

Aging Well

In Jefferson County, Colorado

Introduction

Preparing for Population Aging

It is now common knowledge that our communities are rapidly aging. Primarily as a result of medical advances, people are living many years longer than they did just a few decades ago. These future elders will be increasingly diverse, more likely to be living at moderate and low incomes, and will need supportive services to remain independent in their communities for as long as possible. The call for community decision makers to “prepare for the graying of society” has been increasingly made throughout the United States. In some fortunate communities, though, the decision makers, in partnership with citizens, non-profits, businesses, local government agencies, and others, have actively worked to document just how they will prepare for the so-called “Silver Tsunami” also known as the “Aging of the Baby Boomers.” This is the case in Jefferson County, Colorado where many people have participated for more than two years in the development of this Strategic Plan for Aging Well. The Jefferson County Aging Well Project (aka Jeffco Aging Well Project) is likely to be the focal point for years to come for all who want to collaborate here in creating and maintaining a truly age-friendly county.

Original Vision and Intent of Aging Well Project

This document is the culmination of many community meetings, presentations, research, discussions, and debates about how Jefferson County could be ready to meet both the challenges and opportunities the growing number of older residents will bring. The Executive Director of the Jefferson County Department of Human Services, Lynn Johnson, and key department staff, began discussions in late 2007 around how to carry out a large-scale planning process and develop a written plan document. A main aspect of the Jeffco Aging Well Project was to accurately assess the needs of the aging population and the availability of resources throughout the county. This Strategic Plan document describes the identified needs, as well as the information, services, and programs available to meet those needs, in Jefferson County. Perhaps more importantly, it also lays out a framework for how stakeholders can work together in coming years to maximize use of available resources to better meet the needs of the aging population.

Resources for Aging Well Project

The decision was made, in agreement with the Board of County Commissioners, to dedicate some county resources to this effort. In early 2008, Jefferson County Human Services contracted with a consultant to assist county staff in moving this project forward. Additional funding was sought and received from Rose Community Foundation which became another important partner in Jefferson County's Aging Well Project. Throughout the project, many agencies, organizations, and individuals contributed their time and expertise, brought refreshments to meetings, allowed use of their conference rooms for meetings, etc. Throughout this document, the names of these individuals and organizations can be found and they are to be commended for their contributions to the Jeffco Aging Well Project.

Internal Planning Team

An initial Internal Planning Team from the Jefferson County Department of Human Services was formed, comprised of Lynn Johnson, Tom Hitpas, Susan Franklin, Sue Bozinovski (consultant) and Mary Boland. The planning team reviewed some existing models of large-scale community-level planning for population aging. A number of local experts were also interviewed. The group reviewed existing studies and reports, including but not limited to, DRCOG's 2004 Strengths and Needs Assessment of Older Adults, and data and projections from the State Demographer's Office. After an assessment of the information and input, a large-scale planning process was crafted that was tailored to the unique needs of Jefferson County, while also taking into account positive features of other known planning efforts.

Appointment of Leadership Committee

The Internal Planning Team decided to create a Leadership Committee whose role would be to guide the entire Strategic Planning process. After a series of strategizing and internal planning meetings in early to mid-2008, citizens and individuals representing various organizations were invited by the Jefferson County Human Services Director to serve for a two-year period on the Aging Well Leadership Committee.

The characteristics of individuals asked to serve on this group included:

- Comfortable being a visionary leader
- Enthusiastic about the need for planning for an aging community
- Open-minded and willing to listen to and tolerate differences of opinion and attitudes
- Able to view planning from short, medium and long-term perspectives
- Able to review various data and reports and understand whether conclusions are valid

- Able to review materials relatively rapidly and note concerns or input
- Comfortable directly expressing one's own ideas and feelings in a group setting
- Enjoy collaborating and partnering with an array of individuals and organizations

Approximately thirty-five (35) people attended Leadership Committee meetings for approximately two (2) years from August 2008 through June 2010. This group, in fact, continues to meet and will do so into the future as participants are committed to implementation of the Jeffco Strategic Plan for Aging Well.

The Leadership Committee has guided the entire Jeffco Aging Well Project process and outcomes. All critical decisions, changes, etc. were made in conjunction with the Leadership Committee members. The Leadership Committee developed the following Vision and Mission Statements to guide the project and have been referred to whenever focus was needed.

Vision

Jefferson County: A thriving community for aging well

Mission

To develop and implement strategies creating inclusive, livable communities through sustainable partnerships and integrated services.

Formation of Workgroups

In the autumn of 2008, some Leadership Committee members stepped up to chair six workgroups that the committee had decided were the most global and important issues for seniors. The Aging Well Program Manager and Project Consultant conducted an orientation session for them and for members of the workgroups. Workgroup members came from the Leadership Committee, but also were brought in from outside by the workgroups to supplement the knowledge and expertise around the table. The main role of the workgroup chairs was to facilitate discussions about their topic area, move the discussions along and delegate various pieces of the project to workgroup members.

Chairpersons led the identification of key goals and strategies to be carried out in Jefferson County in the next twenty years. Workgroup chairpersons also collected information about their topics, sent that information out to their workgroup members, set up the meetings, including handling the meeting logistics, and communicated with the workgroup members on an ongoing basis. In the first year, some workgroups decided to use either volunteer facilitators provided by the Jeffco Mediation Center or volunteers from the community or nearby universities so that the chairperson could be a part of the group discussion and not have to worry about

having to facilitate the meetings. Most workgroups used these volunteer facilitators only for the first year.

Six broad areas of focus were selected for the Jeffco Aging Well Project, based on all of the information available. These were: (1) Basic Needs, (2) Caregiving & Supportive Services, (3) Physical Health, Mental Health, Wellness & Prevention, (4) Housing, (5) Social & Civic Engagement, and (6) Transportation & Mobility.

Economic Context

There was no way of knowing that while this Plan was being developed, the economic crisis of 2008-2009 would escalate and become the context within which we would be working. If anything, the economic backdrop prompted the Aging Well participants to urgently discuss what would be needed in Jefferson County to fully support its older residents. This led to questions such as, "If people need to work longer, are employers ready and willing to help them work longer? Can this be done without detrimental effects on the young who are also seeking work in the county? If pensions and Social Security aren't necessarily so secure, how will people pay for food, clothing and shelter in the decades to come? Does Jefferson County have enough affordable housing suitable for older adults?" This Strategic Plan addresses these and many other issues that were covered by the workgroups and Leadership Committee members.

Layout of Document

The Jefferson County Strategic Plan for Aging Well contains a tremendous amount of information. It was organized in the manner provided here so that the reader can find a specific topic of interest, as well as get a complete overview of a number of aging-related topics. Sections and their contents are as follows:

The report begins with an Acknowledgements page listing the Leadership Committee Members. There is also a Table of Contents.

Section 1 Executive Summary

This section highlights key aspects of the entire Strategic Plan document. Only select information is provided, though this section will provide the reader with a good representation of the entire Plan document.

Section 2 Introduction

This section provides the background and basis for why the Strategic Plan was done and what can be found in the remainder of the document.

Sections 3-8 Reports and Strategic Plans for Six Workgroup Topics

Each section contains a page acknowledging those who worked on this portion of the report and a Table of Contents. The six sections, one for each workgroup, contain a report describing the activities and findings from

the first year of each workgroup's charge. This includes an Introduction, the Process Used, Trends, Strengths and Assets, Gaps, Report Wrap-Up and Appendices including Terms and Definitions Used in Report. Each section also provides a Short-Term Strategic Plan covering the years 2011 through 2015 and a Long-Term Strategic Plan covering 2016 through 2030. Short-Term Plans identify Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Potential Lead Agencies, Potential Partners, Resources that will be needed, expected Key Outcomes, and Target Completion Date. The Long-Term Strategic Plan consists of Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Potential Lead Agency, Potential Partners, Target Start Year, Target End Year and Comments.

Section 9 Cross-Cutting Strategic Plans

This portion of the Plan contains Short-Term Strategic Plans covering the period 2011 through 2016. Certain topics such as homeless elders and aging with intellectual and developmental disabilities kept coming up throughout discussions of most or all of the six workgroups. They often came up at Leadership Committee meetings as well. Given the number of people and the resources already dedicated to the Aging Well Project, participants decided to create Short-Term Plans for some of those cross-cutting topics. Thus, in this section, the following Strategic Plans are included: Accessing Information & Resources; Advocacy; Special Populations: People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD), Homeless Elders, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) Elders; and Sustainability of the Aging Well Project.

Section 10 Conclusions and Recommendations

This section puts forth future actions, policies, and approaches to be considered by stakeholders in Jefferson County in order to fully implement as much of the Strategic Plan as possible over the coming years.

Section 11 Attachments

A number of documents including organizational charts, maps, and the Report Template for years 3 and beyond are included in this section.

Using this Strategic Plan

Those who were part of putting this Strategic Plan for Aging Well together want to see widespread distribution and usage of it. As the reader of this Plan, you are asked to incorporate the information from it into your life in whatever way is most suitable to help achieve a truly Age-Friendly, Livable Jefferson County. The contents of this Plan can be used for public speaking, for incorporation into agency and community planning, guiding an existing non-profit into priority areas, or offering entrepreneurs ideas for future businesses that will contribute to community betterment. The developers of this Plan invite you to contact them with your ideas, insights, and energy.

