Because of You a Newcomer to DC Was Welcomed Warmly

There are no accidents. I am 66 years old and this fall I relocated to DC from Denver, under difficult personal and familial circumstances. On my third day after my arrival, still in grief and sorrow, I went to the National Cathedral to find out about volunteering.

I was searching. And God provided.

After visiting the Cathedral, I stopped at the Opportunity Shop at St. Alban’s. I entered that store without any idea about what was about to happen. I heard women’s voices and went exploring. I found women exercising—and a table of information explaining the Iona’s Active Wellness Program at St. Alban’s.

“IT IS THE BEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO ME,” SAYS ENTHUSIASTIC PARTICIPANT MARIA ABOUT IONA’S ACTIVE WELLNESS PROGRAM AT ST. ALBAN’S.

I am so very grateful I found you. I am not alone. There are women. There is spirit. There are exercise classes and all of them are “plus, plus, plus!”

I am so blessed.

I don’t take anything for granted. I want to make a little donation to Iona and when I have more I’ll give more. Thank you!

Thelma Hines, who runs the program, is extraordinary, a real treasure. She cares so deeply about us, as if we were relatives—or maybe even more so. A few days ago she was helping hand out a simple gift made by volunteers, beautiful placemats. The way she did it, it was like she was giving out a million dollar bundle.
We Have a New Friend across the Ocean

Serving as a model, Iona will advise a London organization in establishing aging services

It was a highlight of my visit to Washington, DC this fall to have the opportunity to meet with Iona’s executive director and development director to see what I could learn and take home. I’m the director of a new London-based non-profit supporting older members of my community.

London and DC have much in common; they are the capitals and seats of power of our two nations. They also share a changing balance in their populations. For the first time in the United Kingdom, there are more people aged over 60 than there are children under 16, there is the same shift in the balance in the US.

World War II—Affected Both Our Cities

In London alone we have 43,200 people over the age of 90. Those Londoners lived through the Second World War and then rebuilt the city after the devastating bombing raids of the Blitz. I know that many of the people served by Iona moved to DC during the 1940s to help with the U.S. war effort.

Iona has made significant inroads into embracing the challenges and opportunities of aging by providing support, advice and services to metropolitan Washington, DC residents. If we, at the Hill Homes Foundation, can achieve even some of the positive change that Iona has, London will be a better place.

“Every day at Iona presents a new and exciting opportunity to help older adults get the most out of life,” says Dr. Dring.

He is a graduate of the George Washington University Doctor of Physical Therapy program, where he is also a part-time faculty member. He is offering free strength and fall risk screenings by appointment through the end of March.

To schedule an appointment or ask questions, contact Dr. Dring at (202) 459-4594 or jasondring@mac.com.

Physical Therapist Sets Up Shop at Iona

Board-certified geriatric physical therapist has office hours available

“My role as a physical therapist is to help people identify their strengths and weaknesses so that they can continue to lead rewarding lives. Too many believe that getting weak, losing coordination and living with pain are part of the normal aging process,” says Dr. Jason Dring. “My goal is to help people actively identify deficits in their strength, balance and mobility so that we can intervene before it is too late.”

Iona is pleased to announce the addition of Jason Dring, PT, DPT, GCS, a board-certified geriatric physical therapist, to our building. Physical therapy referrals are appropriate and helpful for many problems that affect older people including arthritis, osteoporosis, chronic pain and incontinence.

“Every day at Iona presents a new and exciting opportunity to help older adults get the most out of life,” says Dr. Dring.

Physical therapist Jason Dring can help older adults preventing falls and maintain independence

Special to the VOICE
This past fall, Iona tried an experiment. The goal? To see if an occupational therapist (OT) could create and run a successful workshop series focused on staying active and independent. The idea came from Joe Brey, a doctoral OT student from Washington University in St. Louis. For his “capstone” independent project prior to graduation, Joe was seeking a community-based setting in which to work with active older adults.

A Strengths-Based Perspective
Iona was a perfect match. “We always operate from a strengths-based perspective, focusing on what older adults can do,” Joe explains. “As an OT, part of our profession is looking at people’s challenges and how to overcome them. Being at Iona and working with Deb Rubenstein, Iona’s Director of Consultation, Care Management and Counseling, helped me frame what I do in a new way. That was extremely valuable, as I want to look at OT in prevention and maintenance of health not just rehabilitation.”

The experiment was a success. It’s clear that our active older adults are very interested in maintaining their independence. No surprise, they have a lot of wisdom to share about how to do that! While Joe has graduated and started his first official OT position at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center in Baltimore, he has left a legacy at Iona. He created a curriculum we can offer again and documented all the ideas that the participants generated. We are grateful to Joe for his creativity and caring.

Suggestions from Iona’s Older Adults:
- Watch grandchildren
- Be a mediator
- Share insight/experiences
- Help others and volunteering
- Introduce others to cultural events
- Pick up litter
- Engage in advocacy

A Successful Experiment
Joe created a four-session workshop, which he co-facilitated with Claudia Battu, an intern from the School of Social Work at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. They met with a group of about 12 participants in Iona’s Active Wellness Program at St. Alban’s with the goal of soliciting from the members their successful strategies in coping with these 4 types of daily activities:
The first time my youngest sister said to me, “We need a plan,” the words went in one ear and out the other. But she was persistent and, when she repeated it a year later, I knew she was right. We did need a plan.

I am one of four adult children of parents who are just shy of 80. Professionally, I help DC area nonprofits, including Iona, tell their stories. If there is one thing I’ve learned from working with Iona’s staff, it is how important it is for adult children to talk about their parents’ — and their own — aging, before a crisis occurs.

Yet, like many Boomers, I was busy raising my children, focusing on my career and, to tell the truth, generally in denial about the challenges that undoubtedly lie ahead.

My Sister Had New Demands on Her Time

That is until my sister — who lives near mom and dad and is an especially attentive daughter — was offered a full-time job. These new demands meant she would have less time to spend with our parents. The youngest but perhaps wisest of the bunch, she urged us to begin thinking about the best ways to support mom and dad as they begin the next chapter of their lives.

Okay, in all honesty, we were also focused on how their aging would impact us. We each have children and demanding jobs and recognize that whatever the future will bring — whether dementia, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer, a fall or hopefully less dramatic manifestations of aging — we will be affected in both practical and emotional ways.

Committing to talk about a plan took some time. Knowing where to turn was much easier. Having
promoted the good work of Iona for many years, I knew of its family consultation services. In fact, I had referred many a friend to Iona.

Sitting Down with Deb Helped Us Focus
My siblings agreed to a consultation with Iona’s Director of Consultation, Care Management, and Counseling, Deb Rubenstein, who arranged a 90-minute conference call, since we live in three different cities. She asked us to fill out a questionnaire in advance, describing our family’s unique challenges. We are four Type As and figured we had thought of everything. But Deb raised important issues that were not on our list: do our parents have a financial power of attorney? (They do. We just didn’t know it.) Did we know when our parents’ drivers’ licenses expire? (We did not. Now we do.)

The day after the call, we received an email from Deb summarizing our conversation and listing operating principles, action items and resources. She recommended “baby steps” in introducing change to our parents and reinforced our focus on “safety first.” She provided us valuable information that addressed our specific questions, including a website listing professional geriatric care managers in our parents’ hometown and an article on how to have family conversations with older drivers.

In the year since that call, we have used the email as a blueprint for more regular conversations among the siblings. In the meantime, our parents continue to travel, attend their grandchildren’s graduations and make plans for the future. Other than a case of pneumonia that put dad in the hospital, nothing has changed. (I’m knocking on wood here.)

Well, that’s not really true. One thing has changed. We now have a plan.

“**It is important for adult children to talk about their parents’ aging, before a crisis occurs.**”
—Janice L. Kaplan, Adult Daughter

---

**Could You Use Help with Your Aging Relatives?**

Call the Helpline at (202) 895-9448 and ask for:

- **Family Consultation Services** — We can sit down with you and other family members to discuss next steps in finding solutions to the challenges that aging can bring

- **Iona Care Management Group** — We can help set up and monitor services, serving as your “eyes and ears” and assisting with navigating health issues

- **Support Groups for Caregivers** — Each group is coordinated by a trained professional. Support groups allow people to share challenges and information with one another in a welcoming and private setting. See the full list at: [http://www.iona.org/how-we-help.html](http://www.iona.org/how-we-help.html)
As part of my job at AARP, I researched one of the top concerns of people age 50 and older: how to stay mentally sharp. I learned about these simple (and enjoyable!) steps:

1. **Exercise.** What’s good for the heart is good for the brain. If you’re not up to rigorous exercise, take a walk everyday — better yet, take a walk with friend (see #2).

2. **Socialize!** Staying connected is important to brain health. That can mean staying involved in your community, interacting with friends and family on a regular basis, or even walking the dog or petting the cat (yes — pets counts too!)

3. **Eat Better.** Again — what’s good for the heart is good for the brain. More vegetables, fewer processed foods. The Mediterranean diet has been getting a lot of good press lately for good reason — it is full of healthy fats.

4. **Rest and Relax.** Getting enough sleep is key. So is managing stress. Engaging in prayer and/or meditation regularly has been shown to lower stress levels.

5. **Mental Stimulation.** You may already know that learning a new language or playing an instrument is good for the brain. But any complex task can help — even planning a vacation. Simpler activities can stimulate the brain as well — try taking a different route to work or even brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand.

Do you need help with managing stress, finding guidance on nutrition or are worried about a family member with memory loss? Iona can help! Call our Helpline at 202-895-9448.