Aging Futures NEWS

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Return to Home Caregiver Program Underway at Local Hospitals

Family caregivers face many challenges when an elderly loved one returns home after a hospital stay. This led the Caregiver Workgroup to discuss ways our community could better support caregivers during this critical period.

The result was the formation of the Return to Home Caregiver Program (RTH). The program kicks off at both Lourdes Hospital and United Health Services this month.

Caregivers will receive telephone support from a caregiver specialist at the Office for Aging as well as information about local services and how to access them. Families will also receive a copy of the video, *"Now That Your Loved One Is Home What Do You Do?"* Hospital discharge staff will make referrals or caregivers can self-refer to the program.

The goals of the program are to assist the caregiver and increase their knowledge and confidence. Ultimately it is assumed the program will also reduce re-admissions to the hospital.

Ann Northrup, nurse at the Stay Healthy Center, will be contacting caregivers a few days after discharge. She states, "Many families are overwhelmed at time of discharge. Our goal at UHS is to make the transition from hospital to home as easy as possible. Referrals to Caregiver Services would be a great comfort to those facing taking care of a loved one at home. If a caregiver has someone to contact for help it will be less stressful and help both the patient and caregiver to be successful at home."

DeeDee Camp, Aging Futures program manager, stated that "Return to Home represents the type of work best suited to the Partnership. Organizations are changing how and when they will provide information and referrals. We are taking a closer look at what makes a difference for caregivers after an acute hospitalization and their feedback will be instrumental in improving and further developing the service over the next year."

Mental Health Legislation Anticipates Elder Boom

By Donna Lupardo, NYS Assemblywoman

The Geriatric Mental Health Act was recently signed into law by the Governor. As a co-sponsor of this legislation, I am confident that it represents a critical step forward in recognizing the importance of mental health issues in the elderly.

The legislation will award grants to mental health, health, or aging services providers for demonstration initiatives that advance a variety of purposes. It also creates an interagency council on geriatric mental health to be responsible for developing, on an ongoing basis, an interagency plan for addressing the needs of older adults with mental disorders. The membership of the Interagency Geriatric Mental Health planning council will be comprised of 15 members appointed by state agencies, the Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly and the Majority Leader of the Senate.

A copy of the Geriatric Mental Health Act, BILL NUMBER: A7672B can be found on line at www.agingfutures.org

The mental health system, which currently does not serve older adults with mental illnesses at all, let alone serve them well, is in no way ready for the elder boom, which will hit in full force beginning in 2011. Perhaps it's not surprising that there has been so little preparation despite more than a decade of warnings. The big hit will come outside the ordinary five-year planning horizon. But the boom will be so large and will require such extensive restructuring, as well as growth, that preparation cannot responsibly be put off any longer.

In 2006 AF will be working with project partners to coordinate geriatric mental health screenings. Also, the Chronic Disease Workgroup is planning mental health supports to seniors residing in senior housing.

Currently, there are an estimated 6 million American seniors with depression and only 10% of them are getting treatment. Untreated mental conditions can lead to disability, exacer-

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Trust in the Lives of Older Women (TLOW)

One Strategy for Staying Connected & Staying Well

Six thousand senior women live alone in Broome County. Statistics indicate that living alone increases the risk of social isolation, especially as people live longer and experience physical and emotional losses.

In a 2003 survey supported by Aging Futures, 31% of older adults stated that they would like to be doing more socially. *Trust in the Lives of Older Women* (TLOW), a program offered by Broome County Council of Churches and supported by Aging Futures, is a concrete way for our community to assist in keeping people socially connected.

"There is a positive health factor involved when people can be with and bond with others," states Kathleen Morrow, member of the Social Connections Workgroup. "TLOW is a concrete way to encourage people to connect with each other and for us to study behavioral change."

An impressive panel of leaders spoke at a conference about TLOW and the value of social connections among both women and men over 65. Often, this is a time when changes occur (retirement, loss of loved ones, housing relocation) that leave them needing to build new relationships.

Panelists included Sarah Gueldner, RN, PhD, BU Decker School of Nursing, Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, Kathy Bunnell, Director, Broome County OFA, Francis Battisti, MSW, CSW, BCC Professor of Gerontology, and Joanne Kays, Broome County Council of Churches, TLOW Program Coordinator.

Why are women the focus of this program? Older women are more likely to live alone and have lost a spouse or close friends. They experience a need for a forum to discuss their increasing isolation and how to build new relationships. The TLOW conference planners confirmed this every time they told a friend or colleague about the program, because their friends nodded and said they knew a woman who could benefit from the support of a group like this.

Clergy, social workers and health care providers, men and women alike, recognize women in their congregations or practices who might be potential participants. They identify men, too, but currently the focus is on women.

> *"The linking of social relations to longevity… and the special role of social support in aging have been gradually, but unmistakably, demonstrated."*
> "Successful Aging" Robert Kahn, John Rowe, MD
> (MacArthur Foundation Study)

Dorothy Gardner, UHS Senior Security Coordinator, attended the conference along with close to 100 other community members. She is interested in the program, stating that "there is a gap in services for those who suffer loss of any description. Once trust is gained, life challenges are bearable. I like the idea of women in a sisterhood to help them out of the lonely and depressed state that can occur as we age."

Ten facilitators have been trained, thanks to funding from a United Way Venture Grant and a gift from Wilber National Bank. The next step is to extend a personal invitation to women who could become *Trust* group participants. Six to eight groups will begin by 2006. Now is an excellent time to join a Trust group to share, build new friendships and develop a new community of support. Contact Joanne Kays, BC Council of Churches, at 724.9130 x304 for more information.

The conference for *Trust in the Lives of Older Woman* was supported by Aging Futures Partnership, Broome County Council of Churches, Good Shepherd Fairview Foundation and Broome Community College. Special thanks go to the women on the steering committee. The United Way Venture Grant supported the facilitators' training. An additional contribution was received from Wilber National Bank.

One of five panelists at the Visibility conference in September illustrated the importance of social connections among older adults by telling a story about a family friend who lives in an assisted living facility. The 89 year old woman had become withdrawn. When encouraged to play a tune on the facility's upright piano, however, her music drew other residents who enjoyed listening to music from their youth. Within a few weeks, the woman was playing regularly for everyone in the facility.

TLOW Testimonial

Agnes, age 79, recently moved to Broome County to be closer to her daughter. Agnes knows she can't depend on her daughter for socialization because she works and has her own family. At this age, and in a new community, it is hard for Agnes to meet new people. Loneliness is a constant dilemma. Weekends are especially hard because there is less of a routine in her life.

Agnes joined the Trust group that began meeting at the Broome County Public Library in June. She hopes this group can help her through the loneliness. She looks forward to the weekly meetings and has struck up a friendship with another woman in the group. They have gone shopping, out to dinner and to the movies.

Agnes can't believe how easy it is to share herself with strangers. "It seems that the more you begin to trust and share of yourself the easier it is to get acquainted. I never really thought much about the trust issue before but talking about it and going through the workbook makes it easier to share."

Stories Connect to Our Hearts and Move Us Forward

Andy Goodman, who authors *Story Telling as Best Practice* (*Newly Expanded Second Edition*), champions "story telling as the single most powerful communications tool." A story brings to life the statistics and data we, as non-profits, foundations and businesses, write in reports, post on websites and tediously incorporate into PowerPoint presentations.

Stories let us know why all the other information matters.

What do we need to do to support community understanding with story telling?

Good stories connect with people's hearts, opening their minds to new information.

Do you have to change the PowerPoint presentations you already use proudly at meetings, large and small? "Not necessarily," says Goodman. "Data is useful. First, however, tell your story." A photograph of the hero in your story is essential for conveying the emotion you want the listener to understand. For example, show the caregiver dropping his loved one at adult day care and mention that a quality program offers relief to the caregiver. Then state how many families have informal caregivers, etc.

"In all likelihood, your organization has stories that can help people understand what you do, demonstrate your efficacy, and make a compelling case for support," says Goodman. His booklet is available through his website www.agoodmanonline.com for $12.50 including S&H or may be borrowed from Aging Futures at jsprague@co.broome.ny.us or 778-6145.

Goodman suggests that each organization has its "sacred bundle" of 5-10 stories. These stories are your history and special moments. Just like family stories, your sacred bundle needs to be passed on to each employee so they understand and repeat your mission in the same way. Stories can be collected from your staff, your clients, and anyone touched by your work. A "story bank" helps you when a reporter calls and wants information. You already have what is needed if you have a story bank. To get a copy of a planning sheet for your organization's story bank contact Aging Futures at jsprague@co.broome.ny.us or 778-6145.

Mental Health Legislation

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bate symptoms of other illnesses, lead to premature death, and result in suicide.

As the 78 million baby boomers retire, increased health care costs including mental health care costs, will shift to the states. Currently, states provide mental health services through their state Medicaid match and through state general revenue funded mental health programs for a variety of populations including the elderly. In 2000, $14 billion state dollars were spent on mental health services. The need for services is increasing daily.

Partnerships Help Communities Care in the Long Term

Communities across the nation are benefiting from partnerships formed specifically to look at the needs of older adults. Broome County and eighteen other communities funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Community Partnerships for Older Adults attended a national meeting in September.

George Maddox, Director, Duke (University) LTC Resource Program, reminded us about the urgency of planning. The reality is this: one in three seniors will face a long term care need that will last for several months. Maddox encouraged us to think differently about long term care. Perhaps a new language is needed. After all, aren't we really talking about "care in the long term"?

One in three will face a long term care need lasting several months.

Maddox also urged each partnership to look at the promises we have made to our communities. If partnerships are keeping their promises, local support options are changing. That's when communities will begin to understand long term care differently.

Aging Futures promised our community that we would invest resources and find innovative ways to support caregivers, reduce the impact of chronic disease and promote social connections among our most vulnerable seniors. We are keeping these promises through the Return to Home Caregiver Program, Strike Out Stroke program and our Stay Connected–Stay Well social marketing campaign.

National Article Highlights AF Media Campaign

The Community Partnerships for Older Adults (CPFOA) newsletter, Community View, recently featured articles on Broome's year-long multi media awareness campaign that was coordinated by AOP on behalf of the Aging Futures Partnership.

The newsletter, which has a distribution of 2000, is read by the many advisors to CPFOA including Lisa Alecxih, VP at Center on Long Term Care, The Lewin Group, Falls Church, VA. Ms. Alecxih commented, "I read … about your partnership's outreach efforts and their evaluation … The learnings from these efforts could help similar efforts within the aging network, such as aging and disability resource centers."

The article featured insight shared by Shelli Cordisco and Robbie Smolinsky, Executive Director and Communications Specialist at Action for Older Persons, Inc., respectively, and included information about how our community evaluated the impact of the campaign. The CPFOA national program office recently extended gratitude to our Partnership for learning locally and sharing nationally.

Kudos to all the organizations and committee members involved in the campaign. Find a link to the CPFOA newsletter at our website: www.agingfutures.org .

Stay Connected – Stay Well Campaign Offers New Community Resource

A new brochure, "Stay Connected –Stay Well: Explore Volunteering," highlights volunteering as an excellent way for people to stay connected, or to become re-connected, to others. The brochure discusses the benefits of staying involved with people and activities. It offers suggestions and local opportunities.

The brochure was developed by the Social Connections Workgroup. It will be helpful to community members, clergy, case managers and anyone assisting a senior in staying well. For copies, call Aging Futures 778-6145 or RSVP 231-0726.

Aging Future Website Offers Data on 65+

Aging Futures launched its website, www.agingfutures.org, to facilitate the work of over 50 organizations working together to improve the lives of older adults and promote vital aging.

The website features reports that include charts, graphs, demographic information and the personal views of seniors. The qualitative and quantitative research on the site can assist our community in planning services for our growing senior population. The site is also of particular use to grant writers, local media and business leaders who need data about local seniors. Materials can be downloaded from PDF files.

The Aging Futures Partnership is comprised of local residents and organizations working together to improve the lives of older adults in Broome County allowing for optimal independence and vital aging.

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