



Senior and Disability Services

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 8, 2020

TO: OCWCOG Disability and Senior Advisory Councils

FROM: Randi Moore, Senior, Disability, and Community Services Director

RE: Program Updates – The Year in Review

In reflecting back on the challenging year of 2020, I am in awe of the dedication, resiliency, enthusiasm, and creativity of the supervisors and staff that make up the hard working teams in our agency. Thank you for your support of and for allowing me highlight some of the triumphs and challenges of the last twelve months. Looking forward to a productive, but hopefully less tumultuous 2021!

SERVING THE MOST VULNERABLE DURING A PANDEMIC

- Within weeks of the Governor's Stay at Home order in March, 85% of Senior and Disability Services (SDS) and Community Services Programs (CSP) staff were working from home.
- Processes were quickly adapted to allow workers and volunteers across the programs to still meet the needs of the public while also keeping them safe.
- Guidance from the State changed several times per day in order to adapt and meet consumer and programmatic needs including: accepting self-attestation of consumer information regarding resources, ceasing adverse actions on cases, and completing service assessments over the phone.
- Funding packages that provided for things such as emergency SNAP benefits and COVID funds through the Older Americans Act allowed us expand benefits and services helping countless numbers of consumers.
- However, other programs faced cuts in funding based on concerns about decreases in State revenue. These included Veteran Services (10% reduction), ADRC mental Health Funding – PEARLS (cut), and workload reduction provided last legislative session (rolled back to 50% of increase).
- Facilities closed to visitors, which caused worry for both those in the facilities and those who have loved ones in facilities that they were now unable to visit.
- Meals sites were closed to congregate diners, with those consumers transitioning to receiving home delivered meals, and more meals were served to those that felt unsafe/unable to go into the community to purchase food.
- Because of its small square footage and staff numbers which caused coverage issues the Corvallis office was closed to the public.
- The number of calls to the Aging and Disability Resource Connection call center increased significantly with support for getting medical and food benefits being the most requested resource.

- OCWCOG Teams engaged in creative new partnerships to meet the needs of our communities. For example, working with Salvation Army to deliver weekly food boxes to homebound seniors identified as food insecure. Volunteers were organized to load cars with fresh produce, frozen meat, dairy, bread, and canned goods for Linn, Benton, and Lincoln neighbors in need. A total of seventy-two unduplicated consumers received 497 front porch deliveries.

RECOGNIZING OUR VOLUNTEERS

AmeriCorps Seniors staff typically hold summer and fall recognition events for its 100 volunteers, but had to be creative this year. In August and October recognition parades were held drive-through style in the OCWCOG parking lot to celebrate National Service in a safe way. It was a fantastic time to greet each other, gift lunches and other goodies, and meet our new Executive Director!

Despite being in the middle of a Pandemic, OCWCOG Meals on Wheels volunteers work every day to make sure the most vulnerable of their neighbors have nutritious food. This year 350 Meals on Wheels volunteers delivered over 255,000 meals across our region, an increase of 20% over last year. As a small token of our appreciation OCWCOG provided all MOW volunteers with an “Essential Worker – Meals on Wheels Volunteer” t-shirt.

ELIGIBILITY TRANSFORMATION IS HERE

- The ONE Integrated Eligibility system launched in our region on the first of November.
- This new way of doing business provides consumers a “no wrong door” entry to access medical, food, and cash benefits.
- OCWCOG believes that ONE will be good for many Oregonians, but is working to track and assess that none of our more vulnerable aging adult consumers fall through the cracks in this large statewide transition.
- The move to the new ONE system has been stressful for staff who have been actively training and preparing for the change for many months.
- Staff and management are working together to make the transition as smooth as possible for consumers and community partners.

WILDFIRE RESPONSE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

- Two large wildfires devastated communities in our region in September.
- Staff immediately mobilized to connect with consumers to assist with providing information about resources.
- Within a few days workers had called more than 670 service consumers and connected with them to assure their well-being. Staff also worked closely with Lincoln County long term care communities displaced by the fire to make sure their residents were safe and as comfortable as possible.
- Sadly, 25 consumers, including one limited license AFH, lost their homes to the wildfires. Countless others were displaced in shelters and hotels until they could return home.
- SDS staff worked closely with evacuation shelters to provide evacuees with special needs with the resources and supplies required.
- Volunteers from the Senior Companion Program reach out to over 150 non-service consumers in the affected areas to see if they needed resources or support.
- We are still trying to support those who lost their homes from the wildfires, and continue to touch base with them.

VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS WORKING ON ACCREDITATION

Molly Murphy passed her state accreditation test and is a fully accredited Veteran Service Officer. Curtis Nelson passed the “mile stone test”, the half way point for state accreditation. Curtis also attended the National Association of Veteran Service Officers annual training conference virtually and is now nationally accredited

STAND BY ME OREGON COACHES STARTING TO WORK WITH FAMILIES

It's been a busy year for the financial empowerment program – Stand By Me (\$BM) Oregon. A lot of work has been accomplished in just as few months including: entering into contracts with partner agencies, getting coaches hired and trained, and now starting to have coaches work their first clients. Thank you to the community partners where coaches are embedded - Kidco Headstart and Strengthening Rural Families. OCWCOG also has an embedded coach working to support the staff of long term care communities, and the idea of a Veteran specific coach is still a priority.

Additionally, the Cascades West Community Development Corporation (CWCDC), a non-profit Board that can be used to support the rollout of future programs that bring economic strength to our region, but now is focused on stabilizing and moving \$BM forward, is fully up and running with six new dedicated Board members.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Supporting community partners and leveraging resources is a major component of the Older Americans Act. The Senior and Disability Services Advisory Councils are pleased to announce the disbursement of \$73,000 in grants funds to seven local agencies who are working to improve the quality of life of seniors and people with disabilities. These funds were directed to agencies that were providing programs to promote healthy aging, reduce isolation and loneliness, and increase the overall health and wellbeing of the people they serve. The agencies that received grant funds are: The Mid Valley YMCA, Grace Center Adult Day Services, The Samaritan Health Education Department, The Albany Senior Center, the Newport Community Center, Lumina Hospice, and North End Senior Solutions Adult Day Services.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021

- Looking into my crystal ball - I believe the State will keep many COVID precautions and policies in place including doing most work with consumers telephonically, taking no adverse actions on cases, taking self-attestation, and encouraging minimal staffing in offices.
- We will be submitting our four year Area Plan to the State Community Services and Supports Unit. Goals and objectives were developed around the focus areas of Elder Justice, Nutrition, Transportation, Family Caregivers, Native Elders, Information and Referral and Housing. The Plan will be our “playbook” for the next four years.
- Joint Council members from the Senior and Disability Services Advisory Committees are once again excited about providing advocacy around issues that affect seniors and people with disabilities in the 2021 Legislative session. Though this session will no doubt look different than in years past, we appreciate their diligence in supporting our programs and the consumers we serve.