



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A WELCOMING COMMUNITY



PSRC will work to assure that all aging adults, of diverse ethnic, socio-economic, educational, gender identity, sexual orientation, and immigration status, will be provided services through PSRC.

—PSRC Non-discrimination policy

I realized as I looked back over the past years of Director's Messages, that while we hold being **welcoming to all** as a core PSRC value which we try to make evident every day, I have not written about it. A welcoming community can be like that—you assume that respect is there until one day something happens like a snarky or ignorant comment, and you remember that sometimes you have to make it intentional, to say it out loud.

I think that most of us believe that the communities we live in are more diverse than the ones we grew up in. Yet do we really know people different from ourselves? The national media has pointed out that while our country has become more diverse, we have less contact with people from different political parties, faiths, ethnic, and cultural groups.

PSRC offers great opportunities to get to know people who have had different life experiences

and interests. When I first arrived here, some people said “PSRC is for residents in senior housing,” while others said “PSRC is for the wealthy people in the Western section.” I think we overcame those perceptions by offering a wide variety of programs in multiple locations that appeal to a diverse population. Someone once told me that PSRC and the Princeton Public Library are two places where people gather from throughout Princeton.

We also try to offer programs that give people opportunities to share thoughts and opinions, such as TED Talks and Let's Talk. Evergreen Forum classes are discussion-based and provide space to explore a wide range of subjects. Special programs like “Growing up African American in Princeton” help us learn about others. The more we know each other, the less likely we are to say or do something unintentionally hurtful.

But it takes more than offering programs to be truly welcoming. It means that our staff need to be culturally competent to understand how different cultures view aging and older adults, to help people make plans for their future that are consistent with their own

traditions and circumstances, and to ensure that people feel respected and truly heard. Cultural competence includes understanding LGBTQ concerns, gender differences, and how each generation views issues, not just ethnic and socio-economic differences.

Being a welcoming community also means that we all—staff, volunteers and participants—need to be respectful of each other and individually have a responsibility to intervene when something happens that is disrespectful. There are times that I have interceded when someone has been rude to one of the staff, and when participants got into a disagreement. PSRC can only be a safe space if there is no tolerance for hurtful behavior.

As the Princeton area becomes more diverse, we all need to learn more about each other, to check our assumptions, to listen carefully to each other, and to be respectful, even when we disagree. Together we can make PSRC a community where we learn about each other and treat everyone with respect. The world will be a better place.

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