

WOMEN'S BUREAU

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Older Worker discussion Wednesday 2/25 at 2 pm U.S Department of Labor conference room New York, NY

Participants:

- Grace Protos, Regional Administrator, Women's Bureau
- Jack Kupferman, convener, Gray Panthers NYC Chapter; chair, NGO Committee on Aging; NYC Dept. for Aging
- Renee Summerfield, volunteer, Grey Panthers NYC Chapter
- Lois Steinberg, The Center for Aging in Place
- Mary Beth Morrissey, researcher (gerontology) Fordham University; former president, State Society on Aging NY
- Susan Chittooran, Program Analyst, Women's Bureau
- Kim Hernandez, Asst. Commissioner, NYC Dept for Aging; EEO officer, NYC Dept for Aging

Discussion:

- Grace Protos extends welcome, and provides an overview of the Women's Bureau and provides an overview of the WB work around older workers.
 - o Federal agency that focuses on promoting women's economic security through policy, research, and advocacy. WB carries out its mission by collaborating with organizations, businesses, institutions, and other federal agencies.
 - Focus areas include: older women workers, getting women into higher paying jobs (STEM, particularly technology jobs, non-traditional jobs, manufacturing, transportation), equal pay, workplace flexibility, paid leave, etc.

- o The WB hopes to connect with individuals and organizations in our area to learn about their work related to older workers, and discuss ways in which we may collaborate on future work.

- Other attendees introduce themselves and describe their roles
 - o Jack Kupferman is the convener/president of the NYC Grey Panthers chapter, and has been the chair of the NGO Committee on Aging for 7 years. He described the organizations origins and founder Maggie Kuhn's experience of being forced into "mandatory retirement" at her job, and their continuing fight against ageism.
 - o Renee, a Grey Panthers volunteer, described her experience as a woman in her 50's who is having difficulty finding employment. Renee described being unable to find a job, and felt that her age played a role in getting hired. She also described the hostile manner in which employers and HR professionals treat her.
 - o Lois detailed her background as an education reform advocate, working in the Medicare rights center, and the senior rights program, which is a peer-to-peer training program. Lois gave an overview of the aging in place movement, and has established the only aging in place center in Westchester. This started with a feasibility study in one town in 2007 and expanded to 8 villages today.
 - o Mary Beth Morrissey is an attorney who focuses on healthcare, a researcher at Fordham University who specializes in gerontology, specifically chronic illness. And interference and pain. Past president - Society for Aging in NY
 - o Susan Chittooran is a program analyst in New York
 - o Kim Hernandez, is recently the Asst. Commissioner Dept. of Aging; and the agency EEO officer.

- Kim mentioned that the NYC Dept. for Aging has an employment and training program for seniors, which gets it's funding through Title V / Senior Community Services Employment Program (Federal funds). The program is a job training program for those 55+ and offers training, job placement, resume development and classes in areas that seniors need in particular, especially around computers and technology, etc.
 - o One of the challenges with this program is finding/identifying placement sites that match the skillset of workers. It's not easy to identify possible work locations/assignments.

- o Many of the people that walk through their door are women (very few men come into their offices). Most of the women are black or Latina, followed by Caucasian.
 - o There is also a language barrier, as many of the clients do not speak English.
 - o One of the entry points is through workforce 1 centers. Agency sits up the Workforce Investment Board
- Rebecca expressed her difficulty as a job seeker who is over 50, and despite having education and skills, is unable to find employment. Many of the HR specialists are rude or dismissive when speaking with her.
 - o There was a discussion about whether this was due to her age. General consensus pointed to yes.
 - o There was a brief discussion around whether there are placement personnel at workforce development organizations who specifically serve older adults. The question was raised whether these staff members themselves are older adults.
- Mary Beth spoke about the importance of re-conceptualizing employment, and how to educate older individuals about how to categorize/re-frame their skills and abilities, as perhaps they need to be translated to employers differently.
 - o Can't rely on employers to determine what skills are always needed
 - o We need to educate employers on the benefits and strengths of different generations/cohorts
 - i.e. - millennials may know current technology; but older generations such as baby boomers value loyalty to the company, and have more stability in their lives.
 - There was a discussion about some of the benefits of hiring older individuals and generational pros/cons
- Lois mentioned the Encore Program, which is an employment program for individuals who are 50/60+
 - o A conversation developed around individuals being pushed towards part-time employment vs full-time work.

- Grace mentioned the upcoming White House Conference on Aging that will take place in Washington DC and the smaller regional events in cities around the US. We are not directly involved in the planning of those meetings, but hope to advance these issues to the planning conversations. It would be helpful to be able to identify any models or case examples to highlight.
- There was a lengthy discussion about the need to change the conversation around aging. Promote the idea of positive aging, and not something negative or shameful.
- There is a negative perception and negative stereotypes about the elderly
 - This is particularly true in the media. Commercials that portray older individuals as clueless or not “with” it. Advertisements that show older people hire actors that look youthful i.e. no wrinkles, very physically fit.
- There was a discussion around computer games, like World of Warcraft. The example was given that people of all ages use computer programs and games like this, and a lesson is that you can train someone into developing new skills and techniques (vs “you can’t do this because you are too old”).
- There was a brief discussion around building confidence of out-of-work older individuals who are having difficulty getting a job.
 - Over time, the constant rejections (due to discrimination?) take a toll on ones self-esteem.
 - Training programs could provide tools/programs to help seniors brush up on skills like these - NYC Dept of Aging offers practice interviews in their employment program. This can help them feel comfortable and confident in interviews.
- The Reserve program is another employment program. The program is for retired professionals who are seeking part-time work in NYC agencies. The program matches skills of the individual to the needs of the city agency. There are 186 reservists in 23 city agencies.
 - It would be great to expand the program, particularly to the private sector.
 - Need to figure out how to expand the program without losing the quality of the program

- Discussion around disability and physical limitations due to age.
 - As an EEO officer, Kim mentioned that reasonable accommodations can and should be made.
 - I.e. - someone who has vision challenges may need a monitor that can magnify text.

- Mary Beth emphasized the need to think of aging as part of the normal human developmental cycle (i.e. - development doesn't just end when you "become" an adult), it is the entire cycle of life.
 - Learning should be constant. We need to think of training and education as a continual process, and emphasize life-long learning and growth.

- People need to learn about saving and preparing for retirement/social security BEFORE they are on the verge of retirement. These conversations need to happen much earlier. It was mentioned that they should begin in primary school.

- One individual mentioned the Elder Index, which looks at the overall economic status/well-being of aging individuals. Looks at housing, healthcare, etc.

- Discussion about Food Security/Elderly population. NYC Aging did a program/project involving Goddard Riverside Services and various non-profit organizations in the city who focus on hunger/nutrition, such as City Harvest, etc.

- What areas can we put some money into?
 - Participatory Action Research
 - Legal Profession - example
 - Pilot program
 - Need to come up with a solid plan in terms of what the purpose of this program would be, who it would serve, and who might administer this program, as well as what our overall goal is.
 - Ideas - program for job seekers?
 - Need to justify the need for the pilot program with research/data. Must show the need to have a pilot program

- What are some potential populations/sub-sections of the older worker population we can work with?
 - o Those with low levels of skills/education
 - o Members of an informal workforce (ie - domestic workers; unpaid caregivers; those paid under the table/non-traditionally)
 - o Highly-skilled immigrants (natives of another country who have high levels of education, but are unable to find equivalent work in the US - ie doctors in home country, but driving a taxi in NYC).

- Next Steps - The Women's Bureau will work on identifying some next steps, for example, flushing out some details about possible activities we can do going forward, and coordinate another meeting in the very near future. The idea of establishing a pilot program, or a working group/task force is a good starting point.
 - o In the next meeting, we hope to expand the number of organizations represented, and including groups like AARP, The New York Academy of Medicine, and the Columbia University Center for Aging