

ADULT AND AGING SERVICES: A COLLABORATIVE SERVICE DELIVERY EFFORT IN ALAMEDA COUNTY

By Les Lindop

INTRODUCTION

The Baby Boomers are growing older, our communities are demanding more comprehensive services and our elected officials are finally responding to the legislative needs of this population. It is essential that we look at our service delivery models to assure that we are able to effectively respond to the needs of the dependent adults and frail elderly in our communities. As of July 1, 1990 there were 129,590 residents over the age of 65 in Santa Clara County. It is estimated that by the year 2010 there will be 228,704.¹ The mere fact that this is almost double makes it clear that we must rethink our approach and philosophy in addressing the needs of this community.

OBJECTIVES:

For my BASSC project, I identified 3 areas that I wanted to explore. First to compare service delivery systems for the dependent adult and aging populations in other counties to that of Santa Clara County, second to explore the use of Community Based Organizations (CBO) in providing an enhanced community response for service delivery to our clients and third to examine ways to fill in service gaps to these common clients.

It has become clear that no one department or agency can provide comprehensive services to the dependent adult and frail elderly in our communities. With this basic premise it is imperative for those of us committed in this area to explore different models and systems to streamline our efforts and increase community collaborations to deliver services to this population.

BACKGROUND

Alameda County was selected as my host county with Linda Kretz, Assistant Agency Director for Adult and Aging Services, as my facilitator. Alameda and Santa Clara are similar in that they are both large counties in both population and diversity.

I began with a site visit hosted by the Agency Assistant Director and Linda Kretz who gave us an overview of Alameda County and its restructuring efforts. As part of this restructuring, agency staff completed a yearlong project in developing the "Social Services Agency 1999-2004 Strategic Plan". This 5-year plan was developed to produce . common themes with clear principles, goals and strategies to meet the changing role of the social service agency. It is important to acknowledge the 5 themes and key principles of the plan as it highlights the efforts to address the changing role of the agency by creating a clear philosophy and developing a plan to achieve their goals.

KEY THEMES:

¹ 1 Ca State Dept. of Finance. Dec 98

- Protecting Individuals and Families
- Promoting Independence and Self-Sufficiency

BASSC Executive Development Program

- Strengthening Families and Communities
- Preventing Crises Before They Occur
- Partnering With The Community

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Valuing Innovation
- Increasing Accountability
- Honoring Diversity
- Taking Pride in Our Accomplishments

There are numerous plans and strategies relating to the overall philosophy and goals of the Agency. My intent is not to detail each issue but to focus on the overall task set forward by the strategic plan. Essentially departments should take stock of what is currently being offered, assess the effectiveness of the program, listen to the consumers needs, be innovative in responding and be accountable to achieving the desired outcomes. All of which relate directly to the Agency Mission: "to promote the social and economic well being of individuals and families through a responsive, accessible and flexible service delivery system that recognizes the importance of the family, cultural and ethnic diversity, and the increased vulnerability of populations at risk ".²

One key element in putting the plan into action is The Community Integration and Innovation Initiative. It essentially proposes a grant development approach offering more flexibility and creativity in funding new and innovative community programs. Again fully assessing the community delivered social services and how they compliment those of the Agency.

In years past the focus of Social Service Agencies had been almost entirely on children services and benefits. With the new wave of legislation and community outcry the tide is beginning to shift. This certainly is not to take essential services from children but has recognized the value of our elders in the family. More funds and emphasis is being given to protection and advocacy of our frail elderly and dependent adults.

Alameda County's Adult and Aging Services Department is structured much like Santa Clara County's in that all divisions are under one director. There are 8 divisions within the Department;

² 2 County of Alameda Social Services Agency 1999-2(K)4 Strategic Plan

Area Agency on Aging (AAA). In Home Support Services, Veterans Services, Public Guardian, Adult Protective Services, QMB. Long Term Care Unit and Contract Services.

However, there are two major differences in the structure of Alameda's department. The AAA's role is one. Having the AAA as an intricate part of the department is a benefit in that it places the coordination and control over certain programs and services within the full scope of the department. The second major difference is the addition of the contract unit. This unit oversees the monitoring of 61 contracts with 51 different CBOs. The 5 staff and 1 manager expend a tremendous amount of time overseeing the compliance of these vital additional services that the department itself is unable to provide. Contract services range from money management, case management, friendly visitors, adult day care, information and assistance; home delivered meals and congregate site meals. Being that Adult and Aging programs can no longer provide all services to the community there must be a shift in the approach of service delivery. The staff ultimately acts as coordinator and catalyst to make changes in the way things have been done in the past. Not only are staff working in the community but find their interest focused within the department as well, making the lines of communication clearer, developing plans for implementing new legislation and creating a balance, vision and priorities for the department as a whole.

Additionally, the manager and staff have developed a broiler plate for contracts. In standardizing contract language it has made it easier for the CBOs to assure they are meeting the requirements for the department and the county. Staff in this unit meets with contractors providing assistance and guidance with clear provisions and guidelines for contract performance standards. Staff not only provides contracting services but also actively participates in the community by attending and participating in numerous meetings representing positive collaborations with other agencies. One such collaboration is the Tri City Elders Coalition. This represents 13 different providers, which are responsible for developing a comprehensive resource guide for in home assessments. Staff participates in planning fund raising activities with the Coalition for a "Senior Night Out", thus providing a valuable social event for 200-300 seniors to be out of the home and with others. An important finding in all the interviews with staff and CBOs was that there is an additional benefit to these formal meetings, this being the "informal networking". Issues are frequently resolved as a result of this networking prior to them becoming a much larger issue.

Several of my meetings were with directors of some of the contract agencies discussing not only the changes with in the Adult and Aging Department but also how that relationship has grown over the years. The challenge is reaching the common ground and vision for service delivery, working through the turf issues and dealing with issues of confidentiality regarding common clients. All of these issues are ones that require specific time and energy and great deal of respect and trust. They indicated these issues were not resolved overnight, but required each to come to the table willing to move to the common ground. Complications frequently arise with agencies having not only to work with the county but also with the city of Oakland. CBOs are not only dealing with the governmental agencies but have their own issues with the community in assuring that they are in fact meeting the needs of that community. They, like the agency, must continue to assess and reassess their own structure and staffing requirements constantly looking to the community for unmet needs and determining what it would take for them to meet these needs. CBOs must have a strong sense of what services are already in the community, what is

needed and whether or not they can rise to the occasion. When asked how they deal with complaints in the community with their agency, one CBO director stated, "It's how you deliver the message; you show them respect and that they are heard! And you work to fix it".

ABOUT SANTA CLARA COUNTY:

Santa Clara County began to restructure its aging and adult services two years ago by forming one department under one director, consisting of 5 separate divisions; In Home Support Services, Senior Nutrition, Adult Protective Services, Veterans Services and Public Administrator /Guardian. Up until this point these divisions had operated somewhat independent of each other with little coordination of services to a shared population. Unlike Alameda, Santa Clara County's AAA is connected with the Council on Aging of Santa Clara County (COA). Prior to our new director there was little coordination between the COA and county departments providing services to the elderly. Each seemed to have their own direction and goals without communicating with each other. As our new director moved into place, she clearly took the lead in working with the managers and staff to pull the department together. Managers took on the role as trainers providing in services specifically dedicated to explaining the roles and functions of each individual division. The goal was to have staff in each division realize that even though we have different functions there is a common client that we all serve and that we could work together in providing these services. With the help of an outside consultant a Steering Team was established represented by all the divisions with cross-functional teams as an offshoot of the larger group. All staff is kept informed of the progress of the teams with input for our common mission and goals.

As we begin to redefine our own department, our director has taken the opportunity to develop our relationships in the community specifically with the COA and the City of San Jose Aging Services. This is significant in that now any major changes in the direction of senior services in Santa Clara County are approached jointly with a common goal and collaborative spirit. As a result of SB 2199, we formed an APS Stakeholders Committee to assess the needs of the frail elderly and dependent adults in our community. The committee has gone beyond the scope of the law and developed recommendations for services to be reviewed and possibly implemented after our new APS mandates are fully activated. Like Alameda we have begun to strengthen our relationships with the community not only with the two specific agencies listed above. but also in all areas of the community.

Whereas Alameda's Adult and Aging Department have some 61 contracts monitored by a dedicated staff, we have fewer than 26 within our Department. Additionally contract monitoring is not as organized within our department. I believe it is unclear to the departmental staff as to what contracts actually exist and what can be expected from these CBOs.

IMPLICATION FOR SANTA CLARA COUNTY

In review of my experience over the past few months I am truly impressed by the collaborative work that has gone into Alameda's Strategic Plan and specifically how it is directly related to the full development of the Adult and Aging Department. Alameda County is clearly well on its way with implementation of the Strategic Plan. Alameda's Adult and Aging Department has been

formed for some time now and clearly has established itself as a model in the area of Adult and Aging Services.

This experience only solidifies my belief and commitment to the structure and development of our Department of Aging and Adult Services. I found the contract unit as a significant link to the community not only assuring compliance of contracted services but a key role in eliciting community involvement. Currently Santa Clara SSA has a centralized contract unit, however the monitoring is distributed to supervisors within each department. I would recommend a specific unit in each of the Departments assigned to write and monitor contracts for services specific to the needs and clients in that department.

ACTION STEPS

- Develop and implement a "departmental contract unit" in the Department of Aging and Adult Services
- Identify all community based organizations related to Aging and Adult Services
- Identify Aging and Adult services offered by SSA and the County as a whole
- Bring all stakeholders together in a "roundtable" forum to discuss county wide services for the dependent adult and elderly in Santa Clara County
- Identify service gaps for our clients
- Continue our efforts in the departmental reorganization