

New nonprofit aims to help seniors age in place

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(Photo: TRAIL / Special to the Press-Citizen)

Area seniors or families looking to help relatives age in place will have a new option this April when TRAIL of Johnson County launches.

Organizers of the new nonprofit, which stands for Tools and Resources for Active, Independent Living, say they already have gathered \$108,000 in donation commitments and have brought together an eight-member board of directors. Susan Shullaw, secretary of the group, said TRAIL is intended to support and be a collaboration with services already available to seniors like the Oaknoll Retirement Community and the Iowa City/Johnson County Senior Center, but will allow seniors to age comfortably in their neighborhoods.

"We've been working on this for several years, thinking and talking about getting older and enjoying the neighborhoods we're in," she said. "A number of us also had aging parents and were dealing with the options like nursing homes and those kinds of things and thought this would be a welcome addition."

TRAIL of Johnson County is part of the Village to Village network, an organization that began in Boston over 15 years ago, according to its website, and now includes over 200 similar nonprofit groups across 45 states and the District of Columbia.

The organization will be membership-based and, for a yearly fee based on household size service level, will provide volunteer assistance like daily check-ins, transportation, light handywork, technology assistance and others; access to pre-screened service providers of home health care, lawn and pet care, or home repairs; and TRAIL-sponsored social activities.

"As we age, necessities such as home maintenance and repair, and even routine errands like grocery-shopping or doctor visits, can become barriers to staying safe and healthy in our own homes," David Rust, TRAIL board chairperson, said in a news release. "We also know that maintaining an active social network contributes to long-term quality of life. These are among the key services and benefits TRAIL will bring to its members' doorsteps."

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The group plans to launch with between 20 to 30 members, Shullaw said, mostly in the Iowa City area, but plans to expand to serve all of Johnson County.

"We've been just so gratified and humbled by the support we've already gotten. We've got more than 50 donors who have all said they want to help build a strong organization," she said. "That feels like a vote of confidence and also serves, I think, as a reminder of the responsibility to fulfill what our mission is."

TRAIL of Johnson County will be the subject of the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Iowa conversation series at 4 p.m. Feb. 15 at the Iowa City Public Library, 123 S Linn St. Aging Studies program director Mercedes Bern-Klug, communications consultant Susan Shullaw and Tippie College of Business emeritus faculty member Nancy Hauserman will be speakers at the event. More information about the group can be found [at its website \(http://www.trailofjohnsoncounty.org/\)](http://www.trailofjohnsoncounty.org/).

Fundraising will continue through February, Shullaw said, then the focus will shift to building a larger volunteer base.

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