

Seniors Have Much to Give, Much to Gain

BY 2030, 70 MILLION AMERICANS will be age 65 or older. That's 20 percent of the population. The looming wave of older adults, benefiting from scientific advances and lifestyle changes, will generally be healthier and more active than their own elderly parents and grandparents. But they will still need health care, nursing home, social services, and other programs.

Who is Maria Villaran?

- 1 Salvadoran immigrant
- 2 Grandmother
- 3 Spanish instructor
- 4 GED graduate, Connecticut
- All of the above



More Americans than ever are passing the GED. Tests to earn what they missed years ago—a high school credential. Senior Service America helps 15,000 seniors a year get training and jobs through the Senior AIDES Program. With the GED diploma, you can prove what you know. With Senior Service America, you can make it work for you.



Maria Villaran, 67, GED Class of '01

This poster is part of the GED Testing Service's "Prove Yourself" campaign.

"Most of our key social institutions haven't really grasped what is coming," says Anthony R. Sarmiento, executive director of Senior Service America, Inc. (SSAI).

One answer to the major challenges created by this sharp and steady graying of the population may lie with the older citizens themselves. Healthy and active older Americans, for example, would be ideally suited to volunteer in many capacities, not only to assist their less healthy counterparts, but also to tutor and mentor in schools, for example.

The coming wave could also help us meet our workforce needs in the future.

"Given current immigration policies and retirement trends, combined with lower birth rates in recent years, the aging and retirement of the baby boom generation will

likely result in a shrinking workforce," according to David Dye, U.S.

Department of Labor deputy assistant secretary for employment and training. Employers in high growth industries already face labor shortages, and this can only intensify with time."

"Older workers can represent a tremendous source of human capital, with excellent judgment skills, flexibility in work arrangements, and a high degree of loyalty to the employer," said Dye, speaking recently before an appropriations subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives concerned with the funding for the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP).

Dye points out that between 1970 and 2000, the percentage of Americans 65 and over who completed high school rose from 28 percent to 70 percent. This "greater level of educational attainment may result in a broader array of employment opportunities for the aging baby boomer population," he notes.

But Dye also points out a significant concern: Nine million of those born between 1946 and 1964 did not graduate from high school.

If they are to keep pace with their degreed counterparts, they must have access to education, "training programs

and employment opportunities that help increase their earnings and foster successful careers in emerging industries," Dye says.

One step is to help these older Americans earn their high school diploma. But sending 9 million people back to their local school systems simply isn't likely or practical, Sarmiento points out. That's why SSAI is working with various organizations in several states to encourage and assist seniors in studying for and passing the GED test.

The GED diploma is recognized as a valid credential by more than 95 percent of U.S. employers, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, as well as by nearly all colleges and universities. To pass, GED candidates must meet or surpass the performance of the top 60 percent of traditional high school graduating seniors. GED diploma holders demonstrate the skills of communication, information processing, problem solving and critical thinking.

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"The GED isn't just for young adults," Sarmiento notes. Americans 65 and over can take the tests and benefit.

"Seniors who earn their GED diploma serve as great role models for their peers—and their children and grandchildren," he says. "Earning a GED diploma increases senior adults' chances at better employment, in part by showing prospective employers they are motivated to take on challenges. It also opens the doors to higher education."

One older adult with a GED is Maria Villaran, 67, of Danielson, CT. As a participant in SSAI's SCSEP program known as the Senior AIDES Program, Villaran prepared for the GED test as she served as a job coach for mentally retarded adults at the Eastern Connecticut Regional Education Service Center. That experience, and earning her GED diploma in 2001, led to her current position as a GED testing proctor.

Louise Sinclair, an 83-year-old great-great grandmother in McComb, MS, also earned her GED in 1999 while she was in the Senior AIDES program sponsored by nearly

Copiah-Lincoln Community College.

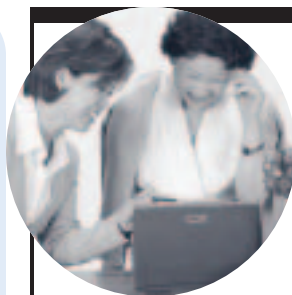
These are the kinds of successes SSAI is encouraging through its GED outreach with its Senior AIDES program. Senior AIDES (an acronym for Alert, Industrious, Dedicated, Energetic, Service) is designed to help low-income people age 55 and older build skills and confidence through paid work experience serving their community. The program provides participants with part-time work (20 hours a week) a library, school, shelter, soup kitchen, or other organizations. The seniors gain access to on-the-job training and new skills and build the confidence and work history that can help lead to non-subsidized employment. As part of their initial Senior AIDES assessment, older adults who need and express interest in the GED are referred to appropriate local educational programs.

“The Senior Community Service Employment Program and the GED are synergistic,” Sarmiento says. “Through SCSEP, older adults can earn and learn as they help meet the needs of their community. At the same time, these seniors can study for and earn their GED diploma, proving to themselves and to others what they know.”

Established more than 40 years ago, SSAI serves more than 10,000 economically disadvantaged seniors each year through its Senior AIDES program. It is one of 13 national organizations awarded grants by the U.S. Department of Labor funded through Title V of the Older Americans Act. With its grant, SSAI currently funds 107 local grantees, including community and faith-based organizations, and local and regional government agencies.

“We are striving to bring together our local grantees with their local GED testing agency and Adult Basic Education network. Connecting these local resources more effectively can result in major, positive life changes for today’s seniors,” Sarmiento says. In addition, SSAI is working with the American Association of Community Colleges to foster postsecondary education beyond the GED for interested seniors. With the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Center for Workforce Preparation, Senior Service America is also exploring ways to promote employment of SCSEP participants and other older adults. 📖

For more information, visit www.seniorserviceamerica.org; call (301) 578-8900; or write to Senior Service America, 8403 Colesville Road, Suite 1200, Silver Spring, MD 20910.



TESOL Fosters Teaching Excellence

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does not automatically qualify one to teach the language to others.

Quality instruction is essential to assure maximum benefit for the student. Moreover, mutual understanding among widely diverse cultures and traditions is critical in fostering peaceful coexistence. And mutual understanding depends on clear and accurate expressions of ideas and goals.

These beliefs make professionalism in language education a major concern of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL), whose 14,000 members work with learners in more than 120 countries. Teaching English to speakers of other languages is an academic discipline that requires training in linguistics, testing and research, curriculum and syllabus design, and more, according to information on the TESOL Web site.

“The constant flow of information from country to country and continent to continent in our shrinking world creates the need for institutions that encourage and support the development of language and intercultural communication skills. TESOL...is uniquely positioned to give coordinated, knowledgeable response at the international, national and

local levels to issues affecting institutions that foster the development of effective human communications.”

Founded in 1966, TESOL is designed to foster teaching excellence through a wide variety of services and opportunities for professional development. For example, the TESOL International Research Foundation (TIRF) is inviting proposals for doctoral dissertation grants and priority research grants in the field of applied linguistics and/or English language education.

For teachers focused on day-to-day techniques, TESOL offers its “Principles and Practices of Online Teaching” certificate program. Designed for both experienced and inexperienced teachers and course designers, the program can help in developing the skills to teach English online or weave online segments into more traditional course plans.

Additional TESOL services include a variety of books and other materials; electronic job listings; a scholarly journal; a teachers’ magazine; resource links; workshops and national conferences; directories of teacher education programs, and more. 📖

For more information, visit www.tesol.org; or contact Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 700 South Washington Street, Suite 200, Alexandria, VA 22314; or call 703-836-0774.

TESOL Winners



Eight visitors to KET’s booth at the national TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) Convention won six months free access to the new *ESL/CivicsLink* online professional development Web site.

Congratulations to the winners:

- Kathleen Bywater, Riverside Adult School, CA
- Gary Fellow, Chemeketa Community College, OR
- Gustav Kocsis, Santa Fe Community College, NM
- Patricia Kerns, Sacramento City USD, CA
- Nadene Lana, Kent School District, WA
- Irma Lance, Borough of Manhattan Community College, So. Orange, NJ
- David Lisker, City College of San Francisco, CA;
- Anne White, Project Reach Youth, Brooklyn, NY

Irma Lance is manager of adult basic education/ESL in a program serving some 500 ESL students. Their lower Manhattan classes serve predominantly Chinese speaking students, with Spanish speaking students in Washington Heights and a wider mix of nationalities at their main campus.

Says Lance, “I was very pleased to have won the six-month free license to the *ESL/CivicsLink* at the TESOL convention. This summer we are planning to use the *ESL/CivicsLink* as a focus of our ESL staff development. What a wonderful opportunity for us and what great timing. Thanks!”

ESL/CivicsLink was developed by PBS, NCAL (the National Center on Adult Education at the University of Pennsylvania), Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education, and KLRN-TV in San Antonio, TX. The Web site is now managed by KET, which is also home to PBS LiteracyLink®. 📖

For more information, visit the *ESL/CivicsLink* Web site at: www.pbs.org/civicslink.