At the Denver Public Library, we view age as a gift. We support older adults as they engage in lifelong learning, creative endeavors, and community connections. We help them find meaning and purpose. We help them thrive.

At the same time, we recognize and address the real challenges people face as they age, including social isolation, homelessness, financial insecurity, dementia, and declining health.

We define older adult as anyone age 50 and older, but we also know that age is a stage of life, not a number. People might consider themselves older adults at a younger or older age, and that’s fine with us.

The older adults we serve are as diverse as the population of Denver itself. DPL’s Older Adult Services welcomes and supports all older adults, in all of their circumstances and identities, in all of their hopes and dreams for the best quality of life possible.

- One in three Americans is age 50 plus
- 27 percent of Denver’s population is age 50 plus
- Older populations are growing faster than younger populations
Programs, Classes, & Events

Between January 2019 and April 2020, we presented more than 147 programs designed specifically for older adults that were attended by almost 2,000 people!

Our programs span the vast landscape of wants and needs felt by today’s older adults. We offer Creative Aging classes, Health and Wellness classes, Information and Technology classes, and opportunities to have intergenerational experiences.

If you want to learn how to paint, we have a class for you. If you want to explore mindfulness as a way of coping with the stresses of aging, we have a class for you. If you want help understanding the dizzying array of Medicare options, we have a class for you.

Our programs:

- Alleviate social isolation
- Create community
- Promote lifelong learning
- Elevate joy
- Provide resources
- Solve problems

"After the program, I felt uplifted. My spirits danced."

"The program made me feel happier and more connected to neighbors."

Development & Training

We know that adult brains learn differently from young brains, and we know that there are developmental stages of adulthood and aging, just as there are developmental stages of childhood. Advances in neuroscience and changes in cultural attitudes mean that society as a whole has a broader view of what older adulthood can and should look like. And so do we!

To provide a welcoming environment and excellent service to older adults, our staff must understand these things. That’s why we offer the following trainings:

- How the Adult Brain Learns
- Age Savvy: The Developmental Stages of Adulthood and Aging
- Dementia 101
- Changing the Narrative: Ending Ageism
- Multigenerational Workplaces

Staff have expressed appreciation for the trainings, which give them the knowledge and skills they need to serve older adults well. For example, after the Dementia 101 training, a staff member said: “Thank you so much! I really appreciate your vulnerability and your wealth of knowledge. It was helpful to understand the disease and how it manifests in the library environment. I feel more prepared as a librarian now.”
COVID-19 Response

COVID-19 has impacted all aspects of life around the globe, and DPL is certainly no exception. No longer able to connect with our customers in person, the library has developed a strategy to reach older adults over the phone, online, and through mail and delivery. Programs and services that we are doing or plan to do include:

- Virtual Memory Cafes
- Virtual Art Cafes (with Denver Art Museum)
- Storytelling in the Time of COVID (with StoryCenter)
- Memory Cafe TV on YouTube
- Take and Make Art Kits for Older Adults (with Think 360 Arts)
- LitLine (a phone line that has stories read by DPL staffers in English and in Spanish)
- Phonebanks
- The Postcard Project (in which DPL staffers hand write personal notes on postcards and then mail them to older adults who sign up)

The pandemic and the social distancing that comes with it has hit the older adult population especially hard. A population that was already experiencing social isolation is being told to stay inside and stay away. Now more than ever it is important to serve older adults and serve them well.
Story of Impact
A Joyful Reunion at Virtual Memory Cafe

Best friends Sandy and Judi have been coming to Memory Cafe together for years. One has dementia and needs help, the other is sharp and still teaching, but the differences don’t matter. They are curious and happy together and greet each Memory Cafe with open hearts and curious minds – whether they are creating art, dancing during a drumming session, or singing along to a live band.

Dementia did not separate Sandy and Judi, but COVID-19 did. These friends, self isolating like most older adults, missed each other very much. Judi said, “I hope Sandy doesn’t forget me.”

And so the first Virtual Memory Cafe was particularly joyous, because Sandy and Judi were reunited through the magic of Zoom. As soon as they saw each other’s faces, they started laughing and talking over each other. Sandy cried out, “Oh! I love you! I love you! I love you!” She blew kisses at the screen and Judi caught them. The joy was infectious, and the rest of the participants couldn’t help but smile and laugh with them. There were even some tears.

If it weren’t for the library and our efforts to keep our customers connected during this strange and isolating time, Sandy and Judi would not have had that reunion. And the rest of us would not have had the privilege and pleasure of bearing witness to their joy.

The library is having a powerful impact on older adults. Surveys taken after programs show:

- 86 percent said they felt happier after the program
- 88 percent said they connected with at least one other person during the program
- 91 percent said that the instructor created a strong sense of community in the class
- 93 percent said they were more likely to try other things in their community after attending a library program

Metro Vision Award

In 2020, the Denver Regional Council of Governments recognized DPL’s Older Adult Services with a Metro Vision Award, stating that our programs and services “elevate Denver as one of the best places to live” in the country.