

Diversity, Equality & Inclusion

DEI Committee Friday Thoughts

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Older Americans Month **by Jeanne Hobbs**

I first came to Goodwin House Alexandria (GHA) as an intern in 1996. Working with older adults has been a passion of mine ever since. At first, I didn't know that would be the case, especially when I found out I was assigned to complete 220 hours of an internship for my associate's degree in nutrition. A little nervous and unsure of what to expect, I learned within just a couple of weeks that I could love a career path within senior living and healthcare. A few months later, a job opened and I was first in line to apply. The rest, as they say, is history.

Within the Goodwin Living family, we know and celebrate older adults every day. Goodwin Living does this very well. It's our mission and our culture. Residents and members live full and successful lives. Many volunteer within their communities, taking part in mission and outreach projects, donating time and financial resources, tutoring and mentoring Goodwin Living team members and participating in clubs and activities. [LeadingAge Virginia recognized Goodwin Living older adults](#) for their advocacy work to "uphold the well-being of our democratic institutions and neighbors and our environment."

One such resident at GHA, Sue Cook, shared the story of how she and another resident co-mentored a GHA team member to help her pass the U.S. Citizenship exam. After several months of one-on-one teaching, both mentors and the team member came to truly love, respect and appreciate one other. They remain close today.

Yet despite the many ways they are active and contribute to society, older adults are still victims of unfounded, negative stereotypes, which

can lead to [stereotype threat, a fear of engaging in activities that would seem to confirm a negative stereotype](#). This phenomenon can cause a negative impact on the physical, mental and spiritual health of older Americans.

What's more, many individuals entering the workforce may not consider working with older adults. As GHA Assisted Director of Nursing Charity Among has remarked for years, new graduate nurses frequently want to work in hospitals where they believe they can learn more and use their newly acquired skills. [With the rapid growth of the aging population and shrinking of the available workforce in health care](#), how can aging services still prosper?

That question is being answered at Goodwin Living.

Chief People Officer Fran Casey helps our organization pursue the goal to change the perception of working in senior living and healthcare. Goodwin Living has created a variety of programs to introduce individuals who are unfamiliar with the industry to the benefits of working with older adults. Through a mentorship program with high school and college students, residents and students form close bonds which results in more young people considering careers in senior living.

Tessa Trosman, a Marymount University student and former intern in our Marketing and Communications team, [points out](#) that she was surprised at how her initial perception of senior living changed so significantly. She assumed it would just be "basic care and support," but Tessa's experience showed her much more than that. It's about "creating an environment that fosters human connection and meaningful engagement for older adults." Tessa was most surprised at the relationships she formed, especially with her resident mentor. They laughed, shared stories and remained in touch even after Tessa's internship.

I continue to be proud of the work I and the rest of Goodwin Living are doing to support, honor and uplift older adults. The work needed to change the negative stigmas associated with aging and older adults can

be a serious challenge. Thankfully, Goodwin Living members, residents and team members have blazed that trail. Finding places of welcome and belonging is what we do, and each day we take another step toward a major paradigm shift.

Goodwin Living team members should encourage co-workers to seek out resident mentors to help with topics of interest, such as English as a Second Language tutoring, building conversation skills and preparing for the U.S. citizenship exam, just to name a few. Residents can continue to volunteer and be activists for themselves and the greater population of older adults. There **is** more life to live after 65. As we continue to age, we have the ability to make a difference every day.

Older Americans Month 2023

Every May, the Administration for Community Living leads the nation's observance of [Older Americans Month](#) (OAM). The 2023 theme is ***Aging Unbound***, which offers an opportunity to explore diverse aging experiences and discuss how communities can combat stereotypes. Join us in promoting flexible thinking about aging - and how we all benefit when older adults remain engaged, independent, and included.



Goodwin Living DEI Committee: Statement of Purpose: Educate, Embrace, and Empower team members, residents, members* and all served by Goodwin Living to support Diversity, Equality and Inclusion.

Goodwin Living DEI Committee Desired Outcome: The Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion Committee (DEI) will seek open and honest communication and collaboration that will inform and celebrate the age, culture, ethnicity and sexual orientation of team members, residents, members* and all served by Goodwin Living without bias. *Members include Priority Club members and Goodwin Living at Home.

Questions or comments? Please contact us DEI@GoodwinLiving.org.