

# *Why Do Senior Centers Matter?*

Senior Centers matter because it is a place where they can share stories, make friends, engage in fun activities, and eat a nutritious meal. When I walk into the senior centers, I get a sense of community and happiness. As a young adult, I love hearing their stories of war, love, hardships, travel, and persistence.

*Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals Site Manager*

*Opportunities for Williamson & Burnet Counties*

For seniors, "this is a home away from home," where we make lasting friendships. Treasure of the Hills Senior Center is an ACTIVITY center for seniors. We have almost every kind of game you can imagine (bridge, canasta, bingo, bunco, cribbage, "42", mahjongg, pinochle, and poker) going on at one time or another. Monthly, we have a salad or soup day (depending on the time of the year), covered dish luncheons with timely presentations (third Monday of the month), a wonderful monthly breakfast, a 4th of July celebration with picnic lunch, and full holiday dinners for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

*Managing Director*

*Treasure of the Hills Senior Center*

Seniors matter because they endow wisdom and experience. Younger generations can learn from that experience and continue to flourish as a culture and society. It's important for us to take time and respectfully listen to their stories and what they have to say. It is our responsibility to embrace those words of wisdom so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. We, as a human race, can then evolve and grow.

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As a professional in the field of aging, I often hear from those unfamiliar with activity centers for the maturing adult, that senior centers are underutilized facilities. That there are better ways to spend tax payer dollars and that there is not a need in the community. I am often asked, "what's the big deal with senior centers?" My initial response might be "how much time do you have?" But when I was asked to write an article to answer the question, "Why do senior centers matter?", I decided to take the question to the people that come to the center, to the people that participate in the many and varied activities, to the active 50+ and to the people who may have some physical limitations, to the people who consider the center their lifeline. What I discovered was a multitude of answers, but one prevailing response, "the senior center saved my life".

No, the senior center is not a hospital and at my center there is no physician on staff, but there is something much more important, there is caring, friendship and camaraderie. There is opportunity for learning, for socialization, for personal growth and for expression. There are opportunities to try something you never have before and for becoming someone you may have had hidden within in you your entire life. There are opportunities to share your life experiences with someone who may have had a similar experience and sometimes, there is opportunity to meet the love of your life.

The senior center is not one dimensional, it is a multi-faceted treasure trove of excitement and new adventures. There are prospects for every age, ability and interest.

Here's what the Baca members had to say to "Why do senior centers matter?"

- Senior centers provide a safe environment where I can go and be among people my own age and I don't feel intimidated.
- Senior centers kill isolation, loneliness, stress and a sedentary lifestyle and keep me from being a hermit

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- Moderation is the key to aging gracefully and the center provides me with opportunity for that.
- The center has allowed me to fulfill my dreams.
- At Baca, I am living life to the fullest.
- Baca has improved my quality of life.
- Senior centers matter to me because they provide both mental and physical fitness and we all need that.
- When I come to the senior center, I am never bored. There is something for everyone and every interest, there is fitness, arts, singing, dancing, writing, learning, travel and games. It keeps me young and young at heart.
- Laughter is the best medicine and the center provides me plenty of opportunity to laugh.
- I don't cook anymore but the senior center provides me with a delicious and nutritious meal and friends to enjoy it with.
- When I moved here, I didn't know anyone except my children. At the senior center, I have met so many friends I don't have to bug my children anymore to entertain me. My children are so happy that I have found happiness.
- It is a safe place where seniors can go, stay active and continue to move forward in life.

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- Senior centers are one stop shopping. I go for education as well as recreation. I can move from one activity to another without ever leaving the building.
- Senior centers provide resources to seniors regarding everything from tax help to wills and even housing.
- The senior center provides me with opportunities to challenge myself.
- At my age, it is important to keep my mind and body actively engaged so for me, the senior center is heaven sent.
- After I retired, I didn't know what I was going to do with myself, then I discovered the senior center and my prayers were answered.
- I have found comfort at the senior center in knowing that I am not alone in what life and aging has placed at my doorstep.
- The senior center means the world to me. When I lost my spouse, I was ready to give up. The senior center saved my life.

*Supervisor*

*Allen R. Baca Center*

I've been working with seniors for close to two years now. What I've discovered in that time is that senior citizens really are ignored. The lack of thought that goes into their needs and well-being astonishes me.

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There are charities galore for children, pets, people in foreign countries to start businesses, endangered species, etc. All of these are wonderful things, but put a booth for one of those charities in the same spot as a booth for a charity or non-profit that serves senior citizens and the seniors don't stand a chance.

If something in the federal budget needs to be cut, immediately social security and Medicare are on the chopping block. The pervading thought seems to be that seniors should have enough saved up to take care of themselves, and if they can't, their kids should care for them or dump (yes, dump) them in a nursing home. In reality, this is not always financially feasible (if John Q. Public knew how little social security really paid every month, he'd be appalled).

Here, then, is where the senior centers come into play. Senior centers give people a safe place to gather, have fun, socialize, share a meal, plan trips, plan time together away from the senior center, learn about senior health and financial and other issues that concern them like nutrition, and to be young again.

I've seen the seniors here get into scraps like kindergarteners, get mad because they're too loud in the kitchen during bingo, and get angry at each other. But, far more apparent is the fact that this center provides them a sense of community and family. These wonderful people have helped each other through the loss of spouses, friends, and family members. They have danced together, performed plays together, and played games together. They have comforted those of us who work here in times of sorrow and/or uncertainty. They have fought City Council for their center and raised money for supplies and to keep the center open during government shutdowns. They give generously of their time, limited income, and resources. Senior centers give older people a sense of community, family, and almost unlimited support in times of need.

Senior centers remind them that they are valuable people, they are wanted, and they are not an inconvenience. Senior centers matter because senior lives matter.

*Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals Site Manager*

*Opportunities for Williamson & Burnet Counties*

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Stonehaven Senior Center has been in existence for several decades. "Home away from Home." A place that is always inviting and laughter can be heard miles away. The Center is full of excitement from Monday to Friday. The seniors are involved in tournaments, bingo, bridge, and dominoes to name a few. Birthdays and anniversaries are celebrated monthly.

Senior centers matter because seniors get the opportunity to socialize and forget their worries. They develop an everlasting bond that empowers them not only physically but mentally also. For the seniors who are loners the center because their family.

*Stonehaven Senior Center*

*Georgetown Housing Authority Ross Coordinator*