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Aging Insights Episode 111: “Technology Solutions: Isolation and Transportation”

TRENTON, NJ (December 8, 2020) – Older adults who report being socially isolated are more likely to die sooner, experience declines in mobility and are at increased risk for mental health conditions, says Dr. Alison Thomas-Cottingham, an associate professor of psychology at Rider University. She and Karen Alexander, Managing Director of the New Jersey Travel Independence Program, NJTIP @ Rutgers, explain ways to keep seniors connected, aided by technology and other solutions, on the 111th episode of **Aging Insights**.

“Technology Solutions: Isolation and Transportation” can be viewed on NJFA’s YouTube channel at youtube.com/user/njfoundationforaging/, along with its website and more than 70 public-access stations across NJ (check local listings for channels and times).

On the show, Thomas-Cottingham delves into the difference between social isolation and loneliness and notes that college students may also be experiencing social isolation. “With the pandemic, most of us are at a point where either we have a personal experience with quarantine or our own isolation, or someone near and dear to us has that experience. I feel like we’re now all at a point where maybe we’re better able to demonstrate some empathy because we’re seeing it...we’re living it.” Thomas-Cottingham also outlines how senior centers are keeping connected with their members virtually by offering such things as online Zumba and language classes.

Alexander explains that NJTIP teaches older adults and people with disabilities how to use the public transit system and other mobility options in New Jersey. When the pandemic hit, “We quickly adapted to a remote and virtual training model,” she says. “By the end of September, we were able to go back out onto buses and trains and do in-field training. We had adapted our curriculum to include COVID-19 safety guidance.” Alexander cited a recently added NJ Transit app that lets someone see how crowded a bus or train is. “You can see of it’s red, green or yellow and if there’s another bus coming in a few minutes, you might want to take that one,” she says.

Dr. Alison Thomas-Cottingham’s current research and clinical interests focus on the health of older adults. She partners with organizations in the public and private sectors to educate older adults about sexual health and promote improvements in community health. She has conducted numerous workshops and delivered presentations at senior centers throughout the State of New Jersey. Thomas-Cottingham is the author of the book, “Psychology Made Simple” and numerous articles on aging and older adults. She serves as a consulting editor for the *Journal of American College Health* and is a member of various professional associations including the American Psychological Association and The Association of Black Psychologists.

Karen Alexander has more than two decades of experience planning and implementing human service, public transit and aging in place programs. She joined the Voorhees Transportation Center in 2013 as a Senior Research Project Manager and Managing Director of the New Jersey Travel Independence Program, NJTIP @ Rutgers. NJTIP provides mobility training to 1,000+ older adults and people with disabilities annually. She is Co-Principal Investigator for “Understanding the Mobility Needs for an Aging New Jersey Population,” a 2020-2021 study for NJ Department of Transportation. She serves as Vice-Chair of the New Jersey State Rehabilitation Council, and she participates in statewide efforts focused on increasing mobility for people with disabilities and older adults, including the NJ Council on Access and Mobility and the NJ Council of Special Transportation.

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*New Jersey Foundation for Aging (njfoundationforaging.org) is the only statewide nonprofit organization focused solely on providing leadership in public policy and education to enable older adults to live with independence and dignity in their communities. In addition to its policy leadership role, NJFA produces the award-winning **Aging Insights**, a monthly half-hour TV program promoting dialogue on critical issues for older adults and caregivers. The show can be seen on NJFA’s YouTube channel at youtube.com/user/njfoundationforaging/ its website and more than 70 public-access stations. NJFA also presents an annual conference offering development opportunities and best practices for professionals.*