



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Finding Joy in Increased Connections

Dear Friends,

September is National Senior Center Month. Sponsored by the National Institute of Senior Centers, this annual celebration promotes senior centers across the country who serve their communities with excellence. This year's theme, *Delivering Vital Connections*, highlights centers who engage older adults with programs focusing on mind, body, spirit, and community.

In these unusual times, many senior centers are struggling to remain relevant and keep people connected in vital ways. While many senior centers have been forced to simply close their doors, PSRC has found a way to open ours even wider.

Through our online programming and digital engagement, PSRC continues to provide program offerings that promote lifelong learning and social engagement. Through our social services team, PSRC offers compassionate care, case management, and resource referral. With community connections and partners, PSRC is addressing issues of food insecurity and financial crises. We are here for you — and we will get through this, together!

A few weeks ago, I came across an essay in *The NY Times* entitled “Why It’s Good to Be Old, Even in a Pandemic,” by Bob Brody. The article caught my attention because it counters the prevailing narrative that older adults are vulnerable and fearful in the midst of this crisis. Brody acknowledges the science and confronts head-on the reality that Covid-19 disproportionately affects older adults (eight in ten deaths are people over the age of sixty-five). He urges rigor in taking precautions to keep oneself and one’s family healthy. At the same time, he argues that he is “having the time of his life.”



While his sunny approach initially caught me off guard, I confirmed his instincts in several conversations in the intervening weeks since. Several folks have shared with me that they are finding joy in increased connections with their family (albeit electronically). Others have shared appreciation for new hobbies, new joy in “walking the neighborhood,” and even greater appreciation for simple pleasures such as watching the sunset or exploring new towns on a Sunday drive.

One of the key factors contributing to this positive outlook is resiliency that strengthens with age. Patty David, director of personal fulfillment with AARP, notes that “older people are better positioned to cope with stresses, including this pandemic.” The ability to put things in perspective, and to understand

this crisis as one snapshot in the panorama of life, enables older adults to sometimes remove themselves from the daily rollercoaster of anxiety and stress that so many are feeling. A 2016 study from the Center on Healthy Aging at the University of California concluded that older people report higher levels of satisfaction, happiness, and well-being, coupled with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress than their younger counterparts.

Brody offers several helpful suggestions in his essay, including:

- Take care of your health — not only in terms of keeping safe from the virus — but also in terms of finding fulfillment through healthy practices (leisurely walks in nature, discovering laughter)
- Reach out more to family, friends, and former colleagues. Write a letter. Make a phone call. Stay connected.
- Practice small acts of kindness. Each chance encounter in a grocery store or a post office — even through a mask — creates an opportunity for kindness. Even a smile with bright eyes and a simple hello carries great significance in a pandemic.

At the same time, please pay attention to your own mental health and be aware of your own emotional state. While some, like Brody, are experiencing joy in the midst of this pandemic, other research suggests that an increasing number of people are experiencing depression and other mental health challenges. If you are experiencing signs of depression (including changes in sleeping patterns, altered moods, confusion, or difficulty paying attention), please reach out to your medical provider. You may also reach out to our social services team who will help connect you with the resources that you need.

All the Best,
Drew A. Dyson, PhD
Executive Director