

WINDHAM REGION, VERMONT
SUCCESSFUL AGING COMMUNITY STUDY

OCTOBER , 2007

THIS STUDY WAS FUNDED BY :

**UNITED WAY OF WINDHAM COUNTY
THE THOMAS THOMPSON TRUST
COUNCIL ON AGING FOR SOUTHEASTERN VERMONT, INC.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

In 2004, the Windham County Long Term Care Network established a subgroup, the WC Healthy Aging Steering Committee. The purpose of this Steering Committee was to : 1) create a vision of a livable and viable community for all, particularly the aging population; 2) conduct an assessment of state and local data including an examination of the needs and available resources within the area (which was done in 2005-06); and 3) develop a plan to meet the continuing needs of the aging population in the Windham County area. In September, 2007 the final report was completed.

KEY FINDINGS

Participants in the community assessment believed that there are numerous assets in the Windham area that benefit its population and quality of life. There is a strong sense of "community" among residents. Participants also identified the "rural nature" , beautiful surroundings, and parks as area assets.

While overall Windham County is doing well economically, some residents are struggling. Survey respondents identified the need for the expansion and diversity of part-time employment opportunities. In addition, access to financial planning services for the elderly should be increased.

Many participants cited the lack of affordable and appropriate housing as a serious problem for elderly residents of Windham County. The majority considered the development of affordable and age-appropriate housing for the elderly and the provision of services to help older residents maintain their homes as high priorities for their community.

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Although participants believed that public transportation options could be improved, many reported making use of the three public transit providers that offer fixed route services in the area. While not comprehensive, commuter buses and between town buses serve many commuters and provide a variety of routes. Participants wanted to see further expansion of public transportation services as well as an improvement of the sidewalk system so that older residents could walk more easily when outdoors.

While a number of educational institutes and services are available, study participants mentioned that improving access to and use of educational resources was considered an important priority for the quality of life of area residents.

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While many area residents have a relatively high level of health and access to services, poor health and access to care are problems for some seniors. Although the majority of survey participants indicated that they have access to the medication they need, those who did not cited expense or lack of insurance coverage as the primary barriers. Almost half of participants considered improving access to physical and mental health care services a high priority. Many respondents also believed that increasing the availability of emergency health and dental health services as well as improving access to in-patient care should receive the highest priority when planning future programs.

Among all of the priorities for improving aging in Windham County, survey respondents considered increasing the availability of nursing homes and assisted living facilities as one of the most important.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The participants described their vision as a place where people are valued, respected and work together to create a community that supports everyone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To help facilitate a plan to meet the future needs of the aging community in the Windham County area these recommendations should be included.

1. Engage existing and new partners from all sectors of the community to develop, implement and evaluate a coordinated strategic plan to meet the future needs of the aging population in the communities of Windham County.

- 2. Develop strategies to increase the public's awareness and understanding of issues related to growing older in the Windham County area in a systematic manner. Try to create a consistent theme and message that can be easily shared by all partners.**
- 3. Collaborate with local school systems, colleges and adult education providers to increase awareness of existing programs, recommend new programs to reach older learners and to increase opportunities for continued learning.**
- 4. Collaborate with current employers to increase the diversity and expansion of part-time employment opportunities.**
- 5. Improve access to and availability of legal and financial services, including retirement and estate planning and budget management, for individuals as they age.**
- 6. Provide educational opportunities for caregivers and families on financial and legal issues that impact an older person's life.**
- 7. Offer educational opportunities to inform the public of housing related issues for aging and disabled residents and their families.**
- 8. Communicate with town governments, planning and zoning boards the issues related to affordable and appropriate housing for seniors.**
- 9. Collaborate with public transportation providers to increase access by expanding hours of service, ensuring affordability of service and expanding routes.**
- 10. Encourage collaborations and partnerships to improve access to health and social services by:**
 - a) increase accessibility for people with disabilities to community activities and services, including health, medical, social and recreational services,**
 - b) develop strategies to address the community's concerns around the reduction of nursing home beds,**
 - c) partner with existing providers to expand respite care opportunities,**
 - d) partner with existing providers to expand adult day programs,**
 - e) encourage the increase of availability of assisted living facilities,**
 - f) develop strategies to address the workforce shortage especially in home based care i.e. nurses, licensed nursing assistants and personal care attendants.**
- 11. Increase awareness of and access to existing recreational programs. Support new initiatives for indoor and outdoor recreational activities and resources such as:**
 - a) strength training programs,**

- b) swimming pools
- c) walking and running tracks,
- d) art programs(various cultural activities),
- e) group fitness programs,
- f) walking or hiking paths,
- g) biking paths.

The Steering Committee welcomes the addition of community partners to work on a plan to meet the future needs of the aging community in the Windham County area.

For more information about the work of the Windham County Long Term Care Steering Committee please contact:

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You will find the summary report or the full unabridged report entitled "Windham County, Vermont- Successful Aging Community Study" at the Council on Aging for Southeastern Vermont's website: www.coasevt.org.