CERTIFIED AGING-IN-PLACE SPECIALIST (CAPS) PROGRAM

Description:
The Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) Program was developed by AARP and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) to assist consumers in making their homes usable for a lifetime—regardless of their age, size, or functional ability. In New York, the New York State Builders Association's Research and Education Foundation (NYSBA-REF) began offering the CAPS training courses in 2006. As of April 20, 2009, there were 55 CAPS-registered professionals in New York State.

The program's goals are to train and certify building industry professionals, as well as interior designers and health care professionals, to understand:

- Housing-related features that present challenges to older adults who have incurred aging-related frailties or other impairments and younger-aged people with disabilities, which limit or prevent their ability to successfully negotiate their living environment and which limit or prevent their ability to continue living where they are;

- How a traditionally designed home is not built to address the normal variation in size and functional ability typically seen among any home's family members;

- How universal design features and home modifications enable people to continue living independently in their homes for much longer periods of time and, often, throughout their lifetimes;

- Common remodeling projects; and

- Solutions to common environmental barriers.

The CAPS program was developed in response to AARP's 2000 study, Fixing to Stay, which revealed that over 80 per cent of respondents aged 45 and over wanted to remain in the own homes for as long as possible (age in place). According to AARP, "Professionals certified in CAPS training have been taught the strategies and techniques for designing and building aesthetically pleasing, barrier-free living environments. However, the CAPS program goes beyond design to address the codes and standards, common remodeling projects and their costs, product ideas, and resources needed to provide comprehensive and practical aging-in-place solutions."

As part of the CAPS training program, instructors use information, discussion, and hand-on exercises to raise attendees' level of awareness, understanding, and sensitivity to changing human needs as an individual's life circumstances change or as he/she ages. For example, during the Sensitivity Training segment, attendees
simulate several disabilities, then work together to complete a simple task—
developing a first-hand, visceral understanding of how impairments and an
improperly designed environment can pose significant obstacles to daily
functioning. Attendees become more aware of and more sensitive to the disabilities
faced by the consumers they serve, and they learn strategies to improve the
environment to help consumers.

NYSBA-REF’s CAPS training course consists of three full-day courses focusing on
marketing to older adults, effective communication with older adults, design and
building solutions, and business management. A complete description of these
courses is found in the CAPS section of NAHB’s website.

Both NYSBA and NAHB have successfully developed relationships with the American
Occupational Therapists Association (AOTA); and, since 2008, there has been a
significant increase in the number of Occupational Therapists pursuing the CAPS
designation. This supports the team approach to home modifications, which is a
hallmark of the CAPS training classes. AARP, NAHB, NYSBA, AOTA, and other
groups continue to publicize the CAPS professional designation and its benefits for
both professionals and consumers; media articles on universally designed and
accessible homes, or on aging and disability issues, often include information about
the CAPS program; and CAPS professionals raise awareness by conducting
presentations to both consumer and professional organizations. As a result,
knowledge of the program, as well as the number of certified professionals, is
growing.

**Benefits:**

- There is an association between a person's physical/mental well-being and
  his/her feelings of autonomy and competence regarding routine activities of
daily living. Universally designed and accessible homes and buildings support an
  individual’s ability to continue doing things for him/herself and sustains his/her
  sense of personal control over his/her environment—resulting in a higher quality
  of life, more choices and independence, and greater interaction with family,
  friends, and community.

- Environments that are universally designed, and therefore more easily
  negotiated by residents who need services and care, make caregiving easier for
  professional health care workers and for family members who are providing
  informal, unpaid caregiving.

- Homes designed or modified by CAPS-trained professionals incorporate the
  principles of universal design, allowing frail older adults and persons with
  disabilities to function independently at a higher level, thereby enabling them to
  be self-managing for longer periods of time and to safely and appropriately live
  in their own homes longer.

- Modifying a home to allow continued, successful use by a resident with frailties
  or impairments reduces or delays the need for costly in-home care and reduces
  the incidence of needed relocation to costly institutional environments.
The principles of universal design stress that housing and other buildings should be designed to be as usable as possible for as many people as possible for as long as possible—with features such as roll-in showers, adjustable counters, appropriate lighting, no-slip floors, and many others—making daily living easier for all ages and abilities. Universal design also advances the concept of *visitability* (no-step entry; doorways and bathrooms that accommodate individuals in wheelchairs), by allowing mobility-impaired individuals opportunities to successfully visit the homes of friends and family members (thereby supporting the benefits of continued socialization and interactions with other people), as well as to successfully negotiate public buildings such as grocery stores, banks, churches, schools, medical offices, and many others.

The CAPS program increases the number of available professionals who have the awareness, sensitivity, knowledge, and resources to design housing and other buildings that can accommodate the differing abilities of residents as those abilities change over time because of aging or life events.

The CAPS program provides *professional* certification, requiring graduates to sign a Code of Ethics, as well as participate in Continuing Education.

**Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:**
- The greatest barrier to the development of the CAPS program is lack of awareness among both professionals and consumers about the program and its benefits.
- Architects may postpone or choose not to pursue this training as they cannot earn CEUs as other professions do because, while they are able to take the course, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) has not yet approved CAPS courses for continuing education units.
- The cost of the CAPS training may be an impediment for some professionals. For non-NAHB members in 2009, the cost of three days of training ranged from $600 to $750 (this varies according to the association offering the courses); there is a graduation application cost of $245; and there is a certification-renewal fee of $75 every three years.

**Resource—examples:**
- *Homes for Life Award*, a joint program by NAHB and Best Bath, a major manufacturer— This award "recognizes CAPS designees for excellence in aging-in-place design and/or accessible home modifications in a remodeled home; these homes offer specific design or programmatic solutions that aid resident(s) to continue living in the house as they grow older and/or face physical challenges."
  2008 award-winning projects:
Livable Communities Award, a joint program by NAHB and AARP to encourage design innovation—This awards "recognizes homes and communities that are well-designed, safe, comfortable, and accessible, regardless of the occupants' age or abilities." See: Pat Curry (December 13, 2007), "NAHB and AARP Honor Builders for Universal Design: First Livable Communities Awards Spotlight Accessibility for all Ages and Abilities," Builder: http://www.builderonline.com/awards/nahb-and-aarp-honor-builders-for-universal-design.aspx.

"Tuesday Toolmen" created by CAPS instructor Annie Morgan, Home Repair Director, Senior Services, Inc., Kalamazoo, MI—This program recruits retired, volunteer handymen to perform repairs and modifications to the homes of older adults. Volunteers install grab bars, fire alarms, wheelchair ramps, and other accessibility and safety modifications: 41490 County Road 653, Paw Paw, MI, 49079; (269) 330-2054; info@tuesdaytoolmen.com; http://www.tuesdaytoolmen.com/.

Resource—written and web:

- For lists of CAPS professionals:
  - AARP, 601 E Street NW, Washington, DC, 20049; 1-888-687-2277, TTY: 1-877-434-7598—for a list of CAPS professionals in New York State, as well as those in other states (which is useful for New York caregivers who are providing long-distance caregiving for family members living in other states): http://www.nahb.org/directory.aspx?sectionID=0&directoryID=188.
  - National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), 1201 15th Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20005; 1-800-368-5242, (202) 266-8200—for a list of CAPS professionals, by state. Contains all professional remodelers for the United States, with states listed alphabetically; scroll down to "NY" to identify seven remodelers holding CAPS certification in New York; long-distance caregivers can scroll down to the appropriate state to identify remodelers holding CAPS certification in the geographic location of their family member: http://www.nahb.org/directory_list.aspx?pageNumber=1&pageSize=0&directoryID=387&version=1&activeFlag=1&proximityLimit=0&orderBy=5703. This web site takes a long time to download.

- National Association of Home Builders (NAHB):
  - Extensive information on the CAPS program, including a description of the program, its goals, courses, and other requirements for professionals: http://www.nahb.org/category.aspx?sectionID=686.
  - “CAPS Connection” newsletter: Google “CAPS Connection,” or see: http://www.nbnnews.com/capsco/issues/.


- Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA), 1700 North Moore Street, Arlington, VA, 22209; (703) 524-6686, TTY: (703) 524-6639:
  - *Making Homes Accessible: Assistive Technology and Home Modifications*. A resource guide providing information about assistive technology and home modifications—covering definitions; laws and guidelines; initiatives from the Assistive Technology Act grantees; advocacy, financing, modification, and research resources; accreditations; online courses; and a bibliography: http://www.resnaprojects.org/nattap/goals/community/HMRG.htm.
  - For a list of RESNA publications related to home modification and assistive technology—RESNA Book Store: http://resna.org/store/.

- The Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University, PO Box 8613, Raleigh, North Carolina; (919) 515-3082; http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/. This is a national information, technical assistance, and research center that evaluates, develops, and promotes accessible and universal design in housing, commercial buildings, public facilities, outdoor environments, and products. The Center's mission is to improve environments and products for all people through design innovation, research, education, and design assistance. The Center was founded by the late Ron Mace, the father of universal design.

- AARP (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), Washington, DC:
  - *Home Modifications*, a free pamphlet available at major bookstores.

- Infinitec, Inc., a joint effort of the United Cerebral Palsy Association of Greater Chicago (547 West Jackson Street, Chicago, IL, 60661; (312) 765-0419; dhohulin@ucpnet.org) and United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc. (Washington D.C.). This Web site provides extensive information and multiple resources for modifying one's home to accommodate people of all ages—from small children to elderly individuals. Infinitec's position: contemporary planning values require that making homes accommodating and usable is no longer just for people with disabilities, but that words like "barrier free" and "ergonomic" are now part of the common vocabulary, applying to all residents in a community: [http://www.infinitec.org/live/homemodifications/basics.htm](http://www.infinitec.org/live/homemodifications/basics.htm), [http://www.infinitec.org/index.html](http://www.infinitec.org/index.html).

**Resource (free or fee-based)—technical assistance contact names:**

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