Office of the President/CEO

July 18, 2019

Dear Community Leader:

The year 2019 marks the first time in U.S. history that there are more people over the age of 60 than under the age of 18. What do we know about our neighbors in Charlotte Mecklenburg that are 60+? What infrastructure is in place? How do we mind the gap between these two factors?

This holistic evaluation of people 60+ in Charlotte Mecklenburg is a crucial first step in understanding the needs of elders and caregivers living in our community. Our goal is to turn the information found from this data collection into innovative new programming, help shape policies, organize resources where needed, and create a strategic plan, that we can measure against, to see the impact we’re making on citizens of the Queen City.

I would like to personally thank Dr. Julian Montoro-Rodriguez and UNC Charlotte for partnering with Southminster in order to deliver a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment. This study aligns with our mission of being a national leader on aging and empowering elders to live their lives to the fullest.

Thank you for being a good community partner and taking the time to review this very critical study. We can’t possibly do this work alone. We’ll be leaning on collaborators like you to help us align the needs of those 60+ with community resources and create community coalitions that build a feeling of connection among all ages, improving the quality of life for some of our most vulnerable populations.

As always, we welcome feedback from policy-makers, aging services providers, non-profits, government leaders, and the community at large. Your support of this study not only impacts the lives of older adults living in Charlotte Mecklenburg today, but demonstrates your commitment to planning a future that is well positioned for our younger generations to age well in their community.

Sincerely,

Ben Gilchirst
President/CEO

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INTRODUCTION

The commissioning and completion of the MECK60+ Community Needs Assessment Study is both a continuation of research on and about older adults in Mecklenburg County and also a new beginning setting a new standard for replication studies in the future.

Over the last forty years there have been periodic studies and reports on the population of older adults in the county, and the most significant of these studies have occurred essentially at ten year intervals.

The recently established Mecklenburg County Council on Aging commissioned a major study based on a random sample survey of older adults in the county in the 1980s. This was followed in the 1990s with another similar study by the Council on Aging using the same questions that were asked in the previous survey.

In the early 2000s, a task force was formed, partly in response to the increasing number of older adults in the county’s population, to study how seniors were faring in the county and to try to determine what needs were not being addressed. This study, which took more than a year to complete, produced a couple of publications entitled “The Status of Seniors in Mecklenburg County” and a concomitant strengthening of the local Council of Aging to assist in carrying out recommendations from the study. The recommendations in this report were based on demographic data from the census and census-like data, a very small bit of survey data and from discussions of the task force and its sub-groups.

About ten years after the completion of the Status of Seniors study, the Council on Aging provided an update of the earlier study but again without the data that would have come from a needs assessment. At about the same time that the update was published, a second document was produced by Elyse Hamilton-Childers, a student working on her Masters degree in Social Work degree from University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill. This thesis was part asset mapping, data analysis, reporting from focus groups and stakeholder interviews, and an assessment of the status of service provision for older adults in Mecklenburg County. This report was data and analysis rich; however, the missing link was information that came directly from older adults that could be generalized to the total population - there was no scientific random sample survey data.

Hence, the MECK60+ is a continuation of a forty-year effort to better understand how the older adult population is getting along in the county. However, Mecklenburg County in 2018, the year this study was completed, is substantially different than it was back in the early 1980s when the first research on this topic, at least to our knowledge, was completed.

Mecklenburg County is a rapidly growing urban center with newcomers pouring into the county and region daily. Many of the newcomers are young, which means that the county’s population is younger than most of the counties in North Carolina. However, older folks are also moving to
the region to be with family, to enjoy the climate, and to take advantage of an amenity rich quality of life.

Mecklenburg County has just over a million people calling it home. The last census (2010) indicated that about ten percent of that population was 65 and over, which amounts to a population of about 100,000. Current estimates suggest that the percentage of older adults has increased marginally since 2010 with future predictions of continuing growth of the older adults far into the future.

The size of the older adult population is not inconsequential. Yet, as noted above, we have done a poor job of developing systematic information about our growing older adult population. The MECK 60+ represents a more comprehensive research model than has been the case in the past. For the first time, the research sample includes adequate numbers of African-American and Hispanic older adults to support generalizing the study findings across racial and ethnic groups. This study also includes a separate sample of caregivers, the often forgotten group that is essentially the first line and sometimes the only line or support for our older adult population who require support and assistance.

Although the intended primary focus of the MECK60+ research is centered on the issue of health, the study and report has an astounding array of information about many aspects of the lives of older adults. The greatest benefit of this research and report will accrue if it is repeated periodically preferably every three to five years. Longitudinal data are the gold standard. Collecting the same information at regular intervals over time can provide a better assessment of what programs are working well or not so well, which should suggest where the community needs to direct or redirect resources. In addition, this study represents a new beginning only if those in positions to make and/or change policy use this information to develop ways of assuring that older adults can live a rich and rewarding life in Mecklenburg County.