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Chelsea Senior Center Welcomes New Ease the Day Program Co-Leader

Chelsea Senior Center announces the addition of Emily Nagaonkar, LMSW, to its Ease the Day (ETD) adult day program dedicated to providing caregivers with a safe destination for their loved one while they enjoy a break in the caregiving routine.

Nagaonkar's devotion to the holistic well-being of older adults is showcased in her 18-year career and education. Her Master of Social Work was obtained at University of Michigan and included the McGregor Geriatric Social Work Fellowship. Her career entails pivotal leadership positions where she developed individualized services for older adults, facilitated groups, created innovative programs and cultivated community partnerships.



"I have always known that these are my people," says Nagaonkar. After earning an undergraduate social work degree from University of Wisconsin and completing her Master's degree at UM, she focused on career opportunities that eased isolation for seniors, helped seniors maintain independence as long as possible, and developed her skills to work with older adults with Alzheimer's.

Upon returning to Michigan after 12 years in California, Nagaonkar was thrilled when she Googled day programs for older adults and discovered Chelsea Senior Center's Ease the Day program. For several months, she volunteered at Ease the Day. After Ease the Day's co-leader Lisa Klinkman retired in March, Nagaonkar was eager to step into the role.

Together with co-leader Katie Garvey, OTRL, CAPS, Nagaonkar is now programming for Ease the Day (ETD), coordinating volunteers and engaging with the adults who spend time in the program. The adult day program is a win-win for care partners; for the senior who needs extra support and for the caregiver who needs a break. The program provides a safe space to engage with peers in conversation, movement, art, music and seasonal gardening. Activities are often theme-and-seasonal based or connected to a holiday or nationally recognized day of celebration. For the caregiver, the program provides peace of mind knowing their person is safe and an opportunity for self-care. The respite ETD provides is crucial for preventing burnout.

“Immediately, I had such a great feeling about the program and the people and the Chelsea Senior Center. This is such a unique model. The same people are coming in every week to volunteer,” says Nagaonkar. “It’s really an amazing program fueled by volunteers. The spirit of volunteerism at CSC is next level; beyond what I have experienced before.” On any given day of Ease the Day, there are a handful of volunteers on hand to interact with and support up to 12 ETD friends. Activities vary widely, though favorites include Movin-Groovin’ seated-exercise class, pool noodle “volleyball” and time spent outdoors: blowing bubbles, playing croquet and planting seeds for summer harvest in Chelsea Senior Center’s Trinh Pifer Intergenerational Garden. Since April 2023 when the program launched, Ease the Day has provided more than 6,200 hours of caregiver respite with the support of more than 3,000 volunteer hours.

Care partners who are residents of Western Washtenaw County are encouraged to reach out to Chelsea Senior Center to learn more about Ease the Day. This program is specifically for caregiver respite. After completing an intake process to ensure a good fit, caregivers drop off loved ones at CSC for up to five hours of engagement. Those who qualify must be at least 50 years old. The adult day program at CSC is Tuesdays and Thursdays (9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.) and half a day on Wednesdays (9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.). “Our plan is to expand Wednesday hours and create a new structure for a Monday program later this summer,” says Jennifer Smith, CSC’s Executive Director. “With an always aging population, there is a pervasive need for a community-based program like ours. We hope to expand the program with support of the Older Adults Millage. We are fortunate to have a higher-than-average population of older adults in this part of the county. I envision a lot of opportunities to collaborate and partner with other organizations to meet the changing needs of aging adults.”

Ease the Day offers three options for caregivers who need free time to tend to their own well-being. Beyond Chelsea Senior Center’s adult day program, at-home companion visits are provided in conjunction with Catholic Charities Washtenaw County. More robust in-home care is offered in partnership with Comfort Keepers of Ann Arbor. Chelsea Senior Center offers many programs that align with Ease the Day hours. Notably, on Wednesdays at CSC, caregivers can attend a support group called A Moment for Me or, on alternate Wednesdays, restful Yoga Nidra. Pickleball, crafts, cards and other activities are also options during Ease the Day.

Chelsea Senior Center (CSC) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization in Chelsea, Michigan. Its mission is to enhance the quality of life and well-being for area seniors and their families. Chelsea Senior Center, celebrating 60 years in 2025, is located at 512 Washington Street.

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