



# THE MINKA MONTHLY

Official Newsletter for the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well



## WHAT'S A MINKA?

By Thomas Engels, Intern

The Minka Learning Lab for Living Well is where students, faculty, healthcare professionals, stakeholders and the community can come together to learn about aging in place and a variety of health topics. Therefore, the Minka will be used as a model to show that people can live where and how they wish. Furthermore, the Minka will be a crucial element in fostering an active community of engagement through applied research and by translating research into practice. The primary focus for the Minka is to create an adaptable learning and living space and explore innovations. To create an adaptable learning space, the Minka has plans to provide simulations, class projects, program offerings, workshops and internships.

Incorporating the WELL Building Standards is important to ensure that the Minka is creating an adaptable living space. The WELL Building Standards will be used to help select technology, lighting and landscape outside of the house to show people how they can age in place where they want and how they want. The Minka will also play a key part in educating people on aging in place through the use of innovative technology and programs such as a virtual chatbot assistant, health coaching and healthcare leadership development.

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# EDITOR CORNER

## THE BEGINNING

By Thomas Engels, Intern



Welcome everyone! My name is Thomas Engels, and I am very excited to help establish a newsletter for the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well. Since I am graduating from the University of Southern Indiana in December of 2021, I was looking for an internship to gain real world experience. When I found this internship with the GWEP, I knew that it would be a perfect fit. Growing up, I have always been interested in healthcare because my mom is a nurse. I eventually figured out that marketing is a better path for me, but this internship helps me combine both of my interests. I hope to learn a lot through this experience from a marketing and living-in-place perspective. I am excited to collaborate with members of the advisory board, and learn from people with different ideas, experience and backgrounds.

Therefore, I am extremely delighted to release the inaugural Minka newsletter this month. Each month the newsletter will have different articles about a variety of topics. This month, the newsletter will feature articles about what is a Minka house, incorporating the WELL building standards, technology in the Minka, healthy living and dementia awareness. Additionally, this newsletter will help inform people about what is happening in the Minka, the dementia friendly communities and it can be used as a tool to spread awareness to the greater Evansville community.

*If you are interested in contributing to this newsletter, please contact Thomas Engels at [teengels@eagles.usi.edu](mailto:teengels@eagles.usi.edu)*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **Live, Virtual Learning with Teepa Snow: March 29-April 1**

Monday, March 29, 2-3:30 p.m. CT – Recognizing and Responding to Exit-Seeking

Tuesday, March 30, 8-9:30 a.m. CT – Person-Centered Care: Who Am I, and Why Does it Help Your Staff?

Tuesday, March 30, 9:30-11 a.m. CT – Supporting Staff to Prevent Abuse and Neglect

Tuesday, March 30, 2-4 p.m. CT – Dementia, End of Life and Advance Care Planning

Wednesday, March 31, 2-3:30 p.m. CT – Activities and Engagement to Prevent Challenging Situations

Thursday, April 1, 2-3:30 p.m. CT – Sexuality, Intimacy and Dementia

To register for these free workshops, visit: [USI.edu/gwep/teepa](https://usi.edu/gwep/teepa)

### **Simulation in the MINKA**

Tuesday, April 13, 12 p.m. CT – virtual

### **Minka Advisory Board Meeting**

Wednesday, April 14, 10-11 a.m. CT – virtual

Contact Thomas Engels at [teengels@eagles.usi.edu](mailto:teengels@eagles.usi.edu) for more information

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# WELL STANDARDS IN THE MINKA

By Thomas Engels, Intern

The WELL Building Standard is an evidence-based system for measuring, certifying and monitoring the performance of building features that impact health and well-being. The concepts of air, water, nourishment, light, fitness, comfort and mind all make up parts of the WELL standard. Each concept will be addressed in the Minka to provide the greater USI community with a smart home that is capable to perform to high standards. One way that the Minka will be addressing these concepts is by utilizing current technology. Some technology that will be in the Minka includes a doorbell, an alexa/virtual chatbot, tablets and a state of the art lighting system. Future plans for an outdoor garden and sitting area will help incorporate the concepts of air, fitness and mind.

The Minka Learning Lab for Living Well offers an interdisciplinary focus to involve students, faculty and campus stakeholders in research, healthcare leadership development and simulations that address challenges for living-in-place and open health profession career opportunities. It is important for the Minka to follow the WELL Building Standards because it will provide important research on helping people live how they want and where they wish.

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## INTRODUCTION TO GERONTOLOGY

By Madeline Menke, Intern

Gerontology is the study of old age, the process of aging and the particular problems with older adults. It is a multidisciplinary study of the physical, mental, and social aspects and implication of aging. There are normal aspects for healthy aging and aspects that are not normal. Some physiological declines to expect are greying of hair, changes in skin elasticity and bruising easily. Some changes that many may think are normal, but are not, are hearing loss, physical decline where you may need a walker or wheelchair, incontinence and dementia. The way we address and talk to older adults is also important. Some insensitive terms can include old man/lady or elder, facility, aging-in-place and caregiver. Some more appropriate terms to use instead are older adult, community/home, living-in-place and care partner. Another aspect to look out for when communicating with older adults is the way we speak to them. People often use elderspeak which is when people use reduced grammatical complexity, exaggerated pitch, slowing down and demeaning terms such as "honey" and "dear." These terms can limit them from engaging in conversations with those who use it.

For those living-in-place, it is important to make sure building standards are inclusive for them. You want to make sure that the entrances are wheelchair accessible and there is no threshold to have to step over. Showers should be the same way. It should be a walk in with no extra step to have to step up on. Support bars should be installed in the shower and next to the toilet. Rooms should allow enough space to allow room for wheelchairs to get next to beds and furniture or for a care partner to assist someone with getting out of bed. It is important to make sure if rugs are being used that they don't have curled edges and have a nonslip backing to help prevent falls. For those experiencing a decline in vision, it is important that rooms are well lit. Contrasting colors should be utilized to help detect stairs, doorways and furniture as like colors can make it difficult to detect. By having these standards, they can help promote safe, independent living.



"Some changes that many may think are normal, but are not, are hearing loss, physical decline where you may need a walker or wheelchair, incontinence and dementia."

# TECH & U

## READY FOR THE JETSONS!

By Dr. Lisa Fournier, DSL, MPM,  
Project Coordinator, Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement  
Program

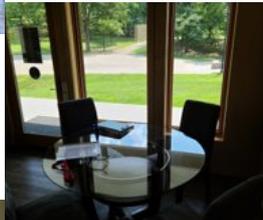
"Alexa, please play instrumental jazz" might be a familiar saying for some of you. You know Alexa - that round speaker thing located across the room. You say something, and she does it - plays music, looks something up, tells you the time or turns on the lights. Alexa is a virtual assistant based on voice-activated Artificial Intelligence (AI) software. This software understands natural language voice commands and responds to those commands by performing tasks and services. For some of you, the "Jetsons" has come alive! However, we are only in the beginning of what AI can do for us and with us in our living spaces. Virtual Assistants are expanding rapidly, whether an AI shopper chatbot that answers questions on a website to wearable technology that alerts others somebody has fallen. The Minka Learning Lab is dipping our tech toe into this water as well. In the next few months, we will be starting a new project with joy...literally. "Joi" is an AI Virtual Assistant to improve well-being and independence for people living with dementia who are aging-in-place. Stay tuned as we start our journey. Check out the USI Minka Learning Lab instagram site to watch the design and development of Joi.

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## WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT...?



Inside the Minka

# LET'S TALK ABOUT DEMENTIA

## I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY... PLEASE LISTEN!

By Dr. Lisa Fournier, DSL, MPM,  
Project Coordinator, Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program

Isn't it frustrating when somebody keeps talking and talking and you can't get a word in? We've all been there and, most likely, on both sides of the struggle. Sometimes you might talk to explain something or get a point across. Other times, you might talk to fill silence or to cover up the feeling of being uncomfortable. The person on the receiving end might listen or they might get impatient. Regardless, they probably have something to say about the topic or have an opinion to express. They might interrupt or not. They might communicate back with facts or express their words with emotion if they feel passionate about the subject. When they do get the opportunity to participate in the conversation, they are most likely communicating with you in the same language, but not always. If you have ever traveled to another country, you probably experienced communicating with hand signals, pointing or an attempt at native slang. No matter what, the attempt to communicate existed between you and the other person.

A person living with dementia has something to say too. They just might not communicate in your language or with specific content. They do communicate with feelings, sometimes using non-verbal communication.

My mom, who was diagnosed with "most likely Alzheimer's," emphatically kept telling me she had given all of her property away. On the receiving end of this insistence, I tried to give her a dose of reality to get her off of this line of thought. I even went to the courthouse and printed out the records that she still owned her property. It didn't work. My mom had always been an insightful person, so I knew "something" was wrong, but I couldn't figure out what. I started listening to her more closely and the emotions she was expressing. She was very agitated, frustrated and worried. She was tense in her body language. I decided it had to be something with her money and looked through her checkbook. I found a large check written to the neighbor next door. After speaking with my stepdad, I found out they had been "loaning" money to the neighbor, except there had been no repayments for some time. My mom most definitely was communicating with me, but not in a language I understood....until I decided to. If I had not, my mom and stepdad would have continued to suffer elder abuse at the hands of this supposed "neighbor."

In his book, *Dementia Beyond Disease*, Dr. Allen Power refers to communication as meaning or the messages within our words or actions. He explains people going through cognitive changes receive and process information differently, such as my mom not being able to communicate about the money. How frustrated my mom must have been as she struggled with the situation on so many levels. Not just because of the neighbor, but also her recognition that she couldn't figure out what to say or do to remedy the situation. She was living in a state of perpetual confusion. She did not deserve to live there. She needed somebody to understand.

Power provides some key pointers for non-verbal communication and how to listen. They include:

- Be present: actively listen and examine the environment, stop correcting word choices
- Suspend judgment: Put your feet in their shoes and realize their cognitive skills may be declining, but their intuitive skills are heightened
- Seek to understand: Many times the meaning is simpler than you might expect
- Look beyond the words: Accept expressions, body language and emotions have meaning, it all counts

People living with dementia deserve to have their voice heard, no matter how they communicate. Please listen.



"People living with dementia deserve to have their voice heard, no matter how they communicate. Please listen."



Congratulations to  
Rockport and  
Petersburg for  
becoming designated  
Dementia-Friendly  
Communities! See the  
[Press Release!](#)

# HEALTHY LIVING

## BE WELL TO DO WELL: SELF-CARE FOR PERSONAL WELLNESS

By Catherine Champagne, MPH, CHES  
Assistant Director, Student Wellness Programs  
Recreation, Fitness and Wellness Center

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the health and wellness of people around the world and has been a stressful time for many. During stressful times, you may have heard how important it is to practice self-care. But what does this term mean? Often, people envision self-care as something that requires extra time or resources (for example, taking an expensive vacation or going to a spa). In reality, self-care is any intentional action that enhances our personal well-being. For our physical wellness, this could mean getting enough sleep, exercising or eating a healthy meal. Self-care for emotional wellness could include meditation, journaling, engaging in a hobby or spending time outside. Social self-care could include volunteering or connecting with friends, family or neighbors (socially distanced of course!).

If you are pressed for time, consider the times in your daily schedule where you may have just 10-15 minutes to spare. Although self-care doesn't take a lot of time, the rewards are well worth it. As the pandemic continues, remember to take time each day for self-care and offer yourself compassion. Only when we take care of ourselves can we approach our daily tasks and goals with energy and excitement.



"In reality, self-care is any intentional action that enhances our personal wellbeing."

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# STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

## LANDSCAPE/HARDSCAPE

By Thomas Engels, Intern

For the landscape/hardscape project, we are excited to collaborate with Professor Henri Maurice and his Biology 122 course, Professor Edith Hardcastle and her Ecology 215 course and Professor Adam Tennant and his Civil Engineering 471 course. Students from these courses will be part of the design and plant selection process. Staff from the GWEP and members of the Minka advisory board will be brainstorming ideas with the students and eventually everyone will be able to build the garden together. The goal for this project is to create a safe landscape and gardening area to use as therapy and help people successfully age-in-place.

# FOLLOW THE MINKA ON SOCIAL MEDIA



USI Minka Learning Lab for  
Living Well Community

Follow on Facebook  
for updates on:

- Events
- News



@usiminkalearninglab

Follow on Instagram for  
interactive content including:

- Minka House tour
- Technology Unboxing
- How tech is used in the Minka

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## MINKA VISION STATEMENT

Aging well is personal. Each of us expects to live where we want and how we want as we go through life. Our homes are not always set-up for aging well. In addition, our communities may be stifled by issues with access to healthcare, crime and violence, food insecurity, inclusion, age discrimination and more. The Center for Healthy Aging and Wellness wants to transform southwest Indiana by creating a Learning Lab for Living Well housed in the Minka house at USI. The Learning Lab for Living Well offers an interdisciplinary focus to involve students, faculty and campus stakeholders in research, healthcare leadership development, and simulations that address challenges for living-in-place and open health profession career opportunities. In addition, the Learning Lab for Living Well provides everyone in the local community a place to learn about and to adapt home innovations for living-in-place. Home innovations designed to integrate smart home technology, health coaching and learning workshops for a personalized, adaptable approach to aging well. The Center for Healthy Aging and Wellness at USI looks to offer a blueprint for other rural communities to address social determinants of health.