

## **ELDERSHIRE PROGRAMS: RECLAIMING ELDERHOOD [LIFELONG LEARNING]**

*(This program involves a partnership with Ron Browne who has developed “The Years Ahead” program based in Cleveland, Ohio).*

It’s referred to in many ways: as successful aging; as lifelong learning; as life planning. But no matter what the label, it’s about thinking differently in the second half of life. It’s about thinking differently about who we are, about our potential, about what options are available to us, and about what our value is to the greater culture. We call it “*Reclaiming Elderhood*.”

Reclaiming Elderhood suggests we look critically at the word “elder” and recognize that, in these times, it has become an synonym for an older person, a “senior citizen.” If, however, we view the image of an elder in tribal terms, or the way that elders were regarded in ancient and primitive societies, it is quite different. In that context, we think of an elder as a leader, as the keeper of the wisdom and of the experience of the culture of that society.

Other basic concepts include:

1. *Living with passion and purpose in the second half of life.* Paying more attention to the “joys and opportunities of growing older” as a means for better coping with the inevitable “challenges of aging.” Recognizing each person’s individuality and the potential that lies within each of us.
2. *A re-examination of the idea of retirement.* Although retirement may signal the end of lifelong work, it doesn’t signify personal decline or lack of worth. To the contrary, the retirement time of our lives can mean bright new beginnings and exciting new possibilities for personal growth.
3. *Looking at our continued learning potential.* If we look at the learning process critically, we discover that learning is not so much diminished as it is just *different* as we age. In fact, we often become more focused learners as years pass. Many of the myths attached to the learning process in older adults are just that – myths.
4. *Paying particular attention to our physical selves.* Our bodies are the bricks and mortar of our being. They were designed to move and work, no matter what our age or condition. By paying particular attention to our physical selves, by engaging in purposeful physical activity, by setting aside the myths relating to being active in our later years, we can realize the joys and benefits of taking back control of our bodies.
5. *Exploring how we might be stimulated to move beyond our previous boundaries relating to art and beauty.* The world holds many aesthetic

wonders. By engaging in both appreciation of them and in the creative process itself, we can expand our awareness of such things as we age and engage in the realization of our own creativity.

6. *Relating our values and our spirits to an expanding awareness of life's larger questions.* By reflecting on those things we know are true, but that may not be proven by science, we explore how we might adapt that awareness to our own personal needs in a meaningful and purposeful way.
7. *Embracing stories and myths.* We mine the richness of our history and our heritage by telling and hearing our stories and the stories of others. This gives and adds to the understanding and richness of our lives and the lives of our neighbors as we move forward in community.