Come and “Join the Conversation” – Iowa’s White House Conference on Aging

Part one:

Issues, concerns and accolades flowed from seven Iowa sites where 190 participants convened for “Join the Conversation: Iowa White House Conference on Aging Dialogue.” Through the internet and conference calls (oh, the marvels of living in this age of technology), Connections Area Agency on Aging was fortunate to be part of this June 26th event, as host for sites in both Council Bluffs and Sioux City. Additional host sites included Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Mason City, and Waterloo, providing the opportunity throughout the state for regional participation and input. The event provided a forum for participants to discuss long term services and supports in their community and included a one-hour facilitated discussion of the issues, barriers, and solutions identified. Attendees included consumers, caregivers, service providers, advocacy organizations, governmental entities, financial institutions, lawyers and law firms, hospitals, and universities, among others.

Studies and surveys have indicated what we’ve known all along – people prefer to remain in their own home, in their communities, and with the people they know and love, as they get older or as they live with their disabilities. Very few prefer to be uprooted and placed into a nursing home or other facility, unless there is no other alternative. Iowa’s “Join the Conversation” followed Iowa Public Television’s airing of the program, “Caring for Mom & Dad” and an hour panel discussion by experts in the areas of aging and disability. These programs were eye-opening and thought-provoking, especially in light that by 2030 the majority of Iowa counties will have significant populations over age 65. With 10,000 Boomers turning 65 each day in the United States, we need to discuss topics relating to aging, caregiving, financial responsibilities and community supports for both our senior population and those who will be caring for them.

Iowa’s White House Conference on Aging sent their results to the White House Conference on Aging held on July 13, 2015. This national conference has been held every 10 years since 1965, when the Older Americans Act was first signed by President Lyndon Johnson.

The community forums had participants examining long-term supports and services that are (and aren’t) available within their community. They were asked to consider the public perception and awareness of services and supports, accessibility, and their impact on quality of life. Through guided facilitation, groups brainstormed long-term services and supports in the context of four questions: What’s working (accolades), What isn’t working (Issues), Why things aren’t working(Barriers) and How do we fix it (Solutions).

Even though this is the first of a series of articles to share the combined reports from the seven sites, the discussion continues. We welcome your feedback about long-term services and supports within your community and within our great State of Iowa. Here are some ideas:

The Iowa White House Conference on Aging Dialogue followed a thought-provoking airing on Iowa Public Television of “Caring for Mom & Dad” You can view the program at the following link: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/caringformomanddad/>

* Watch the program “Caring for Mom & Dad”
* Ask your senior center, apartment complex or other facility to provide an opportunity to view the program and host your own discussion group. Make a pledge to stay accountable to steps you would like to take, as a result of viewing the program.
* If you are a senior or soon to be a senior, have that discussion with your family, so they know your choices, your expectations, and how to manage your resources to make that happen.
* If you are a caregiver or family member, have that discussion with your older family member(s). Acknowledge their wishes, help them make the legal decisions, assess their resources with the reality of the care they may need. Begin to design a plan to best respect their choices.
* Share the results of those discussions with us. Help us to understand the needs that are being met, and those that are lacking. Share your ideas about the barriers for creating needed services and support, and potential solutions. And don’t forget to give praise where praise is due! You can write us, call us, email us, or even share your thoughts on our Facebook or website.
* Consider being an advocate and representative for your community/county/region. We are seeking qualified persons to serve on our advisory council for Connections Area Agency on Aging or for our Lifelong Links program.