

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RETIREMENT, SECURITY AND AGING
MAY 16, 2006

Good morning Chairman DeWine, Ranking Member Mikulski and respected members of the committee. It is a true honor and privilege to testify before you today. My name is Beth Shapiro. I am the director of Community Partners (CP), the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington's naturally occurring retirement communities demonstration project in Montgomery County, Maryland.

On behalf of the 800 seniors whose lives Community Partners has touched, I want to express my sincere appreciation to Senator Mikulski for her well-established commitment to and support of Maryland's seniors and sponsoring Community Partners.

CP brings services and programs to seniors living in NORCs. Frontline staff are in the buildings we serve providing 1:1 support, interesting social programs, blood pressure clinics and health education programs. Community Partners provides over 100 programs a month in the NORCs. This is our way of transitioning from a facility-based model - where the client must go out to receive needed services, to a community-based model where staff provide services where the senior lives. We like to think of ourselves as the "advance team" providing support based on strong trusted relationships.

We have found NORC Supportive Service Programming to be an effective public-private partnership to successfully leverage community expertise and resources. To make this possible in our own catchment area, Community Partners has created a successful collaboration of seven agencies providing four cornerstone services that include recreation, transportation, social work and health services. County and state governments have joined us in this endeavor along with two philanthropic foundations, the managements of 5 apartment and condominium properties, (with a waiting list of 4 more), and other critical community partners. We have all come together in support of seniors' overwhelming desire to age in place by bringing a variety of professional services to NORC's thus, logistically simplifying access to the services they want and need.

Assessment & Program Development:

Our program invests in keeping seniors healthy and active. It is critical that NORC service models like Community Partners' be tested now in order to successfully serve the future demographic of seniors. We spent the first few months of our grant completing 268 in-depth, 1:1 surveys with seniors to determine their interests and needs. The top services requested were:

- Educational programs
- Memory improvement programs
- On site medical services
- Exercise activities
- 24-hour emergency call service for medical needs
- Coordination of services
- Curb to curb transportation
- Volunteering to help operate this program
- Recreational activities and events

As the result of critical partnerships including with the seniors themselves, we are now providing all of these services.

A Prevention-Based Approach:

These programs and services comprise a pro-active system designed to prevent and delay disability and disease. As such, our programs and services strive to:

- Eliminate and prevent isolation by aggressively pre-empting it with active physical, intellectual and socially focused programs;
- Provide emotional support;
- Provide new avenues for conversation that promote respect by family and friends;
- Provide health services such as blood pressure checks and 24-hour emergency alert services (many are using this service because it was recommended by one of our staff whom they know and trust); and
- Provide professionals that are there before, during and after a crisis.

The Community Benefits of CP's NORC Model:

- Making it possible for greater numbers of seniors to age in place;
- Supporting building managers with difficult or at risk residents;
- Directly and indirectly serving resident's adult children by reducing stress and improving family relationships;
- Extending the length of time a person can live in their community;
- Maintaining community in a resident's building for an extended time thus supporting longer-lasting friendships and more physically and mentally active lives; and
- Helping seniors understand and apply for the government services for which they are eligible to receive, such as the new Medicare Part-D program.

The Diversity of Program Partnerships:

- Our successful public-private partnership is one in which funding is supported by all 7 agency partners, the local county government, the state government, the federal government, and philanthropic foundations.
- Currently we have active partnerships with the seniors, building managements, a social work agency partner, a recreation partner, a home health partner, a transportation partner, a research partner, and an information and referral partner.
- We are actively working on partnering with a local hospital, a grocery delivery service, a prescription delivery service and we are developing a shelter-in-place program with Montgomery County.

Program Challenges Experienced:

Sustainability is a particular challenge to launching new programming. This is why part of our demonstration will be geared toward testing a Membership (“fee-for-service”) model this summer. The model will include program subsidies based on an assessment of ability to pay. Moving forward, CP services will be available only to the NORC residents through a “membership program.” Later, we will expand the concept to incorporate a “family membership” program for adult children to support their parents through CP services. We also plan to develop a program to engage the business community in financial support of the program.

Devising a workable transportation program has also been a challenge we are working towards rectifying. Transportation ranked very high in our baseline survey with the older adults, but ridership associated with our initial transportation model was low. This model was premised on a set route according to a set schedule. Through evaluation of the program, we found that the seniors were not enthusiastic with a one-size fits all transportation model that did not allow for deviation. We are now testing a ride coordination service we call Smooth Riding, which arranges rides for participants to medical and social appointments for a nominal fee. So far we have found the service to be attractive to seniors because all arrangement for their rides are made for them, they get a reminder call, and providers are matched with the passenger’s needs such as access to an escort or wheelchair lift. Seniors are thrilled to let the program staff handle issues such as rides that do not show up and paying the bill for them from their Smooth Riding account. In the future we will be looking at providing subsidies for medical appointments as this can be a proactive way of supporting aging in place. Transportation is very expensive and a frequent necessity for seniors with numerous medical appointments and limited access to transportation options.

Lessons Learned from the NORC Demonstration Experience:

In this process we have learned many things along the way. The most important thing we have learned is the importance of working proactively instead of reactively. Of course we respond to the immediate and more obvious needs of NORC residents. However, our focus is on building “pre-existing professional friendships.” These are relationships that are established and maintained between a professional senior service staff member and a NORC resident. Such relationships allow for a different kind of intervention that creates opportunities for prevention. The following three examples illustrate the supportive nature of the CP program.

- CP has played an important role in helping several women after they lost their husbands. One woman lost her husband this past winter. Her life was directly affected as the result of CP staff making regular visits to her apartment the week following her husband’s death. As a result of this relationship, although she had not regularly participated in CP programs previously, the woman now attends almost EVERY event. We believe her participation provides vital stability and structure in her life, especially during the difficult transition to living alone after 50 plus years of marriage.
- CP recently provided social work support after a NORC resident had a car accident. CP staff coordinated support services with her husband and adult children, visited her in the hospital and assisted with arranging for rehabilitation. This process went very smoothly because this woman and her husband had an existing relationship with CP staff. They had attended social excursions, discussion groups and health programs in their building. The couple felt comfortable and trusted the CP staff and, as a result, so did their children. In this case the entire family was able to benefit from the pre-existing relationship.
- One participant fell at the grocery store and made her way home alone. A CP staff member happened to run into her later that morning in her building. The woman was resistant to getting medical treatment but because she knew and trusted the staff member, she agreed to see one of our nurses who happen to also be in the building. The nurse did an assessment and convinced her to go to the Emergency Room, which she did. At the ER the woman received information about how to care for the bruising on her face. Had she been more seriously injured, the trip to the hospital would have been even more critical.

Program’s Greatest Benefit:

Many seniors express they feel forgotten by the communities in which they were once actively involved. Seniors tell us that before Community Partners came to their building, they had to deal with daily isolation and loneliness. In combating isolation, this is what some have told us:

- *“The in-building discussion groups have helped. I was severely depressed about 6-8 months ago. Than I saw the big CP monthly calendar and attended a discussion group. I enjoyed it and started attending regularly because they significantly lifted my spirits and enabled me to become friends with more neighbors. I now attend almost all of CP’s activities each month.”*
- *“CP has helped me alleviate the loneliness that comes with living alone in a big apartment complex. The program has really helped transform my life and I am so thankful to CP. I go on every museum trip and to every lecture and to the social work groups. I love volunteering to help with the monthly mailing because it helps the CP program and gives me a chance to talk with a circle of friends as we work together.”*
- *“CP helped me stay in my apartment during my building’s conversion to a condominium by connecting me to the right person in the County who could help me. I went from being told by the condo management that I did not qualify for an extended residency, to receiving a two year extension!”*

Conclusion:

There are significant challenges facing today’s seniors and the providers who serve them:

- Seniors have limited information about services and other helping organizations;
- Many experience barriers in accessing existing programs because of distance and transportation issues;
- Many face caregiving and aging issues without support and guidance; and
- Many lack basic accessibility to socialization and recreational opportunities.

NORCs are a national aging phenomenon that are the manifestation of the desires or consequence of the fact that the majority of older adults want, or by necessity, will age in place, even as they grow frail. Our demonstration has been an overwhelmingly positive experience for the older adults it serves and for the partnering providers, who, without this grant, would not have had the means or impetus to approach community services in such an innovative way. In this context, I hope that my experience and those relayed by my fellow panelists have provided you with insight and understanding into what I believe is an incredibly important model to serve the country’s aging population. I look forward to answering any questions you may have regarding my testimony, Community Partners, or NORC Supportive Services.

Thank you.