

"THE AGING PROJECT"

The North Dakota Project to Improve Services
to Older Persons with Developmental Disabilities

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The Aging Project promotes the independence, productivity, and integration of aging persons with developmental disabilities in the community through the following activities:

Life Planning Short Courses

Short courses are designed for families, services providers, and persons with disabilities:

- It's Never Too Early, It's Never Too Late
- Making Healthy Choices as We Age
- Rearranging Lives After Alzheimer's
- Understanding Death and Dying

Interdisciplinary Practicum

Individually tailored practicum experiences give MSU students opportunities to participate in community activities designed for aging persons with diverse abilities. Undergraduates may be majoring in:

- Nursing
- Psychology
- Humanities
- Human Performance

- Special Education
- Social Work

The Active and Ageless Program

The *Active and Ageless Program* provides training for providers of adult services to implement leisure activities including:

- Aerobics
- Music and Poetry
- Chair Dancing
- Swimming
- Arts and Crafts
- Stretching
- Life Stories
- Strengthening



It's Never Too Early; It's Never Too Late

Staff members on *The Aging Project* help prepare adults with diverse abilities take part in age-appropriate life planning activities. The curriculum is delivered in a one- or two-day workshop format.

It's Never Too Early; It's Never Too Late workshops are designed for:

- Family members
- Service providers
- Case managers
- Persons with disabilities

The first session explains legal and financial decisions including:

- Advanced directives
- Living wills
- Guardianship issues
- Surrogate decision making

The second session is designed around the concerns of each participant.

The workshop, led by a staff member from *The Aging Project* and an attorney, is designed to present important issues and help resolve tough dilemmas for aging persons with developmental disabilities.



Complimentary Social Work Continuing Education Units are available for this course.

It's Never Too Early; It's Never Too Late Course Content

Introduction

The topics discussed in the curriculum, *It's Never Too Early; It's Never Too Late*, are emotionally difficult and often complicated to sort out. Parents and siblings, agency staff members, and case managers, along with persons with developmental disabilities, often need some assistance to identify key issues and decide how to prepare for them.

Getting Started

Planning for the future ensures that personal choices are made while we have the physical and mental capacity to do so. The benefits of addressing these issues are immeasurable for family and agency staff members, and persons with disabilities.

Decision Making Options

Guardianship and Durable Powers of Attorney for Health Care and for financial purposes are designed to establish mechanisms to insure that our wishes be followed when we must depend on others.

Estate Planning

Children with developmental disabilities benefit from a Special Needs Trust, designed to hold their inheritance in reserve as an ongoing resource to supplement basic services offered through Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

The sessions are intended to give participants an opportunity to investigate alternatives for the future. The workshop may be conducted at any location with a minimum of 10 families represented.

Making Healthy Choices as We Age

The *Making Healthy Choices as We Age* curriculum helps families and service providers living with a senior with developmental disabilities.

Lessons in the Healthy Choices Curriculum

Lesson 1: **What is Aging?**

Lesson 2: **Making Healthy Choices**

Lesson 3: **Healthy Choices for Bones and Muscles**

Lesson 4: **Healthy Choices for Heart, Lungs, and Circulation**

Lesson 5: **Healthy Choices for Our Sensory Systems and Skin**

Lesson 6: **Healthy Choices for Body Systems**

Lesson 7: **Healthy Choices for Feeling Good**

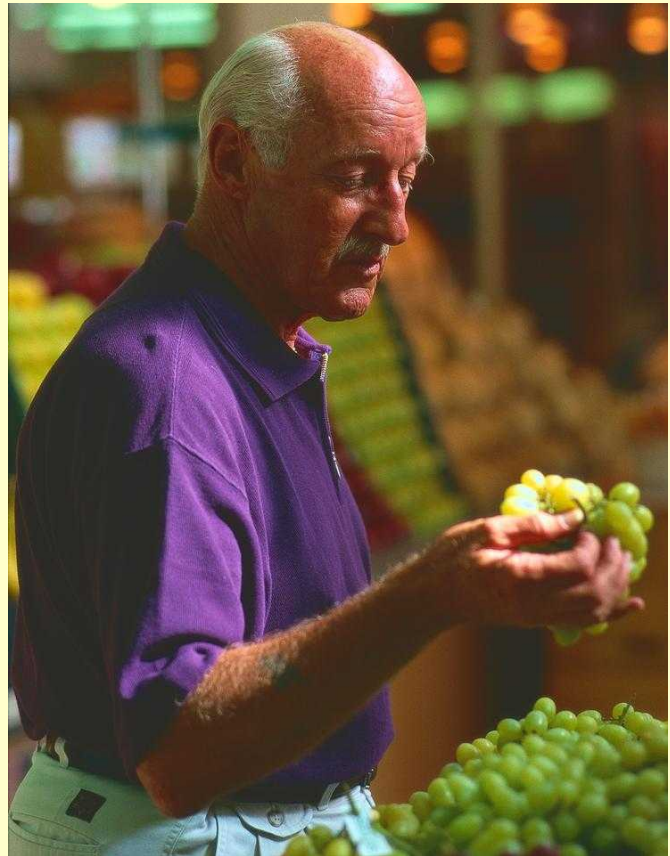
Lesson 8: **Keep Making Healthy Choices Over Time**

Activities in the Healthy Choices Lessons

- Getting together
- Sharing ideas, choices, strategies
- Doing activities that explain aging and health
- Learning new exercise habits
- Planning to make healthy choices at home
- Enjoying a healthy snack together

Achieve Good Health From

- A positive self-image
- Regular exercise
- Healthy foods
- Assistive devices
- Good safety habits
- Health care visits
- Wise health choices
- Good personal health habits



Each Healthy Choices lesson suggests teaching with these strategies:

- Look at and talk about examples
- Share personal experiences
- Compare objects or pictures
- Play a game
- Identify healthy/unhealthy foods
- Try new forms of exercise
- Take before and after pictures
- Look at videos
- Fill out simple charts
- Sort materials
- Make personal wellness plans
- Try new activities
- Look at food samples
- Share easy-to-use recipes

The Aging Project:

- Provides agency staff with strategies and information they can use to support people with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities.
- Teaches about aging and making healthy choices for diet and exercise.
- Offers eight-week classes for consumers that are co-taught by staff members and a representative from *The Aging Project*.
- Uses a train-the-trainer approach so staff members may teach this curriculum to others in the future.



A one-hour orientation for staff members is held prior to the first class. Each class lasts for 1.25 hours.

Understanding Death and Dying

Confronting end-of-life issues is part of the aging process for all of us! Seniors with disabilities *can* learn to understand death and dying as they receive appropriate intervention and support.

Unfortunately, all too often, people with disabilities don't receive the specific instruction they require.

Individuals with cognitive disabilities often have these beliefs regarding death and dying:

- Egocentrism/magical thinking

A belief that a person has the power to control or prevent the death of another person.

- Wishful thinking

A belief that death is reversible and temporary.

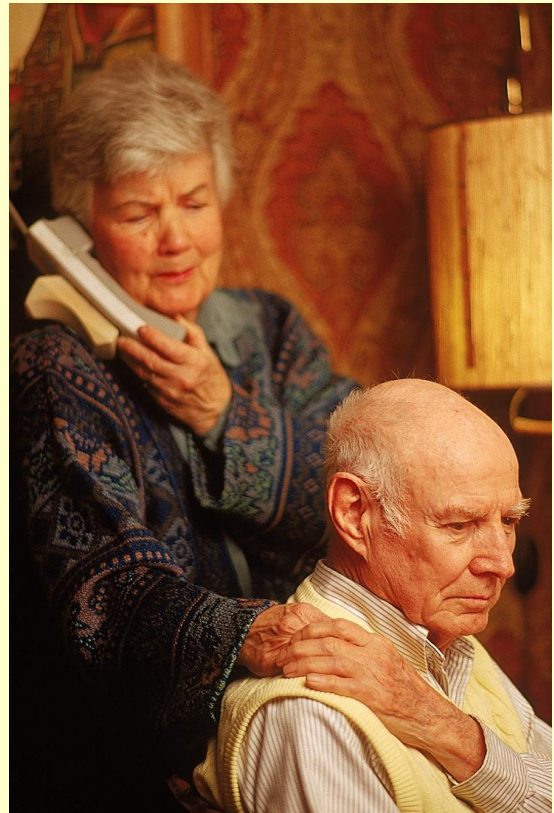
- Death is personified

A belief that life after death requires the basic essentials of food, clothing, air, and water.

The Instructional Approach

The eight-week class for consumers uses a train-the-trainer approach, and is co-taught by agency staff and a project representative. Participants in the class:

- Start with general concepts about death and later learn specific ones (Some things are alive/dead, some people die, I will die).
- Learn which responses are helpful (active listening) and which hinder understanding (asking questions or explaining).
- Replace magical thinking (I'll see Mom at Christmas) with realistic plans (It's had to imagine Christmas without Mom).
- Learn how to prepare for and respond to death.



Explaining Death and Dying

When family and friends move away and die, people struggle to:

- Understand what happened; why the person is no longer with them.
- Cope with intense feelings of anger, fear, anxiety, sorrow, loss, guilt, depression, or even despair.
- Face the impact of the loved one's death and the loss in their everyday life.
- Re-examine beliefs about love, life, death, goodness, and evil.
- Say good-bye, plan or participate in funeral arrangements.

- Mourn or grieve for the person over time.
- Grasp the finality of death.
- Prepare for the ending in one's own life.

Scheduling Classes

Classes are scheduled according to participant need. They are held once a week during the day or in the evening in a home, apartment, or service center.

The best time to hold a class is NOT following a crisis, but on a pro-active basis. Consideration should be given to the on-going needs of the facility as the consumers they support age.

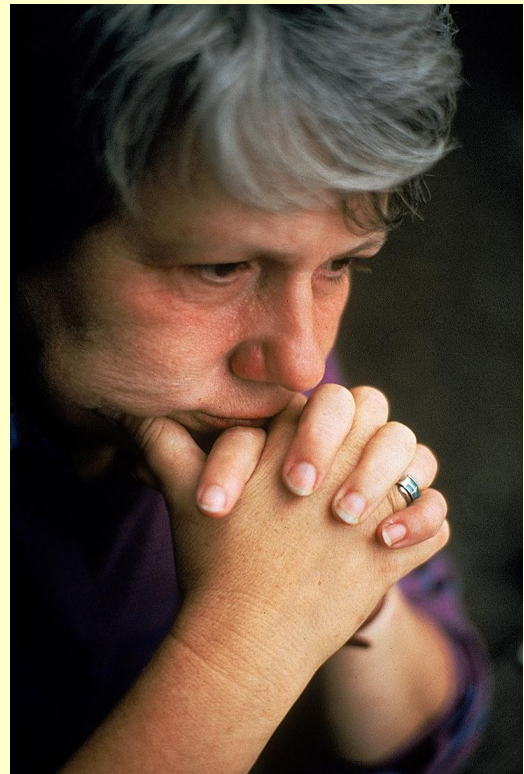


Rearranging Lives after Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease affects individuals with developmental disabilities at a younger age and more severely than typically aging adults.

Strategies for working with aging persons with disabilities and Alzheimer's include:

- Recognizing and assessing changes in behavior as people age.
- Knowing what to expect as the disease progresses.
- Considering changes in plans and objectives as skills and awareness decline.
- Modifying environments to match changes in sensory awareness.
- Using available cognitive strengths to enhance the person's quality of life.
- Providing personal care as skills decline.
- Responding to troublesome behaviors.
- Learning to adjust supportive relationships as personality changes.
- Facing end-of-life issues and arranging for palliative care.



The Aging Project follows a train-the-trainer approach to preparing others to teach this short course. Participants receive a manual including the following sections:

- Technical information
- Training guidelines
- Training handouts

Interdisciplinary Practicum

The Aging Project staff members prepare community facilities staff members and Minot State University practicum students to help older persons with diverse abilities take active roles in age-appropriate activities. *The Interdisciplinary Practicum in Leisure and Recreational Activities of the Active and Ageless Program* is offered through each of the following departments as Independent Study or practicum courses..

Rita Curl, Project Director
Professor of Psychology

David Rochholz
Assistant Professor of Teacher
Education and Human Performance

Richard Watson
Adjunct Professor
of Humanities

Nelrene Yellow Bird
Assistant
Professor of Social
Work

Brent Askvig
Professor of Special
Education



- Join current activities or develop new ones
- Register for one to three hours of college credit
- Get extra credit in selected courses

The Active and Ageless Program

The *Active and Ageless Program* takes place in community settings and has a five-fold purpose. It was designed:

- To provide opportunities for older persons with diverse abilities to express independence, productivity, and involvement in community programs such as the YMCA and The Taube Museum of Art.
- To serve as the setting in which practicum students participate in the design and implementation of leisure and recreational activities for aging persons with a wide diversity of abilities.
- To function as a setting in which staff members of community based programs have opportunities to learn about leisure activities suitable for older persons with a range of artistic skill and physical ability.
- To encourage participants to learn how to present leisure activities to person with disabilities, including motivational strategies to maintain desirable levels of activity.

- To stimulate opportunities to meet people with diverse levels of ability and to have fun together.

Day-long Seminars include:

Arts and Crafts - Margaret Lee, Instructor

- Painting
- Drawing
- Printing
- Clay designs

Fitness Activities - Marlys Fisher, R.N.

- Aerobics
- Stretching
- Chair dancing
- Strengthening



Evening classes are:

Arranged individually and take place in community settings for approximately 1 1/2 hours.

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