



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FRIENDSHIP & PURPOSE

As I head into my next chapter, I am thinking about an article I recently read in the AARP Bulletin (June 2018) which named friendship and purpose as the keys to healthy living. We need to build strong social connections and reduce loneliness and isolation, find a sense of purpose, and develop a more positive, optimistic outlook on aging.

One thing I will miss greatly is the colleagues and friends I have made at PSRC. There are daily opportunities for social interaction, people with whom I have shared stories about our lives for 17 years. As I go forward, I know I will need to make sure I have communities that are as important to me as this one has been. Many of you have experienced this transition as you retire and move to new homes. I also know that I need to feel that what I am doing is making a difference—having purpose. I am excited about how the Friends Foundation for the Aging can have an impact in the field of aging. I also have ideas about volunteer opportunities I'd like to pursue, and you may see me at Women in Retirement or Evergreen Forum one day!

The current issue gaining national attention in the aging field is combatting loneliness and isolation. While isolation is a physical state, loneliness is a perception. Contributing factors include loss of family and friends, reduced mobility or restricted leaving of the home, and health issues. Several recent studies have found that loneliness can shorten life expectancy by eight years and that the mortality rate for loneliness is greater than obesity! Loneliness is associated with poorer overall health and higher rates of depression. PSRC offers dozens of activities to reduce isolation and loneliness, so check them out.

Research indicates that people with close friends and purpose are more likely to get plenty of sleep, eat healthy foods, take care of their health, have less stress, engage in cognitively challenging activities, and try new hobbies. Optimism about aging also has a positive impact on health, adding 7.5 years to life expectancy.

As defined by encore.org and Stanford University's study of purpose in the encore years, purpose is a "sustained commitment to goals that are meaningful to the self and contribute in some way to the common good, something larger than the self." This study found that the majority of older adults who exhibit high levels of prosocial values and behaviors, nearly one third engage in activities that meet the definition, and that people of color tend to be more engaged although prevalence of these activities cross all age, income, health, and geographic definitions. People who are purposeful also do more things for themselves and have a positive outlook on life.

Combined, these studies indicate that there are great benefits to engaging in purposeful activity in the community, which increases social interaction, improves outlook, and by extension, improves health and well-being.

If you want help finding ways to get more involved at PSRC, or in the wider community, ask Sharon Hurley, our volunteer coordinator and director of social services.

Susan W. Hoskins, LCSW
Executive Director