



Tatiana Fortune, Golden Gate Senior Center Director, is having as much fun as the center participants do at programs that provide support and socialization.

UPSLIDE GRANT FOR GOLDEN GATE SENIORS

Isolated seniors are at a higher risk of developing high blood pressure, depression, dementia, and other complications than their peers who are surrounded by a loving, caring network of family, neighbors, and friends, according to several studies. Collier Senior Resources is helping to resolve this problem at the Golden Gate Senior Center with funding from a \$50,000 Women's Foundation grant.

"This grant is going to make a significant difference," said Messer. "In years past, we've given smaller amounts to different organizations. This year, we decided to give a larger grant to just one organization to be more impactful."

The grant is called **UPSLIDE, which stands for: Utilizing and Promoting Social engagement for Loneliness, Isolation, and Depression in the Elderly**. Senior center director Tatiana Fortune fashioned it after a similar, successful program in Tallahassee, Florida. The Tallahassee senior center "has been in existence for decades, but they saw the need to engage even more with isolated seniors." While that program includes men and women, "I targeted women because they are more likely to live longer than men, and report more depression," she said. In fact, according to recent studies, Fortune cited, women are twice as likely to report being depressed than men—a condition that worsens if left unchecked.

The new grant-funded program at Golden Gate Senior Center targets women 60 and over with no social support in the Naples area. They are invited each week into a circle of friends—called Friends Connection—in a creative and

relaxed environment to talk about topics and issues central to everyone's life, build meaningful relationships, and receive counseling.

The grant funds the Friends Connection coordinator and activity materials. Participants discuss topics such as mental health, past experiences and memories, and how close relationships can lead to a better quality of life. Since launching the program in October, 32 women have enrolled, with a goal of 80 participants, Fortune estimates. "I think we'll most likely supersede that—that's the goal," she said.

As the need to serve the aging sector became crystal-clear, Collier Senior Resources converted a former library in the Golden Gate community into the cheery center, which opened in 2014. The center has 1,400 members, Fortune said, up from 800 two years ago.

The center partners with many organizations and agencies to provide hot lunches, classes, activities and programs, a food pantry, and employment and healthcare benefit assistance and resources. Many members enjoy quilting, sharpening their English skills, strengthening their minds and bodies with tai chi or yoga, studying to become naturalized citizens, or socializing over bingo and dominoes.

Others may come—alone—for a warm meal.

In addition to tapping into reticent visitors, Fortune said outreach efforts are underway to spread the word about Friends Connection at area churches, through referrals, social media, and elsewhere. "This is a program people will have to express self-interest in. They have to want to participate and choose it for themselves," Fortune said, adding she hopes neighbors or others recognizing their plight will steer them to

the program.

The women who have already joined have begun to brighten and show excitement as they open to the case manager and make friends, Fortune said. "We are very grateful for the support of the Women's Foundation. We definitely couldn't do this meaningful work without their support. It goes a long way toward increasing our impact," Fortune said. "We're talking about a very vulnerable population here."

Messer, chair of the Women's Foundation, is looking forward to seeing the impact of the grant. "It's really going to enable the women there to connect with other people and help create opportunities for engagement with others and have meaningful interactions. They have the ability to talk with a counselor who will monitor them," she said. "I think it's going to make a world of difference."

GRANTS MAKING A COMMUNITY-WIDE IMPACT

From the community's littlest ones to the eldest, Women's Foundation of Collier County has distributed more than \$550,000 in grants to nonprofits' critical initiatives in the past five years.

Next month, when The Shelter for Abused Women & Children's 21,000-square-foot Shelly Stayer Shelter in Immokalee opens its doors, visitors will sign in at the reception area funded by a \$25,000 grant from the Women's Foundation. The 43rd domestic violence shelter in Florida will have 48 beds for domestic violence survivors, eight beds for human trafficking victims, and four beds for special needs victims. Almost 400,000