

Independence Day...Every Day...and For All

By Hara Estroff Marano

Independence - it's etched into our country's DNA. And so it is into our own as individuals, especially as New Yorkers. And that's what makes **Living Well Together (LWT)**, an offshoot of TTN's innovative Caring Collaborative(CC), a promising program for our times.



Intended for use by organizations in the general community, it preserves independence among a population that's growing older with increasing healthcare needs, allowing people to age in place with a little help from their friends and neighbors.

LWT is built on the same pillars as the CC – peer-to-peer mutual service and information exchange around health-focused needs. And those needs are typically spelled out in an all-important orientation that establishes the principles of confidentiality and boundaries of services-escorting to and from medical appointments, companionship, shopping, sharing information about medical procedures and available health resources.

What distinguishes LWT from its progenitor, the CC, is its flexibility: It can be adapted in whole or in part to fit into existing organizations - housing communities, book clubs, church and synagogue groups.

Like CC, it serves a real need, especially for those who live alone. It fills the giant gap in America's healthcare system, between the onset of acute and chronic medical conditions and the end of life.

The movement to push the program of mutual support into the world at large is spearheaded by **TTN-NYC member Mimi Grinker**. "We are targeting organizations that have existing groups. Introducing LWT strengthens the existing organization through the model of dealing with health-related issues. Groups integrate the LWT model into whatever structure they have depending on their own needs."



The beauty of the LWT model is that it can be adapted to the needs of each group by introducing other needs into the program. For example, Grinker points out, the Manhattan residential community of Kips Bay Plaza, with a substantial aging population, has adopted LWT to help meet neighbors' healthcare needs. The community is now adding peer-to-peer technology support, with younger neighbors typically helping older ones to navigate the digital world.

Of all the features that make LWT attractive, none may be more significant than its role in building and solidifying community as members use the program. The services members offer each other are not tit for tat; they are not a matter of asking for favors. Nor is there a time bank. Instead, the program operates on group trust. "That's why it is so empowering," says Grinker. "Members enjoy the ability to give as well as receive. It's not incidental that that is also important in breaking the stereotype of older adults."



As health-related needs are met by fellow residents or group members, one's circle of friends expands. And so does a sense of security. Says Grinker, "LWT is a safety net for independence." And it demonstrates to the world at large the innovation of TTN-NYC.

If you know of organizations that might benefit from learning about this project, please contact TTN member Mimi Grinker, at mgrinker@gmail.com