

2010 Great Ideas in Aging Contest

Submission by

Aging in Place-Glens Falls, Inc.

Sponsoring Agency: Aging in Place-Glens Falls, Inc. is a new agency approximately two years old.

Initial Problem to be addressed: Aging in Place-Glens Falls began when a small group of seniors met to explore how we could support one another as we continued living in the general community rather than in a specified retirement community. We began by reviewing the "Village Movement" which had begun to spread from the influence of Beacon Hill Village in Boston. (In late 2008 there were several dozen such programs which we found on an internet search; by 2010 it has grown to several hundred.) There is an exponential growth of seniors who wish and need to stay in their home community as they age.

As we thought of adapting a "Village" concept to our community, we felt some major changes were needed. The Glens Falls Metropolitan Area is the smallest such designated area in the country. It includes one small city and its newer suburbs, several surrounding villages and a large rural area. Our exploratory group did not think that we, or folks we knew, would be interested, or able, to pay an annual fee of \$500 to participate in such a support program. That meant that we needed to develop a model of voluntary, not paid, leadership. It also meant finding a way of cooperative, voluntary mutual support, rather than utilizing paid vendors. We decided to follow the model of "Timebanks." We set our annual membership fee at \$12.00 per year.

"Timebanks USA" is a national program, offering support such as software, newsletters and conferences to its members. The underlying concept of Timebanks is that one earns an hour of service by giving an hour of service to any other member in the organization. We took a trial membership in Timebanks USA. That allowed us to use their software on a trial basis, and use their organizing manual. (Timebanks USA is not specifically a program for seniors, and within its membership is a variety of agencies serving persons of all ages. In the fall of 2010, however, the NYS Office for Aging offered a telephone seminar in which the Timebanks program was suggested to agencies and programs serving seniors.) Our membership of seniors found the software too difficult to use, though most of them do use email to some degree. Also we were trying to develop a model of low annual membership fees, and felt that annual membership in Timebanks USA was not feasible with our low annual fee. So we follow the "Timebanks" concept, though not officially affiliated. We developed a membership application form, and a brochure, and decided to tell our story to the community (though we still did not have funds to print the brochure. See more under the funding section.)

Brief Program Description: Our mission statement lists three areas: 1) Mutual service exchange, 2) Information exchange, 3) Promoting and sustaining vital connection to the community. When a new member affiliates with us they complete an application form in which they give us basic information, including two references, and list up to five services which they could offer, as well as services that they might need. All member information is filed in a database, and periodically lists of members, their phone numbers, and services offered, are distributed to the membership. This is done by email for most members, and hard copy to those without computers. It is the responsibility of the person needing the service to contact someone on the list. Initially, persons seem to be reluctant to ask for help. As a sense of community develops this becomes easier. Also, the timebanks concept that everyone has something to give, even if limited to making a phone call, means that asking for help is not a disgrace.

To promote the second goal of information exchange we have offered a series of public meetings, at various senior centers or the public library, inviting leaders of various organizations to describe their programs for seniors. To promote the third goal of sustaining vital connection to the community, we have developed a number

of small group interest area, as well as promoting participation in existing programs like Community Theater. Our initial members are at a stage where they are more interested in giving services than needing personal services. They come with hobbies and skills and interests developed over a lifetime. We have encouraged members to offer leadership of small interest groups as a way of sharing these resources.

How does the Program Help? In our first full year of operation members have reported approximately one hundred hours of services each month. These hours are most likely underreported. Service areas have included advocacy, companionship, gardening and yard work, light home repair, meal preparation, personal organization help (e.g. help in moving to a smaller home), pet care, shopping and transportation. There have been considerable hours given to service on the Board of Directors, and committees, and to planning and leadership of events.

There have been small groups involved in exercise (bike riding and walking), digital photography, memory sharing and writing, reading, and attending summer community theater.

In addition to these hours of direct service, and small group participation, a sense of community has developed into a kind of voluntary extended family. This is important as many of our members have been widowed, and feeling isolated.

Total Program Cost: Our goal has been to keep annual dues modest. However, as we began with a small group of around a dozen members, we did not have the funds for printing brochures, developing a website, and incorporation expenses. These goals were achieved through a development grant of \$4,000 from the Cooperative Development Foundation covering the period of August 2009 through August 2010.

Our goal was to grow to approximately fifty members, so that our modest annual dues would cover us when the grant expired. We hold mailing costs to a minimum by utilizing email to a great extent. We have affiliated with RSVP, and our members are also enrolled in RSVP. This also enables liability insurance coverage at no extra cost to us. We have an inexpensive website designed by a member, with minimal hosting fees. Our major expenses at this point are printing costs to promote educational programs, and to update brochures.

Special Issues, Characteristics: We have decided at this point in time to keep annual dues at a modest \$12.00 per year. We are sure they will have to increase eventually, but nowhere near the \$500 which is typical in the Village movement. To operate within our limited budget we have decided not to affiliate either with Timebanks USA or the new Village Support Organization. No doubt we would benefit from the support of a national organization. We are relying on a talented Board of Directors with a rich personal experience, to keep us vital and growing.

Our affiliation with RSVP is a valuable resource, as well as the support and ideas that we receive from the New York State Office for Aging, and the local Offices for the Aging. What will we look like in ten years? This is such a vitally needed program that we expect continued growth. Eventually some paid staff to coordinate services and program may be needed, which will require higher membership dues and fundraising.

For further information:

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