

## HISTORY OF THE GRAY AND GREEN COALITION

### History of the Gray and Green Coalition

July 2008

Gray Panthers, NYC Network, embarked on an exciting, important initiative examining the relationship of an aging population and climate change. As this topic has become even more urgent and critical to the Earth's survival, we believe elders are affected by and can contribute to the rehabilitation of the planet. By learning about and examining issues as well as building coalitions, Gray Panthers sought to create a new understanding of the breadth of issues facing our aging population.

To ensure that older voices are heard, Gray Panthers and the Gray and Green Coalition sponsored a series of interactive programs to launch discussion on this important topic. We believe that the relationship of an aging population and climate has not yet been fully examined by advocates, researchers and policy makers. We are beginning by examining issues of concern as well as developing a preliminary plan of action.

Although others have considered this topic, our approach has been unique as we have invited speakers from a broad range of perspectives. Many of our speakers became quite enthusiastic about this new approach as they had not considered the magnitude of the effect of climate change on an aging population, from the perspective of the effect of climate change on elders, opportunities this challenge presents, and how seniors can use their power to effect positive change to help rehabilitate the planet.

#### *The Seed of Gray and Green*

During the January 2007 Gray Panthers Board meeting, Judy Lear (Convener, NYC Network) suggested that Gray Panthers, NYC Network, take on the important issue of Global Climate Change. At the forefront of the United Nations agenda, this issue is of worldwide concern. Making this issue relevant to the Gray Panthers' mission, Jack Kupferman suggested that we entitle the Gray Panther's response – Gray and Green.

#### *Steering Committee*

Recognizing the Board decided to invite other organizations that we have previously worked with and include them in a larger coalition. Four Board members immediately volunteered to serve on a Steering Committee to devote three consecutive monthly panel discussions to explore the policy, research and practical issues surrounding the intersection of *Global Warming and an Aging Population – A Gray and Green Initiative*. Other Steering Committee Members were invited to serve. The roster of Steering Committee Members includes:

- Judy Lear, Jack Kupferman, Shuiho Lin, Joan Davis representing Gray Panthers
- Muriel Beach, representing New York Statewide Senior Action Council,
- Elyce Roberts, representing Hudson Guild,
- Bola Aribidesi, representing the Joint Public Affairs Committee for Older Adults (JPAC)

#### *Coalition Partners and Mission Statement*

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The Steering Committee built a coalition of non-profit agencies by brainstorming names of progressive organizations (in the fields of aging as well as the environment) who might be interested in how climate change affects an aging population. Below is the current list of Coalition Partners:

*Congress for Senior Citizens of Greater New York; Goddard Riverside; Gray Panthers; Greater New York Chapter of Older Women's League (OWL); Hispanic Senior Action Council; Hudson Guild; International Longevity Center USA (ILCUSA); Institute for the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Elderly, Inc.; Joint Public Affairs Committee for Older Adults (JPAC); Korean American Senior Center of Flushing; New York Statewide Senior Action Council; Penn South Program for Seniors; Presbyterian Senior Services; Taiwanese American Association of New York. Special Support came from Fordham University, School of Social Work.*

Concurrently, the Steering Committee developed a Mission Statement for the Coalitions' work.

- The Gray and Green Coalition is initiating an examination of issues of climate change and an aging population. Our goal is to provide and identify issues of importance to this yet unexplored area. The objectives are to encourage a fuller exploration of a) how climate change affects an aging population, and b) how older persons can contribute to a healthier and "greener" environment.
- We will sponsor a series of programs entitled "Gray and Green" to educate, influence and motivate all concerned. As an outcome of this series, we hope to disseminate findings, to encourage academic research on this subject; and to provide academics and policy makers with some tools to ensure that the needs of an aging population are heard.

### *Gray and Green Panel Discussions*

To examine these important issues, the Gray and Green Coalition sponsored a series of interactive programs.<sup>1</sup> The program schedule was:

- *Gray and Green: Aging in a Globally Warming World* April 8, 2008
  - Subject: *Issue Identification*
  - Stuart Gaffin, PhD. Columbia University on Climate Change and NASA
  - Charles Guzzetta, Ph.D. Professor, Hunter School of Social Work
  - Richard Jordon Chair, United Nations DPI/NGO Conference "Climate Change: How It Impacts Us All"
- *Gray and Green: How to Use Your Gray Matter to Keep Things Green* May 13, 2008
  - Subject: *Identifying Opportunities*
  - John Liu Member of NYC Council, Queens
  - Majora Carter Founder and Executive Director, Sustainable South Bronx
  - James Collins read presentation of Patricia Brownell, PhD, Fordham University, School of Social Services, and UN Representative of INPEA
  - Tzi Chu Foundation

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of each presentation is attached to this Gray and Green History.

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- *Gray and Green: Unleashing the Power – Action, Action, Action* June 10, 2008
  - Subject: *Identifying Action for Change*
  - Alex Kalache, MD. Age-Friendly NYC, New York Academy of Medicine
  - William Shore Activist, Kendal Retirement Community
  - Betsy Ukeritis Environmental Educator II, NYSDEC Region 2
  - Michael Zamm Council for the Environment of New York City

### *Gray and Green – Food for Growth*

Reaching out to our network of contacts, we found great enthusiasm and excitement for issues we raised, because:

- This initiative represents an unexplored dimension of advocacy for an aging population, and
- The Mission Statement focuses how others could identify with us and provide clearer assistance, and
- Timing for the issue was ripe for discussion, and
- Steering Committee members demonstrated enormous commitment and time to ensuring the success of the program plans, and
- The imprimatur of Gray Panthers represents respectability and our network of contacts is broad, and
- We were clear that we did not know what would be the results of our efforts, but were clear that our initiative represents a significant issue to be examined.

### *Gray and Green Accomplishments*

1. Creation of Steering Committee
2. Writing Clear and Inspirational Mission Statement
3. Establishing and building a Coalition of likeminded organizations to assist us in moving this initiative forward,
4. Producing a Series of Three Topic Specific Panel Discussions
5. A Motivated, Team Oriented, Working Steering Committee producing creative and effective solutions to challenges and future efforts.
6. As a result, we have received numerous requests to bring the issues of Climate Change and an Aging Population to a broader audience. Examples include,
  - a. Potential Partnership with Sustainable South Bronx
  - b. Jewish Association of Services for the Aged (JASA) is preparing a research proposal to evaluate waste management practices in NYC Senior Centers,
  - c. International Federation on Ageing has invited the Gray and Green Initiative to sponsor a symposium on Climate Change at the annual meeting to be held in Montreal.
  - d. NGO Committee – Invitation to speak about Grass Roots organizing on Gray and Green.
  - e. Potential Funders are interested in the initiative
  - f. Making and maintaining connections with community activities, policy makers and outreach opportunities, such as: outreach at Health Fairs and other events

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- g. Enthusiasm from some of the more powerful voices in the environmental movement – the United Nations, large and small non-profits and foundations, Government agencies of the City of New York.
- h. Bringing together the few individuals currently working on this topic
- i. Call to action on the part of older persons in New York City and beyond to take small steps as well as identify policy implications to improve the lives of seniors and of us all.
- j. Working on developing “next steps” to ensure that the information and enthusiasm generated can be reflected in research and action.
- k. Keeping an archive of papers, discussions and contacts germane to the topic
- l. Track legislative initiatives essential to the Gray and Green Initiative

### The Future

The enthusiasm, importance and timeliness of this topic mandates that the efforts of Gray and Green continue. In addition to the above-mentioned ideas and suggestions, we encourage adding coalition partners, providing direction for advocacy, providing a forum for the issues surrounding aging and climate change, and education of the public, academics and policy makers.

We invite you to deepen your participation with the Gray and Green Coalition and Initiative.