Ohio’s Lifespan Respite Initiative—Volunteer Respite Expansion Mini-Grants

In our initial Grant Narrative, we proposed funding and studying one program each of the three different types of respite programs (voucher, volunteer, and emergency) to identify promising/best practices. However, upon further consideration, we decided that this approach would give us the results of one type of program in one part of the state. We would not be able to call any result a “best practice” that should be replicated, because we would not have anything to compare it to determine its validity as a evidenced-based process.

In addition, sustainability is an ongoing issue for any program. Of the three types of respite (emergency, voucher and volunteer), volunteer respite is the most easily sustainable, once the infrastructure is in place. While emergency and voucher programs need ongoing funds to continue their services, once a stable infrastructure is in place, operating costs for volunteer respite are minimal when compared to the other two respite types.

The Ohio Department of Aging (ODA), a member of the Ohio Respite Coalition, chose to fund a grant opportunity to expand volunteer respite programs in Ohio. The goal of the funding opportunity was to identify replicable models of volunteer respite that can be used to increase awareness of and access to volunteer respite services across the state.

On July 25, 2013, ODA emailed the funding opportunity and evaluation criteria to more than 50 recipients, compiled from leads supplied by Ohio’s aging network, the Ohio Respite Coalition and the Ohio State Program Director for the Ohio National Senior Service Corps. Proposals were due back to ODA by August 15, 2013.

The grant proposal was to award a total of $60,000 for up to five successful applicants who agreed to develop and expand their volunteer respite programs. In light of the amount of money each organization would receive, only organizations that currently offered volunteer respite programs were eligible for this funding opportunity.

ODA received five proposals. The evaluation team eliminated one applicant from consideration because it did not meet the criteria. The evaluation team returned the remaining proposals to the organizations for clarification and additional information. After receiving sufficient clarification, the organizations were notified of their awards on September 9, 2013 and received funding in October 2013.

Of the four organizations awarded funds, two are Area Agencies on Aging (AAA), one is a faith-based organization and one is a service of a senior center. Three are grouped in Ohio’s northwest and one is in Ohio’s southern area.
As part of the requirements for the funds, awardees agreed to provide copies of organizational information, including copies of their table of organization and responsibilities, program history and operations, volunteer recruitment strategies, training materials, program evaluations and consumer satisfaction surveys, policies and procedures, insurance and background checks, marketing policies and samples, partner organizations and current funding sources.

ODA is using the information gained from this funding opportunity to create a final report/toolkit which describes various volunteer respite program models, volunteer and consumer recruitment methods, volunteer training methods and marketing tools. The report will include a detailed description of how the Lifespan Respite grant funds were spent and how respite organizations enhanced or expanded their programs. The final report will also include analysis of the success of the expansion funded by this opportunity.

This final report will become an Ohio-centric manual that will be widely available for any organization that is interested in forming a volunteer respite program.

**Quick Highlights**

All four organizations report positive outcomes. They have increased both the number of caregivers they serve and the number of volunteers they have trained.

The four funded organizations found the winter months were particularly difficult in Ohio and hampered expanding their volunteer respite efforts. Even without snow emergencies, organizations found that both volunteers and the caregivers themselves preferred not to go out on the roads in snowy conditions.

Hands of Grace, a faith based organization, saw a strong increase in care receivers in areas of the county that previously had disappointing numbers. They attribute the growth to increasing visibility efforts, including volunteer events, newspaper articles, partnerships with area networking groups, county leaders and area businesses. They also hired office staff to focus on volunteer efforts.

Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio, Inc. conducts a caregiver match meeting after each volunteer training session. The meetings are an excellent way for the volunteer and family to meet and make a connection immediately. At times, the volunteers are more willing to travel a longer distance once they meet the family in-person, instead of by a telephone call.

Defiance County Senior Center works closely with the home health agencies, as well as the extended care facilities in the county, and gives packets of information to a local home medical/pharmacy to provide to clients. In answer to consumer requests, they
are also providing more information and referral, assisting caregivers to navigate through the support systems available in the community.

Area Agency on Aging 8 works with several county Retired Senior Volunteers Programs (RSVP). When the respite program started, the fear of liability was a barrier to providing in-home respite. However, after the RSVPs researched national policies and the AAA funded background checks, this obstacle has been overcome.

All the organizations report a lack of male volunteers. AAA 4 plans to focus on recruiting male veterans to overcome this barrier.

All four organizations work closely with their Alzheimer’s Association Chapters.