

Zoie Bissic Lutheran Settlement House		
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For the community narrative project, I interviewed two senior center members, Mr. B and Ms. C, who both volunteer and take part in the Lutheran Settlement House and their weekly activities. Interviewing them both gave a lot of insight on how LSH helps the community beyond what I saw during the program. While working at the Lutheran Settlement House, it became clear that the senior center is a staple for the community. The senior center can give seniors across Philadelphia resources but helps the local community of older folks who want activities, resources or social services. Although Mr. B was raised nearby in Kensington, he did not know LSH was open to all Philadelphia residents over 55. At the time he was homeless, unemployed and needed aid so discovering the settlement house only because his bike was stolen out front was something he considers “blessing in disguise”. Mr. B made a point to mention that the settlement house reminds him of the best part about his community. He fondly discussed the “old school ways” of taking care of your neighbors and your street just because it was the way they did things. He mentioned that with a lot of the constant changes in the neighborhood, gentrification caused a lot of people to stop depending on others in their community, but LSH brought those types of interactions back into his life. Mr. B shared a lot of the challenges he’s faced in his life and how they caused him to be unhoused on 3 different occasions. He added that despite all the horrific people he’s dealt with, he’s been able to stay kind, positive and have faith in others again because of his volunteering at LSH.

Ms. C also found the Lutheran Settlement House by accident. She shared that she considers LSH one of the best kept secrets of Fishtown and only found the building on a walk through the neighbor because the address didn’t show up after a google search of nearby senior centers. Apparently, she would have eventually run to LSH anyway because other senior centers

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don't compare. Ms. C mentioned that the place is a "treasure trove" that takes care of every aspect of an individual. She emphasized many things I noticed throughout my time at LSH, like the fact that there are activities for physical health, intellectual health, and even emotional health. She said that she loves to tell her friends LSH is "advantageous from head, to body, to soul". Unlike other senior centers who only play bingo and serve coffee, LSH finds interesting programs for every senior by taking their feedback and implementing what they want to see. When asked, Ms. C said that the best thing about LSH is the staff's attention to detail. When I mentioned that I'm going into social work and would love to know how I can make my clients feel as supported as she is, she said I should focus on being attuned to everyone as a person. Especially as a social worker, we agreed that I must avoid generalizing others and focus on their individual problems and needs.

Both interviews reflected a lot of what I learned at the Lutheran Settlement House. I realized that everyone has their own story and is an individual with their own challenges, but I cannot let that change how I act or treat others. I loved seeing many seniors realize that there are always resources available to you at the community center and appreciated being able to help them in any way that makes their lives easier.

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