Exploring New Choices with More Time

Before moving to Episcopal Homes, our elder residents led full lives. They raised children, coached, taught and volunteered. They are former mayors, teachers, social workers, artists and homemakers. Now, they have new choices for how they spend their time—because often they have more of it.

For some, more free time can lead to a sense of loss and isolation. For others, it presents new opportunities to cultivate longtime interests, explore new subjects, discover new skills and share their talents. Elderhood is a crossroads. As with any life stage, our choices impact how we age, our health, our legacies and capacity to thrive.

Episcopal Homes’ Creative Ventures program inspires elders to participate in learning and growth opportunities that are designed to form lasting friendships and enrich their sense of meaning and purpose.

Finding Joy and Meaning through Varied Programming

From one-time to more in-depth, multi-session classes, Creative Ventures offerings are designed to strengthen elders’ wellbeing, not just to keep them busy. Uniquely, programming taps into the talents, skills and experiences of our residents who co-create program offerings with staff. We also actively engage professional teaching artists through partnerships with organizations like MacPhail Center for Music, Northern Clay, Tu Dance, the University of Minnesota and others.

For example, through their participation, our residents can:
• attend weekly lectures, writing or dance groups delivered by residents or community partners;
• paint in courses taught by local teaching artists or resident artists; and
• join Sage Singers choir or perform in an intergenerational theater offered by teaching artists from MacPhail's and St. Paul Conservatory for Performing Arts.

“...creative arts expression, with its ability to engage us and connect us, shows great promise in reducing isolation, fostering improvement in health outcomes.”

—The Foundation for Art and Healing, The UnLonely Project
Many classes culminate with a public exhibit or performance, allowing elders to share their wisdom, skills and stories in various intergenerational forums, such as a recent cabaret performance on topics of aging and elderhood held in a University Avenue bar. As Joey Clark, Episcopal Homes’ frequent, visiting teaching artist from MacPhail Center for Music and St. Paul Conservatory for Performing Arts says, “Cabaret is about telling stories—and those who have lived the longest have the best wisdom and stories to share.”

**Improving Wellbeing through Creative Arts**

Engagement in creative arts positively affects wellbeing. Participation allows elders to find new, creative ways to learn and express themselves amidst a community of elders with shared experiences and extend learning to the broader community. According to research, sequential creative learning experiences:

- improve mental and physical health, resulting in fewer doctor visits and less medication use; and
- reduce elders’ mild cognitive impairment by 73%.

**Creating Beloved Community through the Arts**

Creative expression requires vulnerability. For many elders, painting, writing, singing or acting can be their week’s highlight. Sometimes they laugh together and sometimes they cry. At Episcopal Homes, Creative Ventures participants:

- learn each others' stories;
- share insights and experiences;
- discover new aspects of who they are;
- form meaningful relationships; and
- build resilience and support.

Our elders often marvel that in their 80s and 90s, they meet new friends who instantly become old friends. For many, Episcopal Homes is the most diverse community in which they’ve ever lived, given the socioeconomic, racial and cultural backgrounds represented among our 1,400 residents. With over half of Episcopal Homes’ residents having incomes below the poverty level, we don’t charge for participation. Everyone is welcome thanks to your contributions to Episcopal Homes Foundation.

“As we grow older, our capacity for creativity actually increases! We help empower that awareness by providing opportunities for elders to discover their own creativity and pass their wisdom on to future generations. Creative Ventures programs also help elders actively connect with others while finding new confidence, joy and purpose.”

—Kristin Atchinson
Creative Arts Director, Episcopal Homes
Newfound courage and connections

Two resident students in Joanie Delamater’s painting class, Nancy Begin and Doris Eide, embody the impacts of participation in arts programming. Even though she was a long-time painter, Nancy wasn’t originally enrolled in the class. She watched class from outside of Studio K’s windows, presuming her now disabled hands made it impossible for her to participate. Delamater invited her in, suggesting she use sponges instead of paint brushes, which she could not grip between fingers. Nancy’s capacity to paint with sponges left her classmates in awe.

Nancy and Doris met the first day of class. They sat side by side in their wheelchairs and have become lasting friends. One day, as Nancy struggled to paint, Doris said, “I wonder how we can make this happen?” Doris didn’t step in and paint Nancy’s piece. Like Delamater, she honored Nancy’s capacity to discover new ways to grow, create and share.

From Delamater’s perspective, participating in painting class empowered Nancy to connect with others, helping her unwrap herself in a way that disease wasn’t the lens through which she lived. “Since I met Doris in the painting class, I find myself venturing further out of my comfort zone and doing more than I would have ever dreamed. Without her encouragement, I don’t think I would go anywhere. Last week we ventured down the block in our wheelchairs. Recently, I also started taking the bus to the store. These are things I just wouldn’t have even tried before,” says Nancy.

Episcopal Homes’ wellbeing programming is made possible through your contributions to the Episcopal Homes Foundation.

“Without connections that happen through Wellbeing programming, elders would feel isolated and disconnected. They would not be living a full life, and the people at Episcopal Homes live life fully until they are no longer living,”

—Rev. Joanie Delamater
Creative Ventures Teaching Artist and Spiritual Life Volunteer