

MANAGING LOCAL PROGRAMS FOR THE AGING WITH FEWER DOLLARS

by
Dr. John P. Smith
 Extension Sociologist
 North Dakota State University



STACY LIBRARY
 FEB 17 1982
 SERIALS DEPT.
 LIBRARY

THE PROBLEM

For almost 20 years, funds from the Older Americans Act have been made available for the development of health, social and legal services for the elderly. In both rural and urban areas, many services were developed within the contexts of senior centers and nutrition programs. Senior center and nutrition site councils were asked to develop some social services on their own, but many of the health, social, and legal services were brought into the senior centers and nutrition sites by external agencies.

The problem of managing programs for the aging in local communities is two-fold. First, there is the "federal wind down" for social programs. Present indications are that funding for aging programs will stay at about the same levels as they are at present. Second, external agencies which provided social, health, and legal services to clients within the senior centers and nutrition sites had been left unfunded (like Community Services Administration) or had their funding from federal sources drastically cut (like Legal Services). These problems will seriously affect the elderly who use the senior centers and nutrition sites. In the short term, some strategies for maintaining social, health and legal services should be developed.

7.3 A management strategy for continuing local services needs to be developed. If federal funds are scarce, potential local resources and reliance on volunteers are important. Users of senior centers and nutrition programs are asked to designate what services **best fit** and **are most needed** in the senior centers and nutrition programs. Senior center and

nutrition site users can also designate which social, health and legal services they would be willing to volunteer to help provide. Available local funds could be allocated to client-designated programs. Volunteers could be relied upon for less essential programs.

METHOD OF PRIORITIZING

In spring and summer, 1981, 116 senior citizens were randomly selected and asked to answer questions on a personal, confidential interview. They were selected in seven senior centers and nutrition programs and interviewed. (The funds for the interviews and data processing were provided by the NDSU Experiment Station.) In the survey, the seniors were asked to tell if they felt 14 selected social services would fit into the senior center or nutrition site. They were also asked if they would be willing to help with such a service if they were physically able. They were not asked if the social services mentioned were presently available at the center or site. The 14 services were varied. Some services emphasized volunteers while other services would require professional help (i.e., legal services). If a service fit into a senior center or meals program, it is assumed that the respondent felt it was a needed service for themselves or other elderly. The willingness to help was assumed to explore their capacity for volunteering.

WHAT SERVICES ARE NEEDED

The percentages of those who felt the social service was fitting or needed is shown along with the percentages of those who said they would be willing to help on that service. Also the ranks are given for each according to rural and urban respondents.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution and Ranking for Needed Social Services and for Willingness to Help on Social Services, for Selected Rural and Urban North Dakota Senior Citizens, 1981

RURAL				
Social Services	Fit in Site		Willing to Help	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
1. Volunteer Placement	68.7%	11	47.5%	8
2. Retirement Planning	50.8	14	35.7	14
3. Special Recreation	61.1	13	56.9	5
4. Bereavement	61.2	12	40.0	11.5
5. Outreach Services	83.6	10	58.1	4
6. Escort Services	90.9	4	41.1	10
7. Homemaker/Health Aides	86.4	8	45.2	9
8. Friendly Visiting	97.0	1	67.7	3
9. Meals on Wheels	89.4	6.5	51.6	6
10. Chore Service	84.6	9	36.1	13
11. Transportation Service	89.4	6.5	50.7	7
12. Telephone Reassurance	95.5	2	69.2	1
13. Congregate Meals	90.9	4	68.8	2
14. Legal Services	90.9	4	40.0	11.5

URBAN				
Social Services	Fit in Site		Willing to Help	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
1. Volunteer Placement	68.9%	11	35.5%	8
2. Retirement Planning	44.4	14	31.1	11
3. Special Recreation	80.8	4	44.4	4
4. Bereavement	63.6	12	43.2	5
5. Outreach Services	77.3	5.5	38.6	6.5
6. Escort Services	75.0	7	38.6	6.5
7. Homemaker/Health Aides	70.0	10	31.8	10
8. Friendly Visiting	84.1	2.5	56.8	1
9. Meals on Wheels	77.3	5.5	27.2	12
10. Chore Service	56.7	13	25.5	14
11. Transportation Service	70.5	9	32.5	9
12. Telephone Reassurance	84.1	2.5	48.8	2
13. Congregate Meals	86.4	1	46.5	3
14. Legal Services	72.7	8	27.9	13

Generally, rural respondents felt stronger needs for more types of social services. Many of the social services are urban based and have difficulty getting out to the rural areas. For rural residents, the highest positive results came for:

- 1. **Friendly Visiting** (97%)
- 2. **Telephone Reassurance Calling** (95.5%)
- 3. **Congregate Meals** (90.9%)
- 4. **Coordinated Legal Services** (90.9%)
- 4. **Transportation Services** (90.9%)
- 4. **Escort Services** (90.9%)

For rural residents, the following are ranked as the least needed social programs:

- 1. **Pre-retirement and post-retirement counseling** (50.8%)
- 2. **Special Recreations Programs for Aged** (61.1%)
- 3. **Bereavement Counseling** (61.2%)

For urban residents, the programs were different and the percentages lower. There was less perceived need and fit into existing facilities. Below are the five highest positive ratings for services:

- 1. **Congregate Meals** (86.4%)
- 2. **Telephone Reassurance** (84.1%)

- 3. **Friendly Visiting** (84.1%)
- 4. **Special Recreation Programs for Aged** (80.0%)
- 5. **Outreach Services** (77.3%)
- 5. **Meals on Wheels** (77.3%)

For urban residents, the following were seen as the least useful social programs:

- 1. **Preretirement and post-retirement counseling** (44.4%)
- 2. **Chore Services** (56.7%)
- 3. **Bereavement counseling** (63.6%)

WILLINGNESS TO VOLUNTEER AND HELP

The second issue is what programs would be able to draw on volunteers for help.

For rural residents, the programs respondents are most willing to volunteer for are:

- 1. **Telephone Reassurance** (69.2%)
- 2. **Congregate Meals** (68.8%)
- 3. **Friendly Visiting** (67.7%)
- 4. **Outreach Services** (58.1%)

For rural respondents, the social programs drawing the least volunteer support are:

- 1. Retirement Planning (35.5%)
- 2. Chore Service (36.1%)
- 3. Bereavement Counseling (40.0%)
- 3. Legal Services (40.0%)

For urban residents, there was generally less interest in helping out with the social services. The strongest levels of volunteer support are found for:

- 1. Friendly Visiting (56.8%)
- 2. Telephone Reassurance (48.8%)
- 3. Congregate Meals (46.5%)

For urban residents the social services that would draw the least volunteer support were:

- 1. Chore Services (25.5%)
- 2. Meals on Wheels (27.2%)
- 3. Legal Services (27.9%)

GREATEST NEED BUT LEAST VOLUNTEERS

Using the senior perception for needed services, and the capacity for volunteer manpower, to develop funding priorities, there are some clear patterns for rural and urban senior centers and nutrition sites. Two programs, escort services (medical and shopping) and coordinated legal services, are viewed as high-need programs for which few people could volunteer. This is perhaps because of the medical and legal background needed for such services.

Concerning urban residents, they showed lower levels of support for volunteering. But meals on wheels was a service that was given a relatively high

assessment for being needed in senior centers and nutrition sites. It did not get much volunteer support from urban residents.

Many rural residents were willing to help with telephone reassurance, congregate meals, friendly visiting and outreach services. Urban residents seemed less willing to volunteer, but they were positive on friendly visiting, telephone reassurance, and congregate meals.

For both rural and urban residents, some of the highest valued and best fitting services (friendly visiting and telephone reassurance) would be less expensive and easy to run with volunteers. Congregate meals are highly valued by both. Rural residents felt strongly about fitting legal services and transportation services into senior centers and nutrition programs. Urban residents felt recreation programs and outreach programs were more fitting in the sites and centers than did rural residents.

CONCLUSION

With the "wind-down" in Federal funds, senior centers and nutrition programs can soften the shock of the impact by organizing volunteers in preferred social services. Some volunteers can also be used to cushion the slack in other social services. But with remaining federal income and local sources of revenue, some more complex professional social services like legal services, transportation and escort services should be preserved. These are viewed as needed in senior centers and nutrition programs by the users of senior services.



Cooperative Extension Service, North Dakota State University of Agriculture and Applied Science, and U. S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Myron D. Johnsrud, Director, Fargo, North Dakota. Distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. We offer our programs and facilities to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin, or handicap; and are an equal opportunity employer.