

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Contemporary Approaches to Healthy Living: Reimagine Aging!

By Mary Lou Rozdilsky

Our vision in the Yakima and Selah Neighbors' Network is to build and sustain a community where neighbors engage with and support one another through the transitions of aging.

The last chapters of our lives, or "Elderhood" as geriatrician Louise Aronson calls these years, can be 30 years (one third of our lives), more or less, with a personal road map we create on our own-- depending on our health, our resources, our interests, and the support and feedback we have about the importance of our continuing role in our families, neighborhoods and community. Aronson says "a good life, like a good story, requires a beginning, a progression and an ending... And what is life but a long, messy, awful, wonderful event? Elderhood is life's third and final act; what it looks like is up to us."

Our Network is not alone in wanting to reimagine aging in Yakima. Others may use different language, but faith communities and local groups who meet regularly in the Senior Network, actively provide services and share information about the needs of seniors and senior caregivers.

Our part of the picture is supporting people who want to stay in their homes as they age. We build community by together creating programs and interest groups, offering a balance class and walking partners, providing rides and services needed in the home, and supporting engagement and friendship.

A recent post by Paul Reed MD, Director of the Federal Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (September 28, 2022 by ODPHP), quotes Atul Gawande, author of Being Mortal:

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Medicine and What Matters in the End:

"A few conclusions become clear when we understand this: that our most cruel failure in how we treat the sick and the aged is the failure to recognize that they have priorities beyond merely being safe and living longer; that the chance to shape one's story is essential to sustaining meaning in life; that we have the opportunity to refashion our institutions, our culture, and our conversations in ways that transform the possibilities for the last chapters of everyone's lives."

Dr. Reed points to contemporary approaches to healthy living that hold potential and promise to offer greater-quality of life through our later years. He says "...the answer to the question 'When is the right time to talk about healthy aging: is **now**.'" He calls for collaborative, cross-sector dialogue about healthy aging and the sharing of resource discoveries and successful innovations, as well as failures.

He wants to be expansive, "with perspectives, for instance, on lifelong learning, physical activity, spirituality, and entertainment. Such richer conversations create opportunities for improving what truly impacts the quality of older adults' lives."

CEO Jo Ann Jenkins reports in the May AARP Bulletin that close to 70 percent of Americans who reach the age of 65 will someday require help from others to get through their day (women will need help for 3.7 years, men for 2.2 years). She comments, "These are truths we don't like to think about." She warns: "The system for helping people who can no longer care for themselves is broken and costly."

Our non-profit is not a solution to the huge challenges in health care and care-giving, but it reflects contemporary approaches and is a positive, cost-effective model for supporting

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