



## FROM THE CEO, DREW DYSON

### Words Matter: The Power of Language in Reframing Our Perceptions

Dear Friends,

I was born into the parsonage of The Princeton United Methodist Church on Laurel Circle, the son of the United Methodist minister in town. Driving past that street every night on my commute home now, I am struck by the gentle slope of the hill down to the cul-de-sac where we lived. To a five-year-old Drew, it seemed like an insurmountable *mountain* to climb on my “Big Wheel” tricycle. I also remember fondly many of the lessons that I learned from Bishop Prince Taylor who lived right at the top of the Laurel Circle mountain. “Words matter,” Drew, “and the words we use to identify people can hurt or heal. Be a healer.” Among many lessons I learned from Prince Taylor, that one has had the most profound impact on my approach to life.

From our earliest beginnings at Spruce Circle in 1974, the Princeton Senior Resource Center has always been committed to fostering a community of respect, inclusivity, and understanding. This is a critical part of our core values, and a highlight of our current strategic plan guiding us into the future. As part of our ongoing endeavor to grow in our awareness as a community, I want to highlight the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)’s latest recommendation regarding the way we refer to our community members.

#### **A Shift in Perspective: “Older Adults”**

In their latest communication guidance, the CDC has provided guidance on appropriate and inclusive ways to refer to members of particular population groups that centers the needs of each group and moves beyond “stigmatizing language.” In the report, which you can read [HERE: https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Preferred\\_Terms.html](https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Preferred_Terms.html), the CDC recommends that instead of terms like “seniors” or “the elderly,” we use the phrase “older adults.” At a quick glance, it might seem like a simple linguistic shift, but the implications run deep.

Words are more than just labels; they carry connotations, histories, and emotions. Referring to someone as a “senior” might inadvertently emphasize age over experience, wisdom, or capability. The term “older adult,” on the other hand, offers a more neutral ground, emphasizing adulthood with the simple acknowledgment of the passing of time.



#### **Why This Matters**

- **Breaking Stereotypes:** Ageism remains one of the most pervasive forms of prejudice. By changing our language, we can challenge and reshape the stereotypes and preconceptions associated with aging.
- **Empowerment:** Words have the power to shape our reality. The term “older adults” centers the individual’s experience and maturity, acknowledging their years of experience while also emphasizing their continuing role in society.

(continued)

- Inclusivity: Not everyone in the age bracket PSRC serves (55+) might identify with being a “senior” or “senior citizen.” “Older adult” is a broader term that can resonate with more people, making them feel seen and included.

### **Moving Forward**

As a community, we have the power to reshape perceptions and redefine aging in positive and empowering ways. Embracing this new terminology is a step forward in this direction. I want to encourage you to adopt and promote the use of “older adults” in your conversations, writings, and communications.

Let us remember that words matter. They have the power to influence perceptions, inspire change, and foster understanding. By making this small yet significant change in our vocabulary, we can continue to create an inclusive and respectful community for all.

Thank you for being a part of our journey and for continuously striving to make our center a place of warmth, respect, and growth. I hope to see you “around the mountain!”

All the Best,

*Drew A. Dyson, PhD*

*Chief Executive Officer*