



## Supporting Older Adults Through Healthy Aging and Independent Living

### Student Interns:

Michael Pamonag, Drexel University College of Medicine  
 Hana Shapiro, Drexel University College of Medicine

### Academic Preceptor:

Diane Gottlieb, MD Drexel University College of Medicine

### Community Preceptors:

Roberta Baslam, MA, UUH Outreach  
 Sara Popkin, MSW, LSW, UUH Outreach

### UUH Outreach Program



## UUH OUTREACH

Unitarian Universalist House (UUH) Outreach provides individualized, quality professional care that is responsive to the physical, emotional and intellectual needs of an older adult in the Northwest Philadelphia community. UUH provides services that include but are not limited to health promotion, social work service, client assistance fund distribution, and special projects.

## BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

The Northwest Philadelphia clientele are primarily Black and otherwise diverse, older adults who have been living in the area for decades, if not their whole lives. Many clients qualify for a number of state-assistance programs that can be overwhelming to manage for an individual. The effects of COVID-19, too, on the clients' resilience, mental health, and personal losses have had an acute effect on Northwest Philadelphia's tight communities.

## TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

The Bridging the Gap Interns assisted with the multi-faceted services that UUH Outreach provides to their clients. Throughout the summer, the interns met UUH clients for in-person visits, compiled resources for the client-base, connected clients with pertinent information, and put together a newsletter for an elder living community affiliated with UUH. The interns also assisted with setting up and running community-based events and updated the team on any medical issues that clients experience. Outside of their formal responsibilities, the interns spent their time making meaningful and personal connections with clients—many of whom endured long periods of isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS/CHALLENGES/JOYS

### Challenges:

#### COVID-19

- With the transition of many services to a virtual format and state personnel increasingly working from home, it has been harder to connect over the phone with service providers for elder support, which is often the fastest way to receive help.
- There has also been a push to digitize the bureaucratic process, creating greater obstacles for elders who are not as familiar with computers and smartphones trying to access city or state services.

#### Poverty

- Several clients struggled significantly with their financials, which put pressure on their living conditions, physical health, and mental health.

#### Accumulation

- In recent years, there has been a trend of increased accumulation of personal belongings in clients' homes. To help clients live independently in a sustainable manner, we were concerned about their environmental health (e.g. risk for falls).

### Accomplishments:

- Organized and de-cluttered many different areas of clients' homes and helped them build confidence to tackle problems and help them build their version of a healthy life
- Helped clients identify motivations to reduce smoking and connected them with smoking cessation resources
- Connected elders with fresh produce vouchers and wrote recipes for income-accessible, seasonally-minded, nutritious meals in a monthly newsletter

### Joys:

- We learned about the rich history of Germantown through countless remembered stories
- We are excited to know that there are organizations that exist to support and maintain community through healthcare and social work

## REFLECTION

**Michael Pamonag:** "The staff at UUH outreach's investment and engagement in my learning allowed me to have an immensely eye-opening summer experience filled with both breadth and depth. UUH gave me the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with unique individuals with even more unique stories. Furthermore, through serving the UUH clients, I gained a deep insight regarding some of the unique obstacles that older adults face in independent living as they age. Moving forward, I believe this will play a pivotal role in allowing me to develop into a more holistic health care provider that can better provide multi-dimensional care to patients undergoing similarly unique obstacles."

**Hana Shapiro:** "UUH Outreach is a unique community organization that has the flexibility to address many of the different obstacles older adults face while living independently. After having lived in the Germantown area for a year, it was gratifying to see the faces, houses, and stories of those who have called this pocket of Philadelphia their home. Working in tandem with a supportive and dedicated staff, I was able to build my toolbox of resources and skills to offer people in my community and bolster my confidence in becoming a compassionate, knowledgeable, and available health practitioner and neighbor."



*Summer Cleaning is the new Spring Cleaning!*

Mickey and Hana dispose of some unwanted belongings from a client's house, freeing up space in their new apartment.