

Focus Group Results: Washtenaw County Senior and Community Center Director's Network

BFA Core Leadership Team Executive Summary Report March 25, 2010

History

In February of 2008, building on findings from the 2007 regional Senior Center Day of Dialogue sponsored by Area Agency on Aging 1B, the Blueprint for Aging hosted a Washtenaw County Day of Dialogue. At this meeting a local, county-wide network of Senior and Community Center Directors was established. Discussions centered on the needs of Washtenaw County Senior Centers and both the Blueprint for Aging and the Area Agency on Aging 1B spoke about ways they could support the network. This meeting led to an online senior center directory for Washtenaw County as well as web based resources for senior center directors. The network has been meeting regularly over the past two years with approximately 12 members. Meetings are hosted by various Senior Center Directors for the purpose of sharing expertise.

On March 12, 2009, the Washtenaw County Senior and Community Center Directors gathered for the 2nd Annual Washtenaw Day of Dialogue, again hosted by BFA, with the addition of a Focus Group led by the BFA evaluator. The group discussed continued Senior Center challenges accomplishments, facilitating factors, and suggested next steps for the network; including a matrix to gather funding and programming information on all centers as well as strategies for securing funding.

2010 Annual Meeting of Senior Center Directors

With coordination from the Washtenaw County Blueprint for Aging, the March 25, 2010 annual network meeting was led by Virginia Boyce, BFA. The agenda included presentations and a short focus group. The presentations included the following topics and presenters:

- update on the Blueprint for Aging by Jill Kind
- review of the latest smoking ban from Sharon Sheldon, Washtenaw County Public Health Department
- update on Area Agency on Aging 1-B advocacy and fund development resources pertaining to senior centers from Jim McGuire
- a review of the Volunteer Washtenaw website by Amy Ruddock Bleed, BFA
- a review of the Senior Center Outcome Research by Virginia Boyce, BFA.

Focus Group of Network Members

The information portion of the meeting was followed by a focus group discussion. The focus group was facilitated by Sue Ann Savas, BFA Project Evaluator. The focus group was designed to capture the experiences and perspectives of the Senior and Community Center leaders involved with the network over the past year. The focus group was comprised of 5 Center Directors and 3 other community stakeholders. Participant results were analyzed for themes, and are presented by question, next.

Focus Group Themes

1. *What are the current challenges faced by Washtenaw County Senior Center Directors today?*
 - Branding and marketing of Senior Centers
 - Funding to support staffing of the Centers
 - Resources needed to build infrastructure and increase capacity
 - Funding for operations (i.e. postage, office supplies)

- Seniors are less able to cover center fees. Need to look for ways to increase sustainability of the Center beyond member fees
- Directors are pulled between spending time on-site with members and working in their offices to secure resources (grant writing, fund meetings).

2. *What are Center Directors considering in advancing Center resources and service menus?*

- Trying to build partnerships with other organizations to benefit from fund raising activities that are already in place in the community
- Creating “family sponsorships” that are payable on the website
- Using technology (i.e. swipe cards, Rectrack, RecWare) to track member participation in events and reduce reliance on paper sign-ins and time intensive counting. Understanding that movement toward increasing use of technology may need to occur slowly as some members are more sensitive to change in routine
- Recruiting highly skilled volunteers to help with accounting and strategic planning

3. *Of the three strategies (aging in place, continuum of care, volunteer community involvement) suggested for system level change, which one resonated with you and why? Are there other community leadership opportunities for engaging as county level change agents on behalf of older adults?*

- VolunteerWashtenaw.org is a good resource for Senior Center Directors
- Center Directors need to become more aware of community discussions of local issues related to their membership. Need volunteers to go into the community and represent the Senior Center as ambassadors. They could bring information back by reporting to Center membership.
- Use of expert volunteers could solve the branding and marketing problem faced by Senior Centers today
- Increase evidence based health, prevention, and disease based programming in Centers
- Center leadership and participants need to view Senior Centers, programming, and participants as resources to impact on community problems and issues

3. *Where does the Senior Center Directors Network go from here?*

- Consider requesting a Network representative for the Blueprint for Aging Core Leadership Team
- Advance the Network and formalize the group as a collaborative beginning with mission statement, logo, and memorandum of understanding
- Develop Network Work Plan to outline areas of priority, expected impact, leadership, volunteers needed
- Develop a branding, marketing and outreach plan for the Network
- Maximize use of VolunteerWashtenaw.org
- Identification of resources to further develop staff, including Community Foundation of Southeastern Michigan, and one-day training hosted by the Network
- Utilize extensive list of grantors provided by Area Agency on Aging 1B
- Identification of resources to provide Senior Center Directors with health insurance, including Chamber of Commerce
- Distribute the 2010 Platform for Legislative Action and participate in Older Michigianians Day
- Continue Annual Day of Dialog

Reporting of Focus Group Results

BFA will distribute focus group results to the Senior Center Network, the Blueprint for Aging Core Leadership Team, and the AAA 1-B.