WISE & Healthy Aging Offers Help and Support to Seniors Wanting to Give Up Excessive Clutter and Hoarding

15-week, step-by-step workshop and support group begins in April

SANTA MONICA, CALIF. (March 3, 2022) – With COVID restrictions having limited the in-person gatherings and activities that benefited many seniors prior to the pandemic, WISE & Healthy Aging is pleased to announce that it is resuming its popular, in-person workshop and support group, “From Collecting to Decluttering,” to help older adults gain control of their “stuff.”

“Now that COVID restrictions are loosening up, the time is right for us to safely resume our in-person workshop ‘From Collecting to Decluttering,’” said Anat Louis, PsyD, director of Case Management at WISE & Healthy Aging. “The workshop creates a supportive engaging community for our older adult participants so that they know they are not alone and feel respected, heard and understood as they work on dealing with their clutter.”

Led by WISE & Healthy Aging’s peer counselors, the “From Collecting to Decluttering” (C2D) workshop kicks off next month with an orientation held on Wednesday, April 6, that is required for seniors interested in participating. Those who decide to sign up for the workshop then meet weekly for the next 15 weeks, starting the following Wednesday on April 13, and each Wednesday thereafter through July 20, from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m.
Compulsive saving, acquiring and hoarding are complex issues that affect people of all genders and cultures. And, while the problem can begin as early as adolescence, it typically worsens in severity over a person’s life span, with higher rates of hoarding disorder seen in people over the age of 60.

Nancy, a retired special education teacher, was faced with eviction from years of saving and acquiring more items when she heard about the C2D program a few years ago and decided to give it a try, a decision she says that began her own decluttering process.

“The program works on you from the inside out. It made me want to get organized,” said Nancy who had tried and failed to get rid of items filling her home a number of times before. “Now, I no longer buy things I have no use for, I’ve gotten some tools and developed some mental habits that have helped me to stop buying stuff and bringing it into my apartment.”

While no long-term studies to date have shown that people with serious acquiring and collecting problems either accumulated more items during COVID or “decluttered” their households during all the time they spent at home, it is well-known that isolation, uncertainty and anxiety exacerbate hoarding disorder. This condition is clinically diagnosed and includes an extreme reluctance to part with items and to accumulate them at such a level that living spaces become unusable – often to the point of becoming a fire and/or a tripping hazard.

“If an older adult struggled with managing their clutter before COVID, there’s a good possibility that the problem may have become worse when they were more isolated from their loved ones during the pandemic,” said Louis. “Now they can be with a group of peers who share similar challenges and be there for each other.”

The C2D workshop at WISE & Healthy Aging was introduced nearly a decade ago. It incorporates a positive, cognitive behavioral approach with participants receiving a copy of the seminal book, “Buried in Treasure,” that addresses compulsive acquiring, saving and hoarding. Participants complete weekly homework from its accompanying handbook and after completing the workshop, can choose to become part of a support group that meets twice monthly.

“Over the years that we’ve been doing the workshop, nearly 90% of the people who start the program, finish the program,” said Ellen Satkin, LCSW, a retired patients’ rights director at the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health and co-facilitator of the C2D workshop as a volunteer peer counselor at WISE & Healthy Aging. “The key to that kind of retention for a program this long is that it provides clear expectations and accountability. It’s the peer-to-peer support that happens in the group setting that makes this program so successful.”

Nancy, who makes it clear she is still in process, credits the WISE & Healthy Aging program with helping her to make lifelong friends.

“Our ongoing support group continues to meet by phone and four of us also get together via Zoom,” Nancy said. “Hoarding and getting rid of things is a core issue, so when you find friends who are sympatico in the same process, it’s a wonderful thing.”

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About WISE & Healthy Aging
WISE & Healthy Aging is a multiservice, community-based nonprofit organization serving older adults and their families and caregivers throughout Los Angeles County. Headquartered in Santa Monica, the team at WISE & Healthy Aging works to advance the dignity and quality of life of older adults through leadership, advocacy and high-quality, innovative services.