



# LESSONS LEARNED FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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## ABOUT KIN ON

Kin On honors, supports, and advocates for our Asian elders and families in the Puget Sound region by offering culturally and linguistically appropriate health, social, and educational services.

As a senior care provider for the Asian community for over 30 years, Kin On believes that true health and wellness is not merely the absence of disease, but rather, a holistic approach to care and well-being that addresses social, socioeconomic, cultural and health factors.

In order to fully implement the care continuum from active wellness to end-of-life care, Kin On developed the *Healthy Living Program* (HLP) in 2016-2017. This program enables Asian adults age 55+ to stay physically, mentally, socially active through fitness and cognitive development, health education and lifelong learning programs.

HLP was designed and implemented with community members, organization partnerships, and supported by public and private funders. Its objectives include: 1) inform and empower older adults to stay physically, cognitively and socially engaged, 2) educate and equip them to manage their health and well-being, and 3) increase social integration and participation.



(left) Healthy Living Catalog featuring a variety of programs designed and led by community members for the Asian community. (Right) HLP instructor and class participants

## KEY LEARNINGS

After nearly two years of program development and implementation, we've learned consistently that a successful community engagement initiative must incorporate three key elements, the 3C's:



When these elements are well aligned, innovative programs emerge, community members are empowered to contribute and participate, and programs are able to leverage necessary funding and resources to achieve long-term sustainability.

### Continuous COMMUNICATION

Community engagement is more than just a one-time collection of data through surveys or focus groups. It requires a consistent two-way communication loop that fosters ongoing generation of ideas, needs assessment, program evaluation and improvements. Gathering input from representatives of the target population is essential in ensuring program effectiveness.

Before program launch, we established a 10-member advisory committee representing various segments/subgroups within the Asian community, including various Chinese dialects, stage in life, geographic area, and professional background. The committee meets quarterly with sub committees meeting more frequently. Verbal and written feedback are collected regularly from the advisory committee, volunteers and participants to inform program improvements and ensure program effectiveness.

Each member of the advisory committee has a specific role overseeing one component of the program. They act as extra eyes and ears in the community to monitor participation, ensuring that needs are being met, improvements are made in a timely manner, and barriers are efficiently addressed. Committee members then report back to the larger team and the process continues.

## Strategic COLLABORATION

Community engagement and overall buy-in happens much deeper and quicker when there is synergy between two or more organizations.

Program implementation is much more effective when done in partnerships with community/volunteer groups or like minded organizations who share the same goals and target population. Strategic partnerships help leverage resources, community outreach and maximize participation.

Through a merger with the Asian Seniors Concerns Foundation (ASCF) in 2017, Kin On HLP extended programs to a second site in Bellevue, serving over 200 additional members. This win-win partnership enabled ASCF, a 15-year old, volunteer-run organization to build staffing capacity and continue to serve the community. This collaboration also allowed Kin On to quickly double its reach to a new geographic region.

Programs offered in collaboration with other community organizations have also shown a higher success in outreach, program development, and overall participation.

## Sustainable CAPACITY

Developing organizational capacity and leveraging resources from strategic partnerships create the foundation to initiate a community-centered, need-based programs. Adequate funding from public and private sources help sustain and expand programs to achieve greater impact. Capacity and sustainability needs to be evaluated and addressed at the onset of program implementation.

Since program launch, staff capacity grew from 1 FTE to 2.5 FTEs. In two years, the program has retained 300 paying members and serves over 800 participants annually. The program has also attracted over 70+ volunteers who have logged over 1000 hours and have become an integral part of the program.

To increase financial capacity, program staff worked closely with the fund development team to explore public and private grant funding opportunities and community fundraising efforts. To date, over \$250K has been received in grants and community contributions to support this program. Garnering volunteer and monetary support are two essential components of community engagement which leads to capacity building and long-term sustainability.

## PROCESS

Here's a summary of the process in which the *Kin On Healthy Living Program* was developed and has evolved over the years. Each milestone involved the 3C's as indicated below.

**COM** = Communication

**COL** = Collaboration

**CAP** = Capacity

<b>2007</b>	<b>COM</b> Conducted community needs assessment to determine ways to better serve the community
<b>2010</b>	<b>COL CAP</b> Received \$5000 grant from Healthy Aging Partnership to pilot <i>Story Circle</i> in collaboration with Jade Guild. <i>Story Circle</i> is an intergenerational, multimedia storytelling and activity program to help older adults stay engaged
<b>2014</b>	<b>CAP</b> Initiated \$3.5M capital campaign to expand Kin On campus
<b>2015</b>	<p><b>CAP</b> Completed Campus Expansion Phase I which included converting garage into a 2,600 community center, home base for Healthy Living Program</p> <p><b>CAP</b> Received \$50K grant from City of Seattle Technology Matching Fund to establish <i>SmartLab</i>, a senior-friendly technology lab and tutoring center.</p> <p><b>COM COL</b> Formed a <i>SmartLab</i> Committee and engaged with a team of community volunteers to help implement program.</p>
<b>2016</b>	<p><b>CAP</b> Hired Community Engagement Coordinator, Program Assistants and Interns</p> <p><b>COM COL</b> Formed 10-member Healthy Living Program Advisory Committee to represent various segment of the Asian population (met monthly in first year and transitioned to quarterly after 12 months)</p> <p>Officially launched Kin On Healthy Living Program to include five core program areas: physical fitness, creative aging, technology, health education, and social/recreation</p> <p>Implemented paid membership structure per recommendation of advisory committee and community assessment</p>
<b>2017</b>	<p><b>COL</b> Merged with Asian Seniors Concerns Foundation and expanded Healthy Living Program to the Eastside and added 200+ members to the program. By year end, HLP had over 300 members and reached close to 800 participants.</p> <p><b>CAP</b> Received close to \$100K in grants to expand <i>SmartLab</i> and offer evidence-based health education programs</p> <p><b>COM</b> Conducted program satisfaction surveys to gather feedback for improvements</p>
<b>2018</b>	<p><b>COM</b> Working on expanding and engaging volunteer Advisory Committee into smaller taskforces</p> <p><b>COL CAP</b> Looking into funding and partnership opportunities to expand program offerings including, but not limited to, meal programs, transportation services, dementia-friendly programs</p>

## **CHALLENGES**

Throughout the process, we encountered various challenges in each of the 3C's:

### **Inaccurate Brand Perception - Aerobics at a nursing home?!**

Because Kin On has operated as a nursing home for more than three decades, it was challenging at first to introduce the idea that we are now offering wellness programs for the active adults living in the community. With the help of an organizational rebrand effort completed in summer of 2017, we were able to convey a more accurate and vibrant message to the community. Board members, community groups and HLP advisory committee were all involved in the rebranding process.

### **Trying to reach everyone = reaching no one**

As we roll out the program, we quickly realize that outreach and community engagement efforts need to be intentional and targeted. Trying to design a program to reach everyone sometimes resulted in reaching very few people. The best attended programs serve a very specific need for a specific segment of the community. The challenge then lies in designing various programs to cater to different interests and needs.

### **Quality vs Quantity - More doesn't always mean better**

While we were able to fill the catalog pages with more and more programs, we also recognized that attendance for some programs were quite low. As time and resources were always limited, we had to shift our strategy from quantity to quality. We put emphasis on programs that were doing well, and worked closely with the volunteers and advisory team members to expand them. This approach also applied in our membership structure as we valued repeat attendance as much as one-time participation. Instead of only focusing on growing membership numbers, we strive to develop deeper relationships existing members.

### **Affordability vs Financial Feasibility**

One of the first questions we had to answer was how much to charge for our programs and membership. We researched neighboring centers and tasked the advisory committee to research and give input. While we want to ensure affordability and increase accessibility, we also recognize that a successful program requires funding to sustain. After much deliberation, we decided on a very affordable membership and class pricing structure, as well as fee waivers for low-income individuals. To achieve sustainability, we worked on seeking other funding sources, sponsorships, and creative collaborations.

## SUCSESSES

By continuously communicating and engaging the community, strategically collaborating with like-minded groups and individuals, and effectively leveraging resources to build capacity, the *Kin On Healthy Living Program* grew into a 300-member strong program with over 50 different offerings in 18 months.

In addressing systemic inequities, Kin On HLP strives to provide accessible, affordable and culturally relevant programming to the Asian older adults. In efforts to reduce health inequities caused by social determinants such as income, race/ethnicity, and geographic location, we launched an affordable membership structure with free or nominal fee-based classes to ensure accessibility for all.

All programs are offered with language and cultural sensitivity, allowing limited or non-English speaking community members to join. We also implemented mainstream, locally and nationally recognized evidence-based programs and adapted them to fit the needs of the Asian elderly population.

To increase geographic accessibility, Kin On strategically created a community center adjacent to its nursing home which is centrally located in the Beacon Hill-Columbia City area, with a high concentration of the Asian population, and is now exploring options to offer transportation assistance for homebound older adults.

## CONCLUSION

As Kin On strives to meet the needs of the older adult population, we are encouraged to see a bigger movement in the entire aging services industry. There has been more awareness around combating ageism and social isolation. Fellow senior service agencies are collectively looking at ways to better serve the older adult community. Initiatives such as “Age Friendly Seattle” and “Livable Community” further demonstrate increased efforts in the city, state and federal government to create a more vibrant and livable community for all, including older adults. As Kin On continues to lead the way in serving the Asian elderly community, we look forward to collaborating with all like-minded organizations and community members to meet the needs of our elderly.