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SMC Conference Facilitates Discussion of Critical Topics

By Amanda Kuehn

Diverse and dynamic women, including 92-year-old Betty Reid Soskin, America's oldest park ranger, and Wanda Johnson, the mother of Oakland resident Oscar Grant who was shot by a BART police officer on Jan. 1, 2009, will speak on the topics of racism, sexism and social injustice as keynote speakers at the March 8 Wo/men's Conference at Saint Mary's College. Put on by the Women's Resource Center (WRC), the annual conference connects individuals from different genders and generations to engage in the discussion of critical topics.

Recipient of the 1995 California Woman of the Year Award and special guest at President Obama's inauguration, Soskin is a prominent and active African-American woman. "She's coming back by popular demand," said Sharon Sobotta, director of the WRC. While Soskin will speak to the issue of racism in society, Johnson will target the way that violence against young men of color affects

women. Soskin and Johnson will be joined by social justice practitioners who work in agencies ranging from Community Violence Solutions to the MOMs program in Alameda County.

"It's intentionally an inter-generational conference," said Sobotta. "We think something extra comes from having many generations together sitting around the table and talking about these issues."

Intentionally written with a backlash, the Wo/men's Conference isn't just for women. "We want men to be there too," said Sobotta. The conference seeks to bring together men and women from different backgrounds to explore new ways to address tough issues. It is an all-inclusive venue in which community members, educators, parents and students will have the opportunity to learn about and engage in discussions.

A number of large group workshops will be offered by various members of the Lamorinda com-

munity. Workshop topics range from human trafficking and modern day slavery to a presentation on how your food choices can challenge injustice. "We don't want people to leave overwhelmed," said Sobotta. "We've asked that the workshop leaders leave people with some sort of agency regarding what they can do and what difference they can make."

New to this year's conference is an interactive poster session that will allow small groups and individuals to share new information, interests and findings with conference attendees. "People can choose anything they're passionate about that relates to the general theme," Sobotta explained. Posters might reflect student projects, new research or information regarding the efforts of a local organization related to the themes of racism, sexism and social injustice. A group of SMC students will present a poster on the question "What is violence against women?" Mis-

sion and Ministry will present a poster regarding fair trade products.

Anyone can participate in the poster fair. Poster presenters will be stationed at tables, engaging with small groups and individuals as they pass by. If you're interested in presenting, sign up on the WRC events website at: <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/womens-resource-center/events/womens-conference-2014/submit-a-workshop-or-poster-session-proposal>. Applications for participation in the poster session will accepted through Saturday, March 1.

The conference will run from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, March 8. Conference tickets are \$25 per person; sponsored tickets are available for those who are unable to purchase. You can register online by locating the WRC's events page (<http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/womens-resource-center/events/womens-conference-2014>) and clicking on the link labeled "Register Now."

"V-Day Until the Violence Ends" Event Feb. 14

Other Saint Mary's Women's Resource Center events include "V-Day Until the Violence Ends." A worldwide movement to stop violence against women and girls, V-Day promotes creative events to increase awareness, raise money and revitalize the spirit of anti-violence organizations. Using monologues from Eve Ensler's renowned play, "The Vagina Monologues," SMC students will bring these stories to the stage at 3 and 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 14. Pre-sale tickets are \$5 for students; \$10 for non-students, available online. Tickets at the door are \$7 for students; \$12 for non-students. For tickets and information, visit <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/womens-resource-center/events/v-day-until-the-violence-stops>.

Isolation and Loneliness Can Be "Deadly" to Older Adults

Prevention is the key

By Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC

It is a powerful statement to think that isolation might be debilitating to older adults and contributing to mortality. However, research done in the past few years, at UCSF and at the University College London, revealed that lack of social contact – "isolation" – is a predictor of death.

Dr. Carla Perissinotto, one of the authors of the study done in 2012 at UCSF, said that one of the surprising findings of the team is that loneliness does not necessarily correlate with living alone. Research revealed that 43 percent of the adults surveyed felt

lonely, but only 18 percent lived alone. A caregiving spouse who gives care to someone who no longer has the capacity to be a companion could feel lonely and be isolated due to his or her role.

Many of you over 70 living alone might be saying, "I love my life and I actually enjoy my own company." It is my personal belief that if you choose a solo lifestyle and it doesn't compromise your health or sense of well-being, it can be fine. However, when the ability to leave your home is compromised for any reason or

health issues start to isolate you or family members, then there is a problem that can be remedied.

The British study found that having no social contacts increased the risk of dying, regardless of a person's health and other factors, while loneliness increased the risk of dying only among those with health issues. They further explained that those isolated had no one to urge them to eat well or to take prescribed medications and in a crisis there was no one to step in.

Loneliness can be felt in people who are fully functional, but feel

empty or desolate. People who identified themselves as lonely had an adjusted risk ratio for decline that was 59 percent greater than those not experiencing loneliness.

So what should one do to prevent isolation and loneliness? A simple answer is to stay "engaged" all your life. That engagement will vary for each of us, especially as we move into our 80s and 90s. But when I talk to positive people in these age groups, they are still engaged by volunteering, visiting friends, taking classes – despite losses and health challenges.

Here are seven ways to prevent isolation and loneliness:

1) Consider values and your "sense of purpose." Ask yourself, "What gives my life meaning?" If you played a musical instrument, but don't any longer – go to concerts. If you like to travel, sign up for trips (already planned) at a senior center if you don't have local friends or family to travel with.

2) Volunteer. Churches or religious organizations often offer classes and/or volunteer opportunities. They often have visitors to keep you connected if you're homebound.

3) Access transportation. If you can no longer drive, look for the local senior shuttle to bring you to events where you have opportunities to meet others. Call senior information for a list of senior transportation services: (800) 510-2020.

4) Adopt a pet. You'll have someone to talk to in the middle of the night and a good excuse for a walk where you will meet other pet owners.

5) Get ear and eye exams. If you have sensory losses and don't like crowds because you can't always hear, have your ears examined and see what is new in devices. Same with vision: have your eyes checked annually and update your glasses.

6) Consult a care manager. If you have other medical issues which have been a reason for isolation, you might want to consult with a professional care manager who can assist you with managing your medical issues and get you back into the community. Things that we think can't be fixed often have

a new answer – therapies and treatments are changing and an expert can be your coach or guide.

7) Communicate your needs. Sometimes you just need to ask for what you need. If you do have family – near or far – tell them how important their calls and visits are and if you are not on the computer, learn. Email and Skype can keep you connected.

For those who live in Lamorinda, the Lamorinda Village (www.lamorindavillage.org) – a membership organization that will begin in late 2014 – will provide entertaining, educational and health focused opportunities for social engagement. The primary purpose of "The Village" is to support seniors to live healthy in their own homes and communities.

We are social creatures and we need to nurture ourselves and push at times to stay connected. Loss is part of life, but so is creativity and possibility. Reach out to others who you think are isolated, know your neighbors and be part of your community – it will lengthen your life.

If you want resources for any of the suggestions or need to speak with a professional geriatric care manager, please give me a call. Depression could be keeping you stuck – if so, feel free to call my office for resources. If you do live alone or with a partner, think about becoming part of the new "Lamorinda Village" for this primary reason alone – avoiding social isolation.



Linda Fodrini-Johnson is the founder and executive director of Eldercare Services, a licensed marriage, family and child counselor, and a certified care manager.



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