

OLDER ADULTS: MORE, BETTER, LONGER

Americans are living longer and in greater numbers than ever before. The older adult population will continue to burgeon for at least the next couple of decades, as baby boomers move up. Often, their parents are still enjoying an active lifestyle.

No matter how cosmetics and pharmaceutical manufacturers want us to feel about it, there is no denying that the needs and interests of older adults are not the same as adults in their working and child-rearing years. They need and want library services, but geared for THEM. Many have health challenges. Many others are mobile and engaged and want intellectual stimulation to keep them “in the world.” 21st century medicine offers a lot to help with the problems of an aging body. There is no pill that will help an older adult be able to post to his grandchild’s Facebook page or download a book onto an e-reader. That’s *our* job.

Thanks to a grant from the Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, Queens Library is greatly expanding its programs and services for older adults. The goal is to be “the” destination for information, socialization, entertainment, books and reading, and lifelong learning opportunities, whether they are physically able to come to the library or not. Madlyn Schneider is Older Adult/Homebound Coordinator. “Anyone at home who can’t get to a library should be able to get everything that a person gets when they walk into a library—programming, materials, information, socialization—everything,” she says.

Planning for older adults offers a lot of opportunities on the community library level. They are often available during hours when the library is not quite as busy. They are vocal about their needs and will ask for what they want. They have skills and spare time that can be leveraged, to the library’s advantage as well as their own. They are informed and passionate about their community life. They will advocate loudly for the library. With older adults as with everyone else Queens Library serves, their needs evolve over time. As you become aware of more adults asking for information on a particular topic or showing interest in a new activity, share that with your library colleagues. The very best library programs bubble up from the community.

Mail A Book Services, 94-11 217 Street, Queens Village, NY 11428, 718-464-0084

Queens Library is an independent, not-for-profit corporation and is not affiliated with any other library system.

Right now, library patrons who can get to a Queens Library location can take part in events like AARP-affiliated tax help and defensive driving courses, as well as introductory courses on computer skills like the internet and email usage geared especially for older adults. Queens Library's Senior Theater Acting Repertory, which meets weekly, gathers older adults together to put on dramatic works and re-experience the thrill of the stage. Seniors also need to keep tabs on their health. For that, Queens Library offers the Staywell Program for adults 55 and over. It meets for an hour each week for exercise and to discuss health-related news and concerns that benefits everyone.

You should all know about our award-winning Mail A Book program. Mail-A-Book offers remote access for homebound seniors and adults of all ages. Last year over 50,000 items were circulated this way, including books in large and regular print; audiobooks and e-books; movies, music and games. E-readers are also available on loan. "Just having a package show up at their home, and knowing that somebody on the other end is listening to what their needs and their wants are—that's hugely important," said Madlyn Schneider, who runs the program. "We sit and chitchat with them on the phone for 20 minutes. We respond to what their needs are, get to know how they are, and pick out materials that add to their lives."

The service also offers homebound customers other ways to use services and interact with people, including crossword puzzles solved collaboratively over the Skype web video chat service, and bingo, health discussions and even plain old conversations via teleconference.

"We have had many seminars on different aspects of Queens and have had elected politicians speak to us on Queens including our Borough President. We have health seminars over the phone by health care providers ... which are informative and educational," said Mail-A-Book customer Bonnie Sue Pokorny. "The community has become more aware of us and we are no longer the 'invisible' population."