



Faculty and students in the Interprofessional Education course offered by the College of Public Health in fall 2022

## Helping senior citizens connect with their community

Almost everyone felt lonely and isolated during the coronavirus pandemic—but perhaps no group was more affected than the elderly, who also faced greater health risks. Recognizing that, the College of Public Health partnered with the Kent City Health Department on a project to help local senior citizens stay engaged with their community.

Nine undergraduate and graduate students from five of Kent State's colleges—Public Health; Nursing; Communication and Information; Education, Health and Human Services; and Arts and Sciences—worked in interdisciplinary teams during an Interprofessional Education course offered by the College of Public Health in fall 2022.

The course was co-taught by Sonia Alemagno, PhD, dean of the College of Public Health; Rick Ferdig, PhD, Summit Professor of Learning Technologies; and Enrico Gandolfi, PhD, assistant professor of educational technology. The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Foundation, a charitable trust dedicated to the support and advancement of healthcare, provided funding.

The teams began to develop a pilot program for a “virtual senior center,” a website where local senior citizens can connect with their community. While the virtual center is still in the works, it could one day offer resources and information about a variety of topics, including fall-prevention exercises, technology tutorials, online games, volunteering opportunities, medical services, and in-person activities and events.

“The virtual senior center pilot project is a real testimony of what can happen when professionals from across campus work together to build a new approach,” Alemagno says.

The health department benefited from the varied knowledge of a diverse group of students and faculty who came together to create the website, says Joan Seidel, BSN '86, Kent City Health Commissioner.

“They reached out and asked, ‘What would you envision? How would you see this working? How do you think it would best fit in the community?’” she says. “They had the insight to say, ‘Let’s get everybody at the table.’”

Seidel says that many local elders still feel alone, even as pandemic restrictions have lifted. And the creation of a dedicated online community could significantly improve their quality of life.

“The expertise at Kent State provides a reality-based means to bring this to fruition,” she says. “It is an example of the power of relationships, the benefits of the city and the university working together to make the place where we live, learn, work and play a more fulfilling environment.”

—Giulia Cerasi, graduate assistant in the College of Public Health

## Partners in health education

Kent State University partners with the Kent City Health Department in other mutually beneficial ways. Each semester, the health department welcomes interns; it also has hired Kent State graduates for full-time positions.

“It is a big benefit for us because we receive students with keen minds, lots of energy and eagerness to apply what they are learning,” says Joan Seidel, Kent City Health Commissioner. “And the students gain practical, hands-on experience. They get to see how the classroom learning can be applied in real-life situations.”



The Kent City Health Department benefits from hiring Kent State interns and graduates, and they benefit from gaining real-world experience. Pictured (left to right): Giulia Cerasi, MPH '23, communications specialist (internship), Kent City Health Department; Joan Seidel, BSN '86, Kent City Health Commissioner; Jalessa Caples, BS '17, MPA '19, accreditation coordinator, Kent City Health Department