

GRANT HIGHLIGHTS

DECEMBER, 2009

This information comes from GrantBriefs, RRF's bi-monthly internal newsletter. Much of the information is taken directly from grantees' reports and is presented in their own words. We thank grantees and others for their contribution to Grant Briefs.

Boca Raton Community Hospital Addresses High Re-Hospitalization Rate for Older Adults

In 2008, a \$45,544 grant was awarded to the Boca Institute for Quality Aging to study re-admission rates among older adult patients at Boca Raton Community Hospital. The purpose of the study was to analyze data leading to a pilot intervention to reduce 30-day re-hospitalization rates for patients age 75 and older.

The principal investigator, Dr. Joseph Ouslander, conducted a retrospective study of all persons age 75 and over admitted to Boca Raton Community Hospital over a one-year period. He analyzed administrative and medical records to determine characteristics of re-hospitalizations. Of 8,204 admissions on patients age 75 and older, there was a 13% re-admission rate within 30 days. Three percent were admitted more than once. Of the re-admissions, 36% occurred within a week of discharge. Upon discharge, slightly more than half (52%) went home--33% with skilled home health care and 19% with self-care. Another 36% of re-admitted patients went to a skilled nursing facility, and 12% went to a hospice or another health care facility.

The top five diagnoses among readmitted patients included acute renal failure, congestive heart failure, lower respiratory tract infection, atrial fibrillation, and urinary tract infection. However, together these five diagnoses accounted for only 24% of all re-admissions.

The study concluded re-admissions within 30-days were common among patients age 75 and older at Boca Raton Community Hospital. Many conditions leading to re-admission might have been managed on an outpatient basis if effective transitional care had occurred. The data highlighted the need to test transitional care strategies on older patients.

The study led to the development and pilot testing of a program entitled "STEP" (Safe Transition for Elderly People). Upon discharge, patients received a phone call to determine whether they qualified for STEP and whether they agreed to receive help. A home health nurse visited to address concerns identified in the discharge phone call. Phone calls were made to 300 patients upon discharge. Some 75% (225) were found eligible for STEP, and 100 enrolled in the pilot. The project continues to track the needs identified by the home health nurse and the interventions.

Although the study was successfully completed and provided impetus for the pilot, it is too early to determine whether or not this model of care coordination will have reduced re-hospitalization and lowered health care costs. If so, the model would contribute significantly to the field, especially now that Medicare plans to institute financial incentives to lower re-hospitalization rates.

Three Accessible Faith Grantees Complete Projects

Over the past two months, three houses of worship completed accessibility improvements to their facilities with funding from RRF's Accessible Faith Grant Program. The first, **Church of the Holy Spirit**, is a large Roman Catholic Church located in Schaumburg. This very diverse congregation has more than 4,000 members age 60 or over. The church offers many activities for seniors and hosts several community groups, including 12-step programs, English as a Second Language classes, and regular blood drives. Prior to the Accessible Faith grant, there were no accessible restrooms in the main building, which houses the church and a large meeting space.

A \$13,000 RRF grant enabled the church to renovate the men's and women's restrooms to make them accessible. The project was successfully completed, earlier than anticipated and within budget. The project ran into only a few minor plumbing problems.

The second Accessible Faith grantee, **St. Pancratius Church**, is a southside inner-city church that is predominantly Hispanic. Approximately 700 members are age 60 or over, representing 20% of the congregation. The church conducts several senior activities that are open to members of the congregation and the broader community.

A \$30,000 Accessible Faith grant enabled St. Pancratius to install an enclosed platform lift to provide the only accessible route to the basement, which houses the fellowship hall. Although the project was successfully completed, modifications had to be made to the entrance, and a new door and windows had to be installed to comply with building codes. The church incurred additional costs because of the modifications and the need to hire skilled workers rather than rely as heavily on volunteers as anticipated.

However, the congregation has been steadily making up the difference through fundraisers despite the modest income of most of its parishioners. The church expects to recover a portion of the cost by renting out space now that it is accessible. The final report noted that the lift is already enabling participants to continue their involvement and securing the senior leadership base. The pastor estimates that about 25% of all senior participants are now using the lift.

The third Accessible Faith grantee, **Bethel Lutheran Church**, is a low-income, African American congregation that has been a pillar of the Lawndale community. The church founded Bethel New Life as its community development arm, which offers many services and creates jobs for Lawndale residents. Some 40% of Bethel's 450-member

congregation is elderly. Prior to the Accessible Faith grant, there was no accessible route from the street to Bethel's sanctuary, which could be reached only by navigating a steep flight of steps. The congregation estimated it had lost at least 10% of its senior members due to inaccessibility and curtailed some of its programs for older adults.

The Accessible Faith project involved installation of a new platform lift to replace the old, inoperable one. A few problems such as furnace replacement and plumbing system repairs required immediate attention. They delayed the project slightly and diverted some of the church's resources. However, the project was completed on time with only a slight cost overrun.

The church expects to revitalize programs such as the senior Bible study and a grandparent support group. It will also reinstate its senior exercise and senior choir programs. These three successful projects underscore the importance of accessibility to the viability of programs and services and to the financial stability of houses of worship.

ChildServ Expands GrandFamily Support Program

In 2008, RRF made a one-year \$75,000 grant to ChildServ for its GrandFamily Support Program. The program provides financial support, education, housing, counseling, and opportunities for socialization to grandparents raising their grandchildren. ChildServ is a child welfare agency providing community-based services and foster care to metro Chicago families for over 100 years. RRF's grant followed the previous year's funding, which was at the same level.

Despite a very tough economy, ChildServ successfully expanded services beyond a projected caseload of 275 families. During the grant period, the program served 282 grandparents--a 57% increase over the 175 families served the previous year. Of grandfamilies served by the program, 54% are headed by adults age 60 or older, and another 29% are headed by grandparents age 50 to 59.

ChildServ forged relations with several organizations to serve these grandfamilies. It secured a full-time older adult volunteer through National Able. It referred south suburban grandparents to AgeOptions for various services. It worked with Neighborhood Housing Services to acquire and renovate houses for low-income grandfamilies. With NHS assistance, ChildServ opened a second grandfamilies house--a two-flat for two low-income families. A third house is on the drawing boards for 2010.

To evaluate the GrandFamilies Program, ChildServ asked participants to rate themselves on the degree to which they are better able to care for grandchildren, learn to better handle behaviors of grandchildren, learn about community resources, and make friends their age who also care for grandchildren. On all items, ratings were above 4 (on a 5-point scale) and up over the previous year. This year, ChildServ involved its parent educators in seminars for grandparents, and this addition might have made the scores more positive.

ChildServ reported that seniors entering the program this past year had far greater needs than those seen earlier, largely due to the economic downturn. At the same time, the agency reported it was much harder to raise funds for the program. In its report, ChildServ listed several funding proposals that were pending.

This project succeeded despite the difficult economy. The ability to expand the number of participants served as well as the opening of a second grandfamily home during such tough times is admirable. In addition, the agency's partnerships with many different nonprofits and its use of internal resources make ChildServ exemplary among grandfamily programs.

Journal Published on Legal Needs of the Elderly

The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law received a \$10,000 grant to produce a special issue on the legal needs of the elderly in its monthly journal, *Clearinghouse Review*. Entitled, "Let Elders Age Independently and with Dignity: A Call for Advocacy," the journal included 12 articles by nationally recognized experts on aging and the law.

Topics covered by the issue included: demographics; protecting homes and equity; power of attorney and financial abuse; Medicare Advantage; advocacy for limited English speaking elders; recent challenges to court access for Medicaid and Medicare cases; and fair housing. The journal was produced in print, online, and conference versions.

Thousands of legal service attorneys subscribe to the *Clearinghouse Review*; thus, the subject got broad exposure. In addition, there were several targeted dissemination activities. At the National Conference of Elder Law Attorneys, 250 copies were distributed. Some of the journal authors presented their papers at the conference, allowing for more extensive discussion of their topics. An online debate forum was created to discuss reactions to the articles. The information in the journal was very useful because it provided legal advocates with contact information on experts they may approach to help their older clients with a wide range of legal issues.

The targeted use of the journal and its strategic dissemination added to the success of this project. By providing solid legal advice and connections to national experts, the journal will potentially help thousands of overworked legal service providers address the issues of aging. In addition, in preparing the journal, the Shriver Center's interest in aging has increased. Since producing the special journal, the Center has covered legal issues related to aging in every issue of *Clearinghouse Review*. Articles have included topics such as the ADEA and its 40th anniversary, benefits and barriers of hospice care for low-income elderly, poverty among older women, and the universal voluntary retirement account program (a promising retirement savings program promoted by the Economic Opportunity Institute which is funded by RRF).

Strong Relationship Found Between Use of Cardiovascular Drugs and Reduced Incidence and Progression of Dementia

In 2008, RRF made a one-year \$176,000 grant to Boston University School of Medicine to assess the potential for angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs) to prevent and treat dementia. In his previous work, principal investigator Benjamin Wolozin had examined cognitive outcomes among 4.5 million Veterans' Administration patients and found that the statin Zocor (trade name for simvastatin) appeared to significantly lower the incidence of Alzheimer's disease. He also found evidence of a similar effect for ARBs (drugs such as Cozaar).

With RRF funding, Dr. Wolozin replicated the study, focusing on ARBs rather than statins. He felt the ARB data would be more innovative and would have a higher impact. He used a second large database of 3.2 million Kaiser Permanente enrollees. When added to the VA data, the two datasets produced a sample of 7.7 million adults.

All proposed analyses were completed. They revealed significant findings. Patients taking ARBs were found to have a significantly reduced risk of developing dementia, compared to two control groups taking other medications. These patients also had a 70% reduced risk of nursing home admission and significantly reduced risk of death. The study found a dose response relationship when people took both ARBS and statins, drugs often taken together by patients with heart disease. The findings were true for both large clusters of patients--those seen by the VA and those by Kaiser Permanente. Dr. Wolozin's findings will be published for the first time in the *British Medical Journal*.

Unfortunately, at this point Dr. Wolozin has not received funding he had hoped would come from the National Institutes of Health for a prospective clinical trial. The VA and Kaiser Permanente datasets are retrospective, cohort-based epidemiological studies and do not prove a causal relationship. Only a prospective clinical trial could determine this. Dr. Wolozin has been submitting proposals to other sources so that these promising breakthrough findings can be further validated.

Two Organizational Capacity Building Projects Completed

Over the past two months, the Meals on Wheels Foundation of Cook County and the Cambodian Association of Illinois have completed their organizational capacity building (OCB) projects. Both grantees received two-year support of \$75,000 to build their organization's capacity in the area of resource development.

The **Meals on Wheels Foundation of Cook County** (MOWF) was created eight years ago by the Community Nutrition Network and Senior Services Association of Cook County to increase awareness of the Network's services and raise funds for the home-delivered meals program. The Network serves more than 2,500 meals daily through delivery to homebound seniors and congregate meal sites.

MOWF set ambitious fundraising goals for the two-year period. Objectives included: increasing the number of individual donors to 20,000 (from a base of 13,000 at the start of the grant); instituting a major donor gift program; expanding use of the website and number of formal solicitations; improving technology for better donor management; and building the fundraising capacity of the organization by training and engaging the Board and adding a development director and development associate.

Given the tough economy, MOWF made significant progress in building its resource development capacity. By the end of the grant period, MOWF had increased the number of individual donors to 18,000. Although somewhat below goal, MOWF experienced a 40% increase in new individual donors since the start of the grant. MOWF hoped to raise \$140,000 annually from individual gifts; in the past year it raised \$107,355. This represented a 20% increase since the start of the grant. MOWF has identified 83 individuals as major donors to be solicited in the next year.

MOWF improved public awareness of the Network's services and needs. It completed a communications audit, produced site-specific brochures, and published an annual report. MOWF made strides in building its public relations capacity by improving its materials, online giving capacity, and donor management.

Although MOWF fell somewhat short in meeting its fundraising goals, it made significant progress in capacity building. It put resource development systems in place and grew its donor base to meet the increasing demand for services and the decline in government support. The Network also reorganized and restructured its relationship with MOWF. Time will tell whether the reorganization will contribute to further improvements in resource development.

RRF made an OCB grant to the **Cambodian Association of Illinois** (CAI) to meet two objectives: 1) improve its resource development capacity and 2) guide the agency in improving senior programming by assessing the needs of Cambodian elderly. In the area of resource development, CAI planned to establish a development department, install new donor software, improve donor recognition and event planning, increase corporate and foundation support, and upgrade its website.

CAI made considerable progress in managing its fundraising and was successful in increasing revenues, even beyond projections. CAI installed a new donor database known as CiviCRM. It can now track individual gifts and produce donor data to help target requests and guide fundraising strategies. CAI upgraded its website and can now accept online donations. Two new significant foundation grants totaling \$94,000 were secured for health programming. CAI held its first large-scale, annual fundraising event, netting almost \$18,000 from individual donors. It learned how to plan and execute such events for the future. CAI's fundraising revenue increased by 62% over the two-year period (exceeding its 50% projection). Since most of CAI's revenue comes from government sources, the need to generate unrestricted funds from individual donors and gain greater corporate and foundation support is essential to achieving stability.

CAI actively engaged in the identification, cultivation, and recruitment of candidates for its Board. It successfully recruited five new members to its Board. These new members have become very engaged and are stepping up to their role in fundraising.

CAI conducted an informal review of its senior program and options for serving Cambodian elderly. It conducted meetings with seniors, particularly around health needs. Heartland Alliance and the Asian Health Coalition of Illinois facilitated the focus groups on behalf of CAI. During the grant period, staff changes occurred in the senior programs, and this affected the production of a formal report. CAI has decided to incorporate services for older persons into a more family-focused approach. The effect of this decision will be seen in the future.

Moline Adult Day Service Clients on the Road

A \$50,000 RRF grant has enabled Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) to purchase a new 14-passenger minivan for its adult day services program in Moline. Its program, Intouch Adult Day Services, provides a stable, structured environment to increase physical, mental, and social stimulation for 183 elderly (85 clients per day). Almost all of the clients depend on the agency for transportation to and from the program.

The new van provided more than 5,600 units of transportation during the course of the grant. The van was used for round-trips to and from clients' homes and for recreational outings. LSSI received an anonymous gift to purchase two more shuttle buses to replace other aging vehicles in their fleet. RRF's grant, along with these other gifts, is assuring access to essential services for a large number of elderly who otherwise would be at risk of isolation.

Deborah's Place Prepares to Transition Homeless Older Women to Appropriate Housing

Deborah's Place received a \$15,000 RRF grant to prepare aging homeless women to transition to more appropriate housing. Although Deborah's Place offers a continuum of housing options with linkages to vital supportive services for homeless women, it found that, as this population aged and encountered more health issues, the need for supportive housing was beyond the agency's service capacity.

In 2008, an RRF-funded study by Loyola University's Center on Urban Research and Learning highlighted the graying of Chicago's homeless population and identified unique challenges related to housing, health, employment, and other issues. Deborah's Place recognized that its clients were gradually aging, and it needed to re-examine its services for this population. In 1997, 54% of the women served by Deborah's Place were age 40 or over. A decade later, 85% fell into this category. As a result, Deborah's Place sought to change its practices to help aging women focus on long-term transition

planning to meet their goals of permanent housing and greater self-determination. The agency sought to determine: 1) a process for assessing needs of aging homeless women; 2) resources available for aging women who choose to transition to more appropriate housing; 3) agency policies and procedures needed to prepare staff and residents for such a transition; and 4) professional development needed to help staff implement transitional planning.

Deborah's Place formed an Elder Transition Planning Task Force. The task force researched senior housing alternatives and resources and coordinated educational programs for staff and residents. Members of the task force identified and evaluated 26 facilities, including senior housing, nursing homes, assisted living, and intermediate care facilities for persons with mental illness, to determine their appropriateness for inclusion on the agency's list of transitional options for aging women. Twenty-one staff members participated in two training sessions. Staff of Rainbow Hospice conducted a program on grief and loss in transitioning to a new home. Rush University Medical Center provided training on elder needs assessment.

Fifty-seven residents (29% of all Deborah's Place residents age 40 and over) participated in transition planning activities. They engaged in educational workshops, site visits to explore housing options, and individual planning and assessment. Deborah's Place held three meetings with groups of older homeless women to help identify residents' interests and concerns related to aging and housing transitions.

As a result of these efforts, Deborah's Place made several improvements. It created an Elder Transition Policy and Procedure Manual with a compilation of resources staff can use to locate housing alternatives, homemaker services, transportation, and elder law/planning services. The agency adopted a new resident assessment tool along with the Geriatric Depression Scale, the St. Louis University Mental Status Exam, and other instruments.

Using its newly developed skills and knowledge, Deborah's Place staff guided nine residents to relocate to housing better suited to their needs. The agency's new relationships with senior housing facilities helped ease the transition for these women.

This grant enabled Deborah's Place to improve considerably its capacity to serve older homeless women. Deborah's Place staff is now prepared to recognize the onset of older women's problems in daily functioning and can help their clients make a smooth transition before crises occur. The agency put what it learned in research on the graying homeless population into practice by adapting assessment and end-of-life planning strategies to the needs of a uniquely vulnerable aging population--women who have experienced homelessness and multiple barriers such as mental illness, disability, and chemical dependency. The agency has now institutionalized policies and practices to help women deal with issues of loss and grief as they transition from their first "home" -- Deborah's Place -- to more suitable housing.

Project HELP Ramps Up for Kentucky Elderly

A \$10,000 RRF grant enabled Project HELP to build ramps and modify bathrooms for ten low-income Central Kentucky elderly with disabilities. HELP (Handicapped and Elderly Living Accessible Project) is a program of the Central Kentucky Community Action Council and one of a number of services, such as transportation and weatherization, that enable vulnerable persons to continue living independently in their homes.

Half of the ten completed HELP projects involved construction of 6x6 landings and ramps varying in length from 11 to 46 feet. The ramps were built to ADA specifications. The other five projects involved bathroom modifications such as installation of accessible toilets and handrails and widening of doorways. The purchase of materials accounted for 62% (\$6,200) of the \$10,000 grant and labor for 48%. The cost of labor was kept low because half of the projects were completed by agency employees who worked on the modifications after hours or on weekends.

For a modest cost, HELP has provided practical assistance to help older persons remain self-sufficient and mobile. In keeping with the holiday spirit, Project HELP has provided the beneficiaries with a gift that keeps on giving!