

Four Stories

For years we have used “story-sharing” of aging experiences in our community-organizing work. Yet we still marvel at the power of stories to reach out to all of us. At our recent Legislative Leaders Forum, four people had the courage to share their aging stories with Speaker of the House Nicholas Mattiello and Senate President Dominick Ruggerio and our audience of 380 people. Their stories made powerful connections

On the Senior Agenda



By William F. Flynn Jr.

with our legislative agenda.

Harry was a senior who struggled to find a suitable nursing facility for rehabilitation following surgery. His first choice, selected because it was close to home, wasn't a good one. He eventually found a better one, but not without great difficulty. He asked why there wasn't a well-known

source of reliable advice for such a situation. His story underlined the need to enact our legislation to invest in improving The Point, the state information and referral program for senior services.

Wendy, disabled after a long working life, uses her No-Fare Bus Pass to reach several meal sites and food pantries where she volunteers every week. She thanked the leaders for restoring the No-Fare Bus Pass Program last year. She reported seeing big increases in the numbers of people accessing food programs, following a decline in the 5 months when the No-Fare Passes were discontinued. She urged the leaders to find permanent funding for the Passes.

Nancy had a long and successful business career. In the space of two years

her husband passed away, and then she was forced to retire by a serious heart condition. Her network of friends had been mostly

People need other people to socialize with. The senior center is the biggest jewel in the crown of elderly affairs in Rhode Island.”

two years this has helped them stay together.

President Ruggerio and Speaker Mattiello were listening, and gave strong

“At our recent Legislative Leaders Forum, four people had the courage to share their aging stories with Speaker of the House Nicholas Mattiello and Senate President Dominick Ruggerio and our audience of 380 people.”

co-workers. A year of isolation and depression followed. At her children's urging, she found her way to the Leon Mathieu Senior Center. Her first day she encountered a vibrant line-dancing group, and she knew she had found a community. She gives back playing the piano at events, writing stories for the center newsletter, and helping everyone have a good time. She asked for restoration of \$400,000 in senior centers' funding, saying, “What is the most important part of my story? Camaraderie!

John told his story of being the solo caregiver for his wife, a former emergency room nurse, for eight years. During that time her serious health problems worsened, eventually even requiring an amputation. He was running out of energy. Eventually he connected to “Carebreaks,” a Catholic Social Services state-funded program that provides respite care—a relief caregiver for his wife. That gave him time for chores like food shopping and also some social time with friends. For the past

pledges to increase funding for senior centers and The Point, continue No-Fare Bus Passes, and consider legislation providing more advice and support for volunteer caregivers. We are grateful to our four storytellers, and to everyone who turned out for this event.

William F. Flynn Jr. is executive director of the Senior Agenda Coalition. Contact him at senioragenda@senioragenda.com.