



ADA Live!

Episode 105b: Celebrating Older Americans

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Guest: Marnie Mountjoy - Division Director at the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living

Host: Christine Woodell - Southeast ADA Center

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Marnie Mountjoy: Hi, I'm Marnie Mountjoy, and you're listening to ADA Live.

4 Wheel City: Yo. Hi, let's roll (singing)

Christine Woodell:

Hello, everyone. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, and the ADA National Network, welcome to ADA Live. I'm Christine Woodell of the Southeast ADA Center. Listening audience, if you have any questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA, you can use the online form anytime at adalive.org.

Christine Woodell:

In 2021, the Administration on Aging, AOA, part of the Administration for Community Living, which is ACL, published a report called 2020 Profile of Older Americans. The report found that people age 65 and over were 16% of the population in 2019 and are

expected to be 22% of the population by 2040. They also found that 19% of adults age 65 and older reported in 2019 that they could not function at all or had a lot of difficulty with at least one of these six areas of functioning: hearing, seeing, communication, cognition, self-care, and mobility. By far, most people reported having difficulty with their mobility.

Christine Woodell:

Aging brings up a lot of unknowns around independent living, caregiving, and health to name just a few. As we look at how to meet the needs of older Americans and in celebration of Older Americans Month in May, we are welcoming our guest Marnie Mountjoy, division director at the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living. Hi, Marnie. It's great to have you joining us today.

Marnie Mountjoy:

Thank you for having me.

Christine Woodell:

Well, I'd like to start out by learning about the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services and the Department for Aging and Independent Living, also known as DAIL and abbreviated as D-A-I-L. Can you tell us more about the services this agency provides in Kentucky?

Marnie Mountjoy:

Sure. Like you said, we are the Department for Aging and Independent Living, located within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. We are the state agency that's designated to oversee the administration of statewide programs and services on behalf of Kentucky's elders and individuals with disabilities.

Christine Woodell:

That is great. Is the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living a direct service provider to the aging population?

Marnie Mountjoy:

That's going to be a yes and no answer. We work with some community partners in the network of aging advocates, but we also do administer some programs to the elderly in Kentucky, such as our Hart-Supported Living Program and our State Health Insurance Assistance Program, and then our state guardianship program. But again, we do work with a network of service providers.

Christine Woodell:

Well, who can refer someone needing service to the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living, and what happens after that referral is made?

Marnie Mountjoy:

Anybody can make a referral to our Department to help anybody that is in need of services, and then the next step depends on which program is the right fit for them. For example, we do have a toll-free state hotline where anybody can call in and make a referral for a senior or an individual with disabilities that's in needs of services.

Marnie Mountjoy:

Just to plug our phone number, that phone number is 877-925-0037. Again, 877-925-0037. Then you can talk to somebody that can help determine what would be the best fit, what program would be the best fit for the individual in need, and we can get them directed to the services.

Christine Woodell:

Well, that's wonderful. That is wonderful. Can you give us some examples of when and how these agencies work together?

Marnie Mountjoy:

Sure. Some of our community partners that I touched on earlier would be the Area Agencies on Aging. The state's divided up into 15 regions and we work directly with the

Area Agencies on Aging. For example, the State Capitol is in Frankfort, Kentucky, and that aging network provider is the Bluegrass Area Agency on Aging. We have 15 different ones across Kentucky. We also work with the Centers for Independent Living, the Community Mental Health Centers, and the Senior Centers that are located across Kentucky, but we're always looking for new partners and providers.

Christine Woodell:

Well, that is wonderful that that kind of assistance exists out there. Does every state have a program like the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living?

Marnie Mountjoy:

Well, every state does have the designation of a State Unit on Aging, so that's under the Older Americans Act. In each state, it looks a little bit different under what services they provide. So, each State Unit on Aging will provide those core services that are available under the Older Americans Act, such as home-delivered meals, supportive services, elder abuse awareness and prevention. Those are those core services that are available. Like I said, each state's a little bit different. For example, in Kentucky, we also administer our state guardianship program and we work with the Department of Medicaid Services to help administer some of the home and community-based waivers.

Christine Woodell:

That is wonderful. The Southeast ADA Center tries, when we get calls from our region, to be sure we recommend the correct thing. That's great to know. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted older Americans at a much higher rate than other groups. What has the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living done to help older Americans stay informed and safe and healthy?

Marnie Mountjoy:

I think the biggest thing that we've done is right when the pandemic started, Governor Beshear made the commitment that any Kentuckian over the age of 60 would be eligible for a meal. He made that announcement on March 13th, 2020. It was the same day that

we essentially shut down Kentucky and that senior centers were closed, but he wanted to make sure that no senior would go hungry. We have had a commitment to provide additional meals to some folks we've never even served before, that we've never touched before with our Aging Program. So, having the governor use his platform to get the word out about senior services has just been tremendous. And it's more than just a meal. We've been able to provide additional information about resources and supports that are available, such as the ADA Center. We've been working to make sure that seniors have everything they needed during the pandemic, such as information about vaccines.

Marnie Mountjoy:

We worked really hard to do vaccines to those that were home-bound. We worked with our local health departments and pharmacies to get the vaccine delivered to those in the home. We worked with some of our transportation providers, such as the Community Action Network, to get seniors to vaccine sites. We also did a whole new program that's never been done before, and it's been very, very popular here in Kentucky as well as the rest of the United States. We've essentially done drive-through meals where seniors could drive to the senior center and pick up their meal and never get out of the car. The senior center staff will hand that meal to the seniors, and we've been able to hand out information, health information. We've been doing bingo. That was a huge hit. We would pass out meals with bingo numbers on the top of the boxes and seniors were able to call their local senior centers and find out what bingo numbers were drawn that day and to see if they had won any prizes.

Marnie Mountjoy:

That has been really fun and appreciated. We've just been very creative. Our senior center directors deserve so much credit and recognition for all the great and wonderful things they've done to keep those seniors engaged and make sure somebody was checking on them during such isolating times.

Christine Woodell:

That is really wonderful. Add some fun into it.

Marnie Mountjoy:

Yes.

Christine Woodell:

How has the pandemic changed or impacted the work of the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living?

Marnie Mountjoy:

So, like I touched on with the drive-through meals, we've really had to think outside of what our normal operations would be. The Administration on Community Living, that's our federal funding agency that gives us funds for the services under the Older Americans Act, they have allowed us to be more flexible with our programming. The drive-through meals has been something that's been very popular and we wouldn't have been able to do without them. We've also tried to come up with some other programs that are local to here in Kentucky.

Marnie Mountjoy:

One that we had developed, we call Seniors Helping Seniors. We partnered with the Kentucky Department of Education and their HOSA students, that's the Health Occupation Students of America. It's a club for students in high school. What we did was we pair up senior citizens in the community and seniors in high school and just had a telephone program where they would call each other and check in and touch base. We've had some really great stories come out about the connections that the senior students had made and how much they enjoyed the program and how much it has meant to them. That program really took off in our western part of the state and had great support by local businesses and banks and daycare centers and elementary schools that began writing cards and coloring pictures for these seniors. It's just been phenomenal.

Marnie Mountjoy:

Another interesting thing that we've done is we're partnering with the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger and the state of Georgia. We received a grant from the Administration on Community Living to look at disaster preparedness, emergency plans. How did we respond during the pandemic? We're really examining how senior centers responded during the pandemic, making sure that seniors were still receiving those meals, that they were still engaged, that we were making sure that we were checking on those seniors that were isolated and home alone.

Marnie Mountjoy:

That's been another really interesting project and we're moving into year three of that project and where we're going to be working together and hosting some meetings with stakeholders to make sure that we have the plans in place that are necessary for when the next disaster strikes. Because here in Kentucky, we've seen it before, one day it's going to rain, the next day it's an ice storm. And we had those devastating tornadoes back in December. So, we know a disaster's going to strike Kentucky at some point. We just want to be prepared as best we can.

Christine Woodell:

Well, that sounds wonderful for the seniors and the project with the seniors and the students. That just sounds great. Thank you so for your comments. ADA Live listening audience, if you have questions about this topic or any other ADA Live topics, you could submit your questions online at www.adalive.org or call the Southeast ADA Center at 1-404-541-9001. That's 1-404-541-9001. And now a word from this episode's sponsor.

Voice Over:

The Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living, DAIL, oversees administration of statewide programs and services on behalf of Kentucky elders and individuals with disabilities. In partnership with Kentucky's Area's Agencies on Aging and Independent Living, Community Mental Health Centers, Center for Independent Living, and other community partners, DAIL provides leadership and addresses issues and circumstances that stand in the way of elders and individuals with disabilities achieving

the best possible quality of life. For more information on the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living, visit their website at chfs.ky.gov.

Christine Woodell:

Welcome back. We're talking with Marnie Mountjoy, division director at the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living. Marnie, some of our listening audience may not know about the Olmstead decision. Olmstead is the name of the 1999 United States Supreme Court decision that held that people with disabilities have a qualified right to receive state-funded supports and services in their community rather than in institutions. I read on the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services website, the state has a Hart-Supported Living Program. Please tell us a little bit about this program. Did it come about because of the Olmstead Supreme Court decision?

Marnie Mountjoy:

Actually, this program has been in place since 1992, so it's been around longer than that, than that court ruling. But it was first known as the Supported Living Program, but it was later renamed the Hart-Supported Living Program by the Kentucky legislators, after Jane Hart, who was a very strong advocate for disability rights here in Kentucky. That program is a state-funded program where individuals can apply on their behalf or on behalf of someone that they provide care for or a family member to help find or help fund unique programs, unique supports for that particular individual and their disability, to help them remain in the community setting of their choice. It's a very flexible program. We've funded things such as a fence in the backyard. We've done bathroom renovations. We've done assisted technology. We've done van modifications. So, again, it's very flexible to meet the specific needs of the individual.

Christine Woodell:

Well, that really sounds wonderful. Wonderful. Marnie, we get numerous calls from seniors who just don't really see themselves as having a disability. Therefore, some seniors may not know they have legal protections under several non-discrimination civil rights laws, especially if they have a medical or mental health impairment. Do the

Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Kentucky Area Agencies on agencies went across this situation as well?

Marnie Mountjoy:

Yes, they really do. I think that's why it's so important to have such community partners, as you, the Southeast ADA Center, to help our seniors who feel like they've been discriminated against. We work with our legal service providers here in Kentucky, such as Legal Aid of the Bluegrass and Kentucky Legal Aid to help seniors that feel like they have been discriminated against. But having organizations such as yours is so important because we can do so much more outreach and help seniors know that they have rights.

Christine Woodell:

What more do you think can be done to make older Americans aware of their rights under the Americans with Disability Act and other civil rights laws?

Marnie Mountjoy:

I think it's just the education and outreach, so working with our senior centers, working with our meal providers to send out information with home-delivered meals, just getting the word out as much as possible, using free and local information services, newsletters, PSAs through the radio. I think just anything we can to help seniors know what services and supports are available for them is the most important thing we can do.

Christine Woodell:

Absolutely. Each May, the Administration for Community Living, ACL, leads the nation's observance of Older Americans Month. The focus this year is aging in place, how older Americans can plan to stay in their home and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. What are the most pressing concerns or needs you see for aging adults who want to age in place?

Marnie Mountjoy:

I think the best thing that aging adults can do is to make that plan early on, even before they think they need any of the services and supports, because for a lot of the programs that we offer under the Older Americans Act through our Area Agencies on Aging, there are waiting lists. So, I think it's important to know or identify what needs you think you might have later on so that you can go ahead and get on those waiting lists for services.

Marnie Mountjoy:

I think it's important to do some pre-planning, maybe starting off with minor home modifications, such as a grab bar in the bathroom or reinforcing the railing on your stairs. Just starting out with those small, little projects can really help, especially in reducing falls. That's a serious problem here in Kentucky. One fall can lead to a really long hospital stay, rehabilitation stay. And a lot of seniors unfortunately lose their independence after suffering some falls. So, it's important to have a safe home environment for where individuals can live.

Marnie Mountjoy:

I think it's important to plan for those meals. As individuals age, I know they have a decreased appetite, but it's important to make sure that they have nutritious food in their home. And so our providing meals to seniors is a priority for the governor and this last legislative session. The legislators committed to providing millions of more funding to make sure that we don't have any seniors over the age of 60 in Kentucky waiting to get a nutritious meal.

Christine Woodell:

That is wonderful. That is wonderful. What are the plans for the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living and Area Agencies on Aging to celebrate and recognize Older Americans Month?

Marnie Mountjoy:

We really asked at the Department for Aging and Independent Living, we really asked the Area Agencies on Aging, sometimes we call them triple A's, we asked the triple A's to

focus on a local level and make sure that they have lots of engaging activities for seniors at the local level. And senior centers are open now. We're welcoming seniors after the pandemic, after the COVID restrictions. We've welcomed seniors back into senior centers and we're reengaging them and they are reestablishing those friendships that they've missed when they haven't been in the senior center. So, one of the big things this month is senior games. That's a big thing in Kentucky where senior centers participate in games and activities, a little competition among friends. Pickleball is one. Bowling is another popular senior game here in Kentucky. That's been great that we've been able to have the senior games again.

Marnie Mountjoy:

One of my favorite things about the senior games here in Kentucky is in the Kentucky River Area Agency on Aging region, so in the Eastern Kentucky part of the state, they have cheerleaders. They have senior cheerleader groups and those seniors take it very seriously. They do community fundraisers so that they can have uniforms and they compete against other counties. They travel from county to county in that region to do cheerleading competitions. Oh, it's funny. It's heartwarming. I cry every time I see them. It's just so great. And then of course it's prom season, so there are senior centers that are having proms as well as part of their Older Americans Act Month activity. It's just a great time to be a Kentuckian.

Christine Woodell:

Well, that is really wonderful. Certainly, isolation is so destructive for people. That's wonderful to have that kind of support in your community. What supports and services do you provide for people who are caregivers for older parents and other adults?

Marnie Mountjoy:

Sure. We work with our aging network to provide the National Family Caregiver Support Program. That's a federally funded program to help caregivers of those who are elderly. We also have our Medicaid home and community-based waivers to help individuals stay in their homes, in the community setting of their choice, to get those services and

supports because we want to delay nursing home placement as long as possible. We want people to stay in their own home. We want people to stay with their family members, where they feel safe, where they feel comfortable, where they feel at home. And we want to provide as much programming as we can to keep people at home.

Christine Woodell:

Well, I applaud you for all the wonderful things you're doing, and we want to thank you so much for being our guest today. You've shared some very valuable information with us. The resources you shared as well as others on the topic of aging and disability are posted in the resource list for this ADA Live episode. Listeners, you can access all ADA Live episodes with archived audio, accessible transcripts, and resources on our website at adalive.org. Listen to the SoundCloud ADA Live channel at soundcloud.com/adalive. Download ADA Live to your mobile device and your podcast app by searching for ADA Live. We also invite you to tune into our companion podcast, Disability Rights Today, for in-depth discussions on important court cases that shape the Americans with Disabilities Act. Learn more and listen at disabilityrightstoday.org.

Christine Woodell:

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4 Wheel City: (rapping)

[End of Transcript]

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