

Announcing Iona East: Why Iona is opening a center in Southeast DC

By Sally White

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For 44 years, Iona's been a respected and trusted nonprofit leader providing essential services for older adults and their families. Our vision is for a community that celebrates, values, respects, and protects every individual, especially the most vulnerable. No matter their income. No matter the address of their home.

In the last decade, the number of Washingtonians age 60 and older increased by nearly 15,000 to 117,223. More than 20,000 live in Wards 7 and 8 – the communities with the least access to services.

Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and Type 2 Diabetes are on the rise nationally, and African Americans are twice as likely to have Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia than Caucasian older adults. But right now, there is no adult day center in Southeast, DC to serve and support these older adults and families.

Residents with memory loss, physical frailty, or other chronic conditions are literally standing on street corners because they can no longer participate in the active senior programs that were the center of their community. They have nowhere else to go. And family caregivers are overwhelmed because they too don't know where to turn for support.

Things are about to change.

Iona is opening a new adult day health center in Ward 8's Congress Heights neighborhood in Southeast, DC, featuring the same high-quality program, resources, and leadership as our center in Tenleytown, Northwest, DC.

Soon, Southeast DC residents with Alzheimer's or other chronic conditions will have a place to go in their community, where compassionate nurses and other staff will attend to their needs and monitor their health. Where they'll get a nutritious lunch, and keep their minds stimulated with fun, engaging, and therapeutic activities like art therapy, musical performances, and field trips. Where they'll make new friends and once again feel part of a community.

Their family members will have peace of mind and much-needed respite. They'll get connection to professional support and others going through the same thing through support groups, education, and other programming. They'll no longer be alone in their caregiving journey.

I know what a difference a quality adult day health center can make in the lives of older adults and their caregivers. For more than 30 years, we've provided individualized therapeutic, social, and health services for older adults living with dementia, Parkinson's, and other chronic conditions in our Northwest location.

This approach not only provides older family members a reason to get up in the morning, enjoy activities, and make new friends, it also reduces depression and hospitalizations.

In turn, it allows family caregivers to go to work, handle personal business, or rest knowing their relative is safe and well cared for.

The need for such a center in Ward 8 is real. In the words of longtime resident Teresa A. Smith:

“Most people I meet are able to do things for themselves. But I also meet folks with physical or cognitive challenges at our local senior wellness center. They may not be able to get to the bathroom in time or participate in activities. They end up sitting at home with nothing to do and eventually wither away. If they had a place to go where staff attended to their needs and monitored their health, where they got a good meal, kept their minds stimulated, and continued to feel part of the community, I know many seniors who would jump at the chance to be engaged again.”

Iona East will soon be this place for Southeast residents. In the coming months, a warren of offices in The Shops at Park Village will be transformed into the 9,000-square-foot light-filled space that will house Ward 8’s first adult day health center. Iona East is being developed in partnership with WC Smith, which has a long history of supporting the local community and building mixed-use developments in the District’s East End – from THEARC campus to Skyland Workforce Development Center to The Shops at Park Village.

I believe in a city where older adults and family caregivers get the help they need when they need it.

No waiting lists, no gaps in services, no disparities – no matter which side of the Anacostia River older adults live on.