get started on this important conversation and copies were distributed. There are copies of the book "The Other Talk" by AARP available for borrowing. Maureen Salerno thanked everyone for attending. The Forum was adjourned at 12:10pm.