

Sponsoring Agency: Jewish Family Service of Orange County

Initial Problem

According to a study conducted by Prince Market Research in 2007, aging in place is a major issue for older adults (89%). In fact, the 400 people in the survey ranked the following as their top fears:

Loss of independence (26%), Moving out of home into a nursing facility (13%)
Giving up driving (11%) and Loss of family and friends (11%).

Locally, the 2007 consumer survey conducted by the Orange County Long Term Care Council, found that assistance with transportation, grocery shopping, and household chores constitute the top three needs of older residents in our community. Clearly, quality of life and independence are enormously important to older adults

Program Description

The Friendly Visitor Program offers direct services that help adults over age 60 and younger frail adults maximize their independence, reduce stress, strengthen their connection to the community, and continue living in their own homes. The program also provides substantial indirect benefits to caregivers.

Trained volunteers provide the following direct services:

- **Transportation** - Volunteers use their own vehicles to escort participants to medical and other important appointments.
- **Grocery shopping**- Volunteers shop for participants or take them to the grocery store. For those who are unable to pay for groceries and are homebound, volunteers deliver food from local food pantries.
- **Supportive weekly home visits**- Volunteers provide weekly visits.
- **Reassurance telephone calls**- Volunteers call participants regularly.
- **Clerical assistance**- Volunteers assist clients as needed with bill paying and deciphering medical and other important statements.
- **Light chore assistance**- Volunteers provide a wide range of services including minor repairs, yard work, etc.

Referrals for those needing services come from the County Office for the Aging, social service agencies, medical professionals, religious leaders, family members, neighbors and clients themselves. Professional staff visits each older adult to ensure that they are appropriate for the program and that their home is safe for volunteers. Referrals are often made to additional community resources for needs not addressed by the Friendly Visitor Program.

Volunteers are recruited through the Jewish Family Service website and volunteer web sites such as Volunteermatch.com and Volunteer.gov. , speaking engagements, newspaper and church bulletins, radio announcements, outreach to community agencies and service organizations, hospitals, and community events.

Each month, trainings for volunteers are scheduled in multiple areas of the county and are listed on our website. All volunteers receive background checks.

Matches between volunteers and service recipients take into account concrete needs as well as personal preferences and interests. Professional staff monitor the matches to ensure that the ongoing needs of the client are being met.

How the Program Helps/Why I Like the Program

The Friendly Visitor program addresses the major issues faced by seniors and other frail adults who want to maintain their independence. By providing transportation for medical needs, grocery shopping to address the basic need for good nutrition, telephone calls and visits to ensure companionship and a sense of connection to the community, we help participants to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. Ninety percent of the clients in our program at any given time will have remained in their homes and will continue living in their homes over the next five years.

Our services also address the needs of caregivers. According to The National Family Caregivers Association website, overwhelmed caregivers report weakened immune systems and chronic conditions at more than twice the rate of non-caregivers. For the 30% of caregivers who are over 65, the mortality rate is 63% higher than non-caregivers. Our volunteers assume some of the burden of caregiving and thus help to relieve caregiver stress.

Special Characteristics

The Friendly Visitor Program model is easily replicated and is highly adaptable to each community's needs. We have partnered with several local municipalities to seed similar programs throughout Orange County. The basic framework of the partnership is as follows:

We encourage each municipality to form a Program Advisory Committee. Members of this committee determine the target population, the type of services they will provide and the procedures for monitoring their program. The committee selects a coordinator (either paid or volunteer), who is trained and supervised by Jewish Family Service. The municipality houses the program and Jewish Family Service provides continuous oversight, technical assistance, volunteer training, volunteer insurance and background checks.

Aside from providing the opportunity to serve more clients, working in partnership with local programs has fostered creativity in the development of resources and services. Each community has adapted the model to their own needs. Thus, The Town of Mt. Hope/Otisville *Hometown Helpers*, have recruited the Town/Village clerks to answer calls and relay messages to coordinators, as there is no dedicated telephone line. Their coordinator is a volunteer. The Town of Montgomery *Seniors Independence Project* arranges for participating vendor discounts for all older adults and hosts an annual "Resource Day" for participants in addition to providing services. The town has a line item and the coordinator is salaried. The Town of Newburgh *Friends of Seniors* holds fundraising events to support the program and has a volunteer coordinator.

Total income costs

This program can be replicated by a municipality for \$5,000 a year utilizing a volunteer coordinator or \$13,000 if the coordinator is paid. The lead agency supplies the background checks and volunteer insurance. Municipalities can put a small line item in their budget or the committee can fundraise. Jewish Family Service Friendly Visitor Program budget is about \$100,000 and provides services for over 400 people.

Income is generated by fundraisers, direct solicitation to participants, grants from local OFA and foundations.

For further information please contact:

Doris Rubinsky, Program Director 845-341-1173 ext. 304 www.jfsorange.org