Aging Futures

Promoting Social Connections

. . .stay connected – stay well

As people age they face significant life challenges and losses.

Certain factors increase the risk that a senior will become socially isolated. They are:

- The loss of a spouse or close friend can be so traumatic.
- Episodes of long term illness or deaths of friends can result in smaller numbers of social contacts. Adult children may have relocated in other areas and are not available.
- Changes in health and restrictions on mobility, such as giving up driving, can cause a senior to stay at home.

Studies have verified that retaining social connections is beneficial for the physical and mental well being of the elderly. Remaining socially connected is a recurring theme when seniors discuss their needs and concerns. The fear that they will lose connections to meaningful relationships and face their later years alone is common.

The Challenge

A lack of social contact and support has been correlated with an increased risk of physical illness, depression and substance abuse.

Many seniors have the ability to leave their homes but may hesitate to join new activities or form new relationships.

The second, more vulnerable group is those 75 and older, who have mobility limitations and are at the greatest risk of becoming isolated. They are more dependent on others.

In Broome County there are more than 6,000 people age 75 plus living alone.

Women are especially vulnerable since they live longer, often managing one or more chronic illness that can restrict their ability to leave the house and participate in social networks.

As a community, we need to:

- Help family, friends and organizations recognize the importance of staying socially connected
- Explore education that will motivate seniors to stay connected.
- Help seniors make new connections or revive old ones.
- Increase social supports available to most vulnerable elderly.

When seniors disengage, the community loses.

c/o Broome County Office for Aging / PO Box 1766 / Binghamton, NY 13902 (607) 778-2411 Fax (607) 778-2316

The Aging Futures Partnership is supported by funding from Community Partnerships for Older Adults, a national grant program of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

6/2005