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**The Shared Societies Project**:
**Leadership for Dialogue, Diversity and Social Cohesion**
***Building a world safe for difference***

**Replicable example of practice**

**Commitment IV**

Ensure the legal framework protects the rights of the individual

**Suggested Approach:**

- Introduce programmes of affirmative action that include the equipping of members of groups disadvantaged and discriminated against, with the skills necessary to function confidently in work and other social and economic contexts.

## Community Ambassadors Program for Seniors (CAPS)

**Country:** United States

### Background

- Like many cities in America, Fremont has an aging and increasingly diverse population. Nearly half of residents are foreign-born, including one-third of seniors in a population of 214,000.
- Almost one-third of senior immigrants live below or close to the poverty line.
- Fremont is also home to one of the country's largest group of Afghan refugees.

### Goals

- To reach out to seniors in their own cultural and faith communities and help them access essential services.
- To integrate immigrants and strengthen connections between native- and foreign-born community members.

### Method

- In 2004, Fremont's Human Services Department conducted a series of focus groups in nine languages to find out how best to reach the city's immigrant seniors, nearly one-third of which live below or close to the poverty line.
- An invaluable resource emerged from these conversations: a new pool of volunteers. Many residents came forward to work as "ambassadors" within their

respective communities. They embraced the opportunity to be useful and draw from their previous work experiences as professionals here or abroad.

- Volunteers were provided with a comprehensive volunteer ambassador training, developed in conjunction with the City of Fremont, San Jose State University and the Stanford Geriatric Education Centre. The course covers topics ranging from active listening to information on housing, cash assistance, legal and health issues.
- Ambassadors serve as a bridge between the formal network of social services and their respective faith and cultural communities.
- CAPS ambassadors help seniors access essential services through people they know and trust, in their own communities and languages, and according to their own cultural norms.
- Ambassadors also meet bi-monthly with the city's Aging and Family Services staff to review difficult cases, share best practices and receive ongoing training.

**Impact**

- Since 2007, 138 volunteer ambassadors from each of Fremont's distinct communities have completed a 40-hour training program designed to help them provide information and referral services to seniors and their families.
- CAPS ambassadors have conducted outreach to over 1,500 individuals and helped over 700 seniors receive individual support to access services.
- Outcomes include an increased level of trust among ambassadors and city staff, between ethnic leaders and local service providers, and between ambassadors from very diverse cultures and religious backgrounds.
- In 2010, the City of Fremont's Human Resources Department received the Network of Multicultural Aging Award from the American Society on Aging

**Enabling conditions**

- City of Fremont's Human Services Department carried out preliminary research on how to meet the needs of older immigrants through the series of focus groups.
- The focus groups also enabled the Department to connect to ten local cultural and faith-based organizations and identify individuals who were willing to contribute. In this way CAPS is a unique civic partnership.
- The Department was also able to call on other local resources including the State University and the Stanford Geriatric Education centre

**Comments**

- CAPS integrates immigrants through a unique model that engages the full community and supports seniors in their own language, within their own cultural norms, and does so where seniors live, worship, and socialize.

- The city's Human Services Department has ensured that city programs are adapted to meet the needs of the diverse communities they serve. The social security office, for example, now has a Punjabi-speaking professional to work with Fremont's large Sikh population.

**Contact / References for further information**

Community Ambassador Program for Seniors: http://capseniors.org/

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