



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 4, 2017

For more information, contact NDCA at (701) 328-7590

***Sundogs and Sunflowers:
An Art for Life Program Guide for Creative Aging,
Health, and Wellness***

The North Dakota Council on the Arts (NDCA), with the generous support of the Bush Foundation, is excited to announce the release of a ground-breaking arts and creative aging toolkit to be sent to every elder care facility and local arts agency in North Dakota and South Dakota, 300 elder care activities coordinators in Minnesota, and every state arts agency in the country. Reaching 1,200 organizations, it is one of the largest efforts of its kind.

Based on the NDCA's nationally-recognized *Art for Life Program*, it represents a five-year effort to develop a program guide with associated materials to increase capacity and bring together a community's folk and fine artists, local arts agency, a participating elder care facility, and a partnering school to conduct creative aging, health, and wellness work. The *Art for Life Program* seeks to improve the emotional and physical lives of elders in care facilities with intensive art and artist interaction.

Art is medicine. An ever-growing body of evidence reveals just how dynamic, complex, and powerful the influence of art actually is. A national study on creativity and aging found that cultural programs result in higher ratings for physical health, fewer doctor visits, less medication use, fewer instances of falls, and fewer miscellaneous health problems. Art combats the "Three Plagues" of loneliness, boredom, and helplessness that negatively affects the health of seniors in care facilities. Arts programs also reduce risk factors that lead to the need for long-term care.

Other studies indicate that art positively impacts the immune system, blood pressure, heart rate, and respiration. Music stimulates the production of natural endorphins and can be used in pain management. Dance improves gait speed and balance, while reducing frailty and fall risk. Arts and cultural programs improves cognitive functions of older people with dementia. Loneliness results in dramatically increased mortality risk, yet the simple strengthening of relationships with art and traditions can address this major health factor.

The toolkit consists of two publications, a guided imagery CD set with user manual, and dozens of online articles and activity plans developed by folk artists, artists, folklorists, physicians, nurses, gerontologists, speech therapists, and music therapists. These materials seek to connect the dots, provide examples across the arts and sciences, and contextualize creative aging, health, and wellness efforts, especially within a framework of folk culture and folk traditions.

The activity plans, each one informed by medical studies and based upon the award-winning publication *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*, can be modified to align with the cultural, artistic, and other resources unique to each community. The toolkit is available to help direct communities to utilize **both folk and fine arts** to positively address, in creative, unique, and yet

familiar ways, the health and wellness of elders, whether through home-care systems, elder care facilities, or senior citizens' centers.

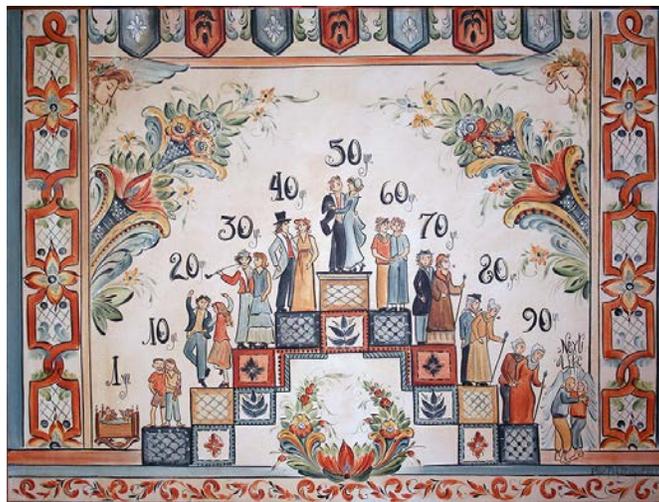
Gay Hanna, Executive Director Emerita of the National Center for Creative Aging in Washington, D.C., wrote, "I do not think that I have ever read a better documentation of the evolution, research, and rationale for practice in the area of creative aging, health, and wellness. It is a must-have for anyone interested in providing excellent care and service for elders."

Marsha MacDowell, Professor of Art at the Michigan State University Museum, and Clare Luz at the College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University, state, "Detailed lesson plans that promote cross-disciplinary collaborations, powerful testimonies, and use of a wide variety of art genres that intertwine folk and fine cultural expressions as well as traditional and western medical perspectives all represent a major contribution to multiple fields."

And Jon Kay, Director of Traditional Arts Indiana, Mathers Museum of World Cultures, adds, "Recognizing the significant role cultural knowledge and traditions play in the aging process, [these materials have] the potential to transform how we care for older generations."

By making a consciously-focused effort and thinking creatively, we can use arts, folk culture and traditions, and the people who are masters of them within our own communities to navigate perplexing, modern-day issues in effective, sustained, and inspired ways. Our greatest resources often can be found in our very own backyards. It is our hope that *Sundogs and Sunflowers: An Art for Life Program Guide for Creative Aging, Health, and Wellness* and the associated materials will be used to benefit elders everywhere.

For further information, contact the NDCA or visit: <http://www.nd.gov/arts/programs/art-for-life>.



###

The North Dakota Council on the Arts is the state agency responsible for the support and development of the arts throughout North Dakota, and is funded by the state legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts.

1600 E. Century Ave., Suite 6

Phone: (701) 328-7590

www.nd.gov/arts

Bismarck, ND 58503-0649

Fax: (701) 328-7595

comserv@nd.gov