

Lending Our Eyes & Ears

A SPECIAL FOCUS OF FRIENDSHIPWORKS



FRIENDSHIPWORKS AND FAITH COMMUNITIES

FriendshipWorks' mission is to reduce isolation, enhance the quality of life and preserve the dignity of older adults in the Boston area. For 30 years we've partnered with communities of all faiths to end elder isolation and build intergenerational networks that benefit all of us wherever we are in our aging process.

VISION AND HEARING LOSS

There are gifts as we age; and there are also losses. The losses of sight and hearing are two of the most common and difficult for older adults.

Did you know?

- 2/3 of Americans over the age of 70 have some hearing loss
- 13 million older adults are predicted to have hearing loss by 2030
- Over 11% of Americans over 80 have both vision and hearing impairment

For older adults, vision and hearing loss can be devastating and increase a person's vulnerability to social isolation and loneliness. Vision and hearing loss have been linked to feelings of depression and anxiety with far-reaching effects on a person's relationships and social circle.



FULL CONGREGATIONAL PARTICIPATION

When an older adult suffers from hearing or vision loss, they are at risk for additional losses as well. For many older adults, congregational participation is a gift: a gift to their senses through praise and music; a gift to their spirits through education and ritual; and a gift to their social lives through warm greetings from friends in faith.



Open Doors: A Checklist

CONGREGATIONAL ACCESSIBILITY FOR OLDER ADULTS WITH VISION OR HEARING LOSS

At FriendshipWorks, we know how much participation in congregational services can mean to many of the older adults we serve, and that's why we have put together this introductory check-list of ways your congregation can make sure elders who experience loss of hearing and vision, do not also have to miss out on full participation in your congregational services.

| Hearing Accessibility | Visual Accessibility |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Does your main worship area have a clear audible sound system, with at least one microphone that can be regularly accessed during worship services? How about your classrooms and fellowship areas?<input type="checkbox"/> Does your sound system in your main worship area have individual Assistive Listening Devices (ALD) for people who are hard of hearing?<input type="checkbox"/> Do your ushers and greeters know where these devices are and are they comfortable assisting people with using them?<input type="checkbox"/> Are all speakers during a service prepared to speak loudly if a microphone is not available?<input type="checkbox"/> Do you have a roving microphone that is available for sharing time, prayer requests or other times of congregational sharing? (If a roving microphone is not available do you have an accessible microphone at the front of the room? Or does a worship leader summarize each comment from their microphone so that everyone can understand?)<input type="checkbox"/> Do you tape your services so that they are available for seniors who cannot attend or who can hear better without outside distractions?<input type="checkbox"/> What do you do to limit background noise? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Do you publish your sermon texts?<input type="checkbox"/> Is adequate lighting provided throughout the worship area? This includes elimination of glare from the windows and lights.<input type="checkbox"/> Do you have the option of printing bulletins, handouts or newsletters in large print? (at least 14 point font or larger).<input type="checkbox"/> Do you have any copies of large print hymnals or song sheets?<input type="checkbox"/> If you don't have large print materials, do you project worship materials on a screen so that everyone can see?<input type="checkbox"/> Do you share all announcements verbally over a microphone in order to accommodate elders with vision loss?<input type="checkbox"/> Do you introduce new hymns prior to worship or in such a way that people with low vision can still fully participate?<input type="checkbox"/> Are your signs easily visible both outside of your congregation and within? (look around at restroom signs, elevators, signs for assistive listening devices).<input type="checkbox"/> Do you light the speakers from the front and avoid back lighting (this is also important for elders who are hard of hearing and rely on speech reading).<input type="checkbox"/> Are sidewalks well lit? |

Additional Areas to Consider

- Are your adult ministry staff and volunteers trained to be sensitive to issues of disability?
- Are you sensitive with religious material that speaks of the deaf, lame and blind?

We are here as a resource for congregations as you live out your faith through compassionate ministry to all generations. We are also here to learn from you about ministry during the lifespan. For more information about how your congregation can partner with FriendshipWorks to create a network of support for older adults throughout Boston, call our Community Projects and Congregational Outreach Coordinator Today!