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The Café Plus Concept: A Different Model for Different Times

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We live in a society where one in five Americans will be 65 years or older by 2030 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002), with the majority of older adults wanting to stay in their own homes for as long as possible (AARP, 2003). Aging services providers are challenged to respond to preferences, needs, and choices of next generations of older adults, many of whom will look towards engaging experiences through structured activities promoting lifelong learning; meaningful, productive roles in their communities; and, generativity or "leaving a legacy." We describe an evidence-based program model designed to provide services and programs supporting community engagement and fostering individual enrichment.

Description of the Model

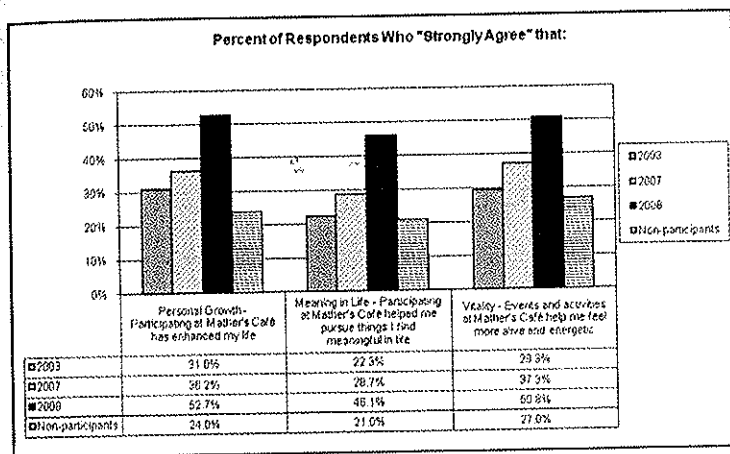
Mather's Café Plus was first developed in 2000 by Mather LifeWays (MLW), an Evanston, Illinois-based not-for-profit organization. Café Plus locations were selected in urban communities with significant older adult populations. The early model was designed to attract older adults who would benefit from centralized access to programs and services addressing social engagement and well-being, in addition to meeting basic needs. Development of the Café Plus model focused on a "participatory paradigm" establish-

ing partnerships among community leaders, health providers, businesses, and (most importantly) community-residing older adults.

The model has evolved into "Mather's—More Than a Café," with the "More" in the title referring to enhanced community resources and support, wellness programming, lifelong learning, and volunteer opportunities that take into account life experiences, personal interests, and choices. Currently, there are three Mather Café locations in lower-to-middle income Chicago neighborhoods reaching nearly 16,000 older adults annually, accounting for more than 88,000 café visits and 45,000 meals each year.

Measuring the Program Impact

To evaluate the impact of Café programs and services, the Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging developed a Quality of Life tool based on concepts from Ryff's (1995) six-dimensional well-being model. The six-dimensions of well-being include: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, social relationships, meaningfulness in life, and self-acceptance. The Quality of Life tool also incorporated measures based on other constructs important to older adults, including vitality, dignity, and privacy. Additionally, staff at the MLW Institute on Aging evaluated satisfaction with specific



organizations have participated in workshops, and 21 organizations have adapted the Café Plus model in some way. Two continuing care retirement communities have integrated Café Plus models as opportunities to build new partnerships through a "connected presence" in the community-at-large, attract younger aged future residents, and even redefine senior living. As Café Plus programs and services continue to grow, their true value

dents in the comparison group "strongly agreed" that community activities they currently participate impacted these domains ($p < 0.001$).

For Café customers, we consistently find that number of visits are strongly associated with increased quality of life, wellness, and satisfaction scores ($p < 0.001$) suggestive of a "dose effect" reported by some physical activity wellness programs.

Lessons Learned

The opportunity to combine research and practical applications has not only benefited Mather's—More Than a Café—customers, but has created interest in the model domestically and abroad. The majority of the interest has stemmed from senior centers. Although some senior centers have re-designed programs or modernized facilities and report subsequent increases in participation, most centers report decreased participation (National Council on Aging, 2008). Based on MetLife's 2007 study, "Boomers: Ready to Launch," it is very likely that tomorrow's older adults are likely to reject associating with anything implying they are "old."

Many organizations view the model as a way to re-design their image and services. To disseminate the model, Mather LifeWays developed a Café Plus Toolkit and two-day workshop for organizations interested in developing a Café Plus in their own communities. To date, 91

will be realized as older adults evolve from participants to active contributors engaged in their communities.

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services and programs and collect information about factors that may influence results, such as number of visits, and length of time visiting a Café, overall health status, and demographic characteristics. Surveys have been conducted since 2003 across the three Café locations with about 800 customers participating annually.

The early model was designed to attract older adults who would benefit from centralized access to programs and services.

As a comparison group, we also surveyed older adult homeowners who had not visited a Café, but reside within a five-mile radius of a Café location. We evaluated the impact of their participation in other community activities, programs, and services on their quality of life. Nearly 1,100 surveys were returned. The comparison group was similar to Café customers on key characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, and health status. The comparison group reported less frequent participation in community activities, programs, and services compared to the Café customers.

An Example of How Research Influences Best-Practice

Café managers are provided with annual survey results, along with an analysis of key programs and services that contribute to customers' willingness to recommend Mather Cafés to others, an important quality measure. Café managers then develop action plans for the following year based on key areas for improvement identified as most strongly associated with an overall quality score.

As an example, in 2007, we identified the importance of improving customers' quality of life in the areas of Personal Growth, Meaning in Life, and Vitality through programs targeting life experiences, meaningful volunteer opportunities, and our approach to relating to customers.

The three domains were chosen as annual survey results showed scores had not significantly improved over the past five years, but they were consistently associated with customers' overall satisfaction and willingness to recommend Cafés to others in their communities.

The following Action Plan items were introduced:

- A Director of Reprimorment was hired to develop creative programming aimed at helping people achieve their new priorities. Using his experience in liberal arts graduate education, he created programs relevant to customers' interests and goals with an emphasis on lifelong learning.
- An Aging Well coaching program was begun to help customers understand their true goals and develop plans for accomplishing those goals.
- The level of customer involvement in Mather's—More Than a Café planning, programming, and operations was increased, which included expanding the number of volunteers and elevating their level of responsibility.
- A SPARKLE training program was developed and implemented among Café employees that went well beyond typical customer service training. This program focused on refreshing employees' skills at engaging and encouraging customers to realize their possibilities. SPARKLE is an acronym for "Spending time wisely, Pleasant greeting, Appearance, Refills (coffee), Keeping it fun, Lasting impression, and Engaging customers."

The following figure compares findings over time for the three quality-of-life measures. After initiation of the 2008 Action Plans, we found significant increases in the percent of Café customers who "strongly agree" ("5" on a 5-point Likert scale) that participation in Café programs and services improved their quality of life in domains of personal growth, meaning in life, and vitality ($p < 0.001$). Significantly fewer respon-