

By Judith Pruess-Mellow, Senior New Ways, 8-25-08

Reaching out to Frail Elders

We are calling this idea “FE V FE Say HI”—pronounced “FiFi Say Hi”—a quirky, temporary name that makes you laugh--Frail Elders Visiting Frail Elders to Say HI. (We got this Say HI idea from San Antonio Hills Homeowners Association, the SAHI group)

-as more older adults choose to age in place, there will be an even greater need than there is now for Friendly Visitors to frail elders, to cut down on social isolation.

-traditionally, in our Senior New Ways Friendly Visitor trainings, we have envisioned these visits to be once a month for about an hour.

-it has recently come to our attention that there is a need for frail elders to be visited more frequently for shorter visits, just a check in time to say HI.

-Marilyn Wilson of Grass Valley UMC is working on a model where an active senior would drive a frail elder who likes to get out to visit another frail elder who is unable to get out. She has been trying the model out with two frail elders, one who goes with her to visit the other. Her idea is to expand this work and arrange for more active adults to take more frail elders to see other, even more frail elders. The active adult would drive. The visits would be short. They would occur every two weeks. In the off-weeks, the frail elder Visitor would call the frail elder Visitee, if that is possible. Otherwise, the active senior calls the Visitee. The Older Adult Ministry Council of the United Methodist Church may consider developing the model within the Methodist Churches. Pat Sanborn of FUMC Santa Rosa has done quite a bit of work with the calling-only method of visitation.

-this service, in addition to referring Visitees and their families to city and county agencies to be sure that the correct meals on wheels and senior transportation are in place and that in home care has been arranged as needed, should reduce social isolation. Concierge services such as those Avenidas Village, SAHI and Richmond Village of San Francisco offers (or will offer) help with hiring of licensed, bonded service workers. Home care agencies can help with personal care workers. Senior New Ways can help with training the Visitors in listening skills. When the Visitors and Visitees are part of a church, the training can address some spiritual issues. As some small neighborhood groups seem to emerge, Senior New Ways could also offer its classes in the Coming Fully Alive series in private homes or in community centers near the homes of seniors aging in place.

-it is our hope at Senior New Ways that some of the conversations between the active senior and the frail elder visitor and/or visitee might be around issues and ideas that have arisen in some of the Senior New Ways classes.

-the FEFE Say HI service can help to guarantee that people in each city have the phone numbers of their local senior care agencies, such as Adult Services (530-470-2476) and

Helpline (530-273-2273) in Grass Valley, Avenidas (650-289-5400) and Avenidas Village in Palo Alto, Community Services Agency (650-968-0836) in Los Altos and Mountain View, and Alameda County Agency on Aging (800-510-2020). Every city receives funds from the Older Americans Act, channeled through the Area Agencies on Aging, to help keep older adults in their own homes. If anyone is ever in doubt, call the nearest Agency on Agency, also called Councils on Aging in some places, for information (Santa Clara County, Council on Aging, 408-350-3297; San Mateo, 650-573-2343. And there is always the Eldercare Locator, a nationwide number: 1-800-677-1116, or the United Way's 211 phone call information line.

For more information on the ongoing development of these ideas, contact Judith Pruess-Mellow (650-209-1119) or Marilyn Wilson (530-274-3354).