

Narratives

Executive Summary

The Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut (AASCC) works to provide a continuum of opportunities, care, and support services that allow older adults and individuals with disabilities to remain in their homes and communities, avoid unwanted and unnecessary institutionalization, and to age in place with dignity, respect, and maximum independence. AASCC serves a 20-town region in greater New Haven and the Lower Naugatuck Valley. AASCC's Volunteer and Training Department recruits, places, and supports the work of older adult volunteers and workers in five programs, including RSVP.

RSVP of South Central Connecticut (RSVP) anticipates 224 volunteers at 66 work stations will serve an anticipated 1,362 consumers via the incumbent RSVP program over the course of three years. Fifty-six (56) volunteers will provide literacy support to 180 students in New Haven schools leading to increased scores on standardized tests in 85% of students. Fifty-five (55) volunteers will provide emotional support and companionship to 147 older adults and individuals with disabilities, including veterans; and 48 volunteers will focus exclusively on serving 195 veterans and their families. Five volunteers will work on capacity building projects, such as leading afghan making projects for children in the foster care system, benefitting 450 consumers. Sixty (60) volunteers will work with over 290 older adults and individuals with disabilities providing them with a continuum of support depending on the identified needs. Many of the consumers will regain financial stability through better access to benefits and decreased bounced checks.

As the work plans indicate, services will be delivered at schools, hospitals, housing complexes, senior centers, and both congregate and individual homes. In addition, work stations will include complexes that exclusively serve veterans, such as the VA Connecticut Healthcare System-West Haven Campus and the Errera Community Care Center.

The primary focus of the program will be Education, which includes tutoring school-aged children (K-12 Success) and teaching older adults, including veterans, about their benefits and money management (Aging in Place). Other focus areas include Access to Care, At-Risk Ecosystems, Capacity Building & Leverage, and Veterans and Families served.

At the end of the three-year grant cycle, 224 volunteers will have provided 60,000 hours of service,

Narratives

The CNCS federal investment of \$72,382 will be supplemented with \$39,585, of which \$4,250 is excess funds.

Strengthening Communities

RSVP of South Central Connecticut (RSVP), sponsored by the Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut (AASCC), serves 14 towns and cities located in New Haven County: Bethany, Branford, East Haven, Guilford, Hamden, Madison, Milford, New Haven, North Branford, North Haven, Orange, Wallingford, West Haven, and Woodbridge. This area has a large concentration of elderly, low-income, and minority populations.

According to 2011 statistics from the Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC), 19.1% (i.e., 97,963) of the RSVP service area population is age 50 to 64 and 14.1% (i.e., 72,663) is age 65 and older. The area is racially diverse, with almost 15% identifying as black and about 14% identifying as Hispanic of any race (CERC). RSVP includes one station in New Haven that provides senior housing exclusively to Hispanic/Latino residents, and a priority over the next three years is recruiting bilingual (i.e., English/Spanish) volunteers. As of 2010, the average poverty rate in the 14-town RSVP service area was almost 6%. However, New Haven's was over four times the average at over 25% (CERC).

Recent focus groups of older adults conducted by AASCC for the Area Plan on Aging for the four-year period of October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2017 identified 17 priority areas of need, five of which RSVP of South Central CT intends to help address: information on and referral to services and benefits, companion services, education about and assistance with scams and financial abuse, assistance with completing benefits paperwork, and assistance with bill paying and money management. Surveys conducted for the area plan indicated the following about the respondents: 70% were somewhat or very concerned about their finances, and 41% were somewhat or very concerned about knowing where to turn for help. In addition, when asked about needs they have now or anticipate they may want help with in the future:

- * 30% indicated they somewhat or very much need help with emotional well-being,
- * 28% indicated they somewhat or very much need help caring for their spouse/companion,
- * 31% indicated they somewhat or very much need help with being lonely,
- * 33% indicated they somewhat or very much need help with knowing where to get help,
- * 31% indicated they somewhat or very much need help keeping their finances in order,

Narratives

- * 27% indicated they somewhat or very much need help understanding and managing their bills,
- * 43% indicated they somewhat or very much need help understanding their medical benefits,
- * 45% indicated they somewhat or very much need help knowing which agencies to contact for help, and
- * 23% indicated they somewhat or very much need help with how to keep active and not get bored.

Collaboration is the key for RSVP, which has a long-standing relationship with over 60 non-profit institutions, working to enhance the important work being done by its partners in a wide variety of areas, including education and literacy, health, and services for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and veterans. RSVP has very strong community partnerships with a number of organizations including Connecticut AARP, local senior centers and libraries, hospitals and continuing care centers, and other community-based and non-profit organizations.

AASCC hosts a range of service programs in addition to RSVP, including the Foster Grandparents Program, Senior Companions Program, AARP Experience Corps, CHOICES, Senior Medicare Patrol, and the New Haven Education AmeriCorps VISTA Project. RSVP collaborates with these programs by helping to recruit and place volunteers, leading to the placement of high-quality older adult volunteers throughout these programs and at special events. These collaborations help support the programs while enriching RSVP, allowing the program to offer full range of experiences to volunteers. Senior Companions will also work closely with RSVP to identify and refer clients in need of Money Management services.

AASCC has an active board of directors to ensure community input. The RSVP director prepares a monthly report of recent activities and sends it to the RSVP council representative, who, in turn, reports to the board at its monthly meeting. The board includes individuals with diverse backgrounds and, when considering new members, the board makes a concerted effort to recruit diverse individuals through a nominating committee, application, interview process, etc. Through this relationship, RSVP is able to build public awareness of its programs and support for the program in the greater community.

RSVP is also able to publicize its programs and build awareness through local online and print newspaper articles, Internet resources, and through publicity gained through its partnerships with local libraries and senior centers that act as staging sites for BenefitsCheckUp. RSVP also participates

Narratives

in community events such as local health fairs to provide assistance and garner interest in the program.

Potential volunteer stations are screened to determine the social/civic impact of the proposed volunteer service. All station supervisors are sent a satisfaction survey once every other year to obtain information about the program and its effectiveness. In 2012, 77% of site supervisors said that the support provided by RSVP volunteers allowed staff more time to address the needs of their clients and 82% reported that RSVP volunteers help staff to better meet the mission of their organization.

RSVP develops new stations and jobs are continuously when community need is identified. One example is the implementation of the RSVP BenefitsCheckUp program in 2007. The 2005 AASCC needs assessment of older adults determined that 35% to 40% of eligible older adults in the greater New Haven region were unaware of benefit programs for which they qualified. RSVP addressed this issue by partnering with AARP to recruit, train, and assign volunteers to a new initiative. Using an Internet-based eligibility screening tool developed by the National Council on Aging and AARP, RSVP volunteers are able to perform benefits screenings. To date, this program has connected RSVP volunteers with approximately 350 older adults who have, as a result, been able to access resources that can increase their income and help them to continue living independently.

According to Connecticut State Department of Education Connecticut Education Data and Research (CEDaR) data, less than 50% of 1,312 third grade students, 1,197 fourth grade students, and 1,202 fifth grade students who took the Connecticut Mastery Test were at or above proficient in reading,

The importance of learning to read well starts in childhood and continues throughout life. Reading is critically important because it affects children's ability to learn in every other subject. For a child at risk of falling behind in school due to inadequate reading skills, extra attention, one-on-one tutoring, or simply being read to by an adult have all been proven to improve academic performance.

Unfortunately, regional data shows that we are not currently meeting our children's needs. Connecticut is home to the largest achievement gap in the country in 4th grade reading scores between students in low-income and those in non-low income households (ConnCAN). Overall, over 82% of 4th grade low-income students and students of color in Connecticut are below proficient in

Narratives

reading. The achievement gap is of particular concern in New Haven public elementary schools, which served 19,851 students in 2011, 88% of whom were minorities and 70.5% of whom were low income (ConnCAN).

The need for a dramatically more skilled and highly literate workforce in a global economy combined with profound changes in students' and families' life circumstances have created unprecedented demands on the educational system. To meet these demands, it is increasingly clear that the education system must change fundamentally, not just incrementally. Thus, the time to implement a comprehensive and progressive literacy plan is upon us. Connecticut's birth to grade 12 literacy plan serves to guide the strategic development for systemic and sustainable change (Connecticut Department of Education).

Placing mature, vested adults in classrooms who can focus their time and talent on struggling students one-on-one can provide the support and encouragement needed to help students build the skills and confidence necessary to not only catch up to their peers, but also help ensure that students do not become so discouraged that they lose all interest in reading well.

RSVP feels it is imperative to maintain strong relationships with New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) and literacy-oriented organizations like New Haven Reads. NHPS is supportive and encourages volunteerism and New Haven Reads offers tutor training classes several times a year to ensure that RSVP volunteers are aware of the standards, guidelines, and expectations established by the New Haven Board of Education.

As stated in Performance Measure 8.1, "Tutoring -- Public School," participating students will be selected by their teachers or reading specialists based on their current reading proficiency and are also economically disadvantaged and/or have a disability. Students will be assigned to an RSVP volunteer who will work with them individually for at least an hour a week to encourage and promote reading skills improvement.

RSVP tutoring volunteers will submit monthly timesheets signed by station supervisors indicating the time spent with students. Teachers/reading specialists will also indicate the time students spent with volunteers; therefore, clearly documenting how many students complete the 36-week tutoring

Narratives

program. Timesheets are reviewed by the project director and all data is recorded in the Volunteer Reporter database. This database enables preparation of a wide variety of reports that demonstrate the impact of the RSVP program. Examples of reports regularly used by the program include total volunteer hours and their wage value, the number of volunteers in impact assignments, and the number of volunteers sorted by service category. Administration of pre and post-tutoring assessments by teachers/reading specialists will provide qualitative data about the efficacy of the tutoring.

According to 2011 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, there were an estimated 25,950 veterans age 18 to 64 (over 5% of this age group's population) living in New Haven County in 2011. Of this age group, 2,134 (over 8%) were below the federal poverty level (FPL), and 720 (over 33%) of those below the FPL had a disability. It was estimated that there were 27,181 veterans age 65 and over (almost 23% of this age group's population) in New Haven County in 2011. Of this age group, 1,031 (almost 4%) were below the federal poverty level (FPL), and 554 (almost 54%) of those below the FPL had a disability.

"Financial literacy is desperately needed. Too many military personnel and veterans lack the knowledge on how to handle their personal finances. This can lead to financial problems and debt since for many of them; it's the first time they have made their own financial decisions." (Veterans Plus, 2013) Recognizing the importance of providing veterans with financial management skills, RSVP will provide a variety of services to enable veterans to become financially literate. Under Performance Measure 2.1, "Providing Financial Literacy and Housing Services," trained RSVP volunteers will provide money management services that match each veteran's unique needs. The services will differ for each veteran, but the schedule will primarily revolve around the established bill payment schedule and, while individual sessions will be approximately an hour, the number of sessions will depend on the capacity of the veteran to develop the skills necessary to independently manage their finances.

RSVP recognizes that veterans often feel confused and lonely and, to that end, RSVP volunteers will work with the myriad of agencies cited under Performance Measure 5.1, "Companionship -- Dept. of Veterans Affairs." Connecticut is one of 10 states chosen to pilot the Veterans Directed Home and Community Based Services Program (VDHCBS), which is housed at AASCC and designed to keep veterans in the community and out of institutional care. RSVP volunteers will work in tandem with VDBHCS and provide companionship to veterans in hospitals, congregate housing, and veterans'

Narratives

homes. Companionship will be multifaceted and may involve helping veterans through the Money Management Program, helping them identify benefits for which they qualify via BenefitsCheckUp, and/or providing transport within hospital and outpatient settings.

Recruitment and Development

RSVP of South Central Connecticut (RSVP) is able to recruit volunteers by utilizing extensive connections with local grassroots community and faith-based organizations, through the quarterly RSVP newsletter that will be sent to 66 stations and 224 volunteers and through the AASCC Web and email-based newsletter that reaches individuals and organizations throughout its 20-town service area.

Development of meaningful opportunities that impact significant community needs provide high quality experiences for RSVP volunteers. Volunteer station professional staff provides initial training and RSVP volunteers have the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and build new skills through ongoing, onsite training. Opportunities for training are also made available for RSVP staff, volunteer station supervisors, and community participation groups (i.e., the advisory council).

A benefit of RSVP is providing meaningful volunteer opportunities, including leadership opportunities, that may facilitate healthy, late-life development for newly retired adults and Baby Boomers. Volunteers are given leadership opportunities and increased responsibilities based on the needs of their individual sites. For example, volunteers serving with the Money Management and BenefitsCheckUp programs are expected to work autonomously, giving them a sense of ownership and accomplishment working with clients. In addition, Money Management volunteers have the opportunity to become Bill Payer Monitors, auditing the work of other volunteers to ensure quality of service.

As stated by AARP, healthy late-life development is predicated on having a sense of purpose and meaning in one's life. Unfortunately, for many people retirement marks the end of their sense of purpose. These individuals are more prone to physical and emotional illnesses. Finding a replacement activity that imparts a sense of meaning to the individual is an effective way to combat the potential losses of retirement. Volunteer service provides the connection between the task completed by the volunteer and the impact of the service, helping to effectively create the sense of purpose necessary to facilitate healthy, late-life development.

Narratives

Current recruitment includes the use of online recruiting tools, including Volunteer Match and the United Way of Greater New Haven Web site. Development of new programs and sites that appeal to Baby Boomers has also enabled the program to recruit more volunteers in this age range (i.e., 55 to 65). Targeted marketing/recruitment is also being used; RSVP have partnered with AARP to recruit appropriate volunteers for the BenefitsCheckUp program and Money Management programs.

Future plans include the use of additional online recruitment through a link to RSVP on AASCC's Web site and by using the "Web Assistant" feature that is part of the Volunteer Solutions database. This feature will allow potential new volunteers to complete applications online as well as permitting volunteers to submit monthly timesheets electronically.

RSVP Volunteers will be recognized for their service hours through birthday cards, gift cards, and acknowledgement during the holiday season. Throughout the year, contact will be maintained with all volunteers and stations through the RSVP newsletter, regular visits to volunteers at their work sites, birthday cards, correspondence to both active and inactive volunteers, and through telephone conversations and/or email. Other volunteer development and appreciation activities will be developed throughout the year, based on feedback from sites and volunteers. Through communication with RSVP staff and these activities, RSVP is able to add an additional level of social and emotional support to all of its volunteers.

Volunteers are also acknowledged by their sites and become attached to the people with whom they work, forming a corps of dedicated volunteers that operate throughout the community. In addition, volunteers serving with the Money Management and BenefitsCheckUp programs form cohort groups from the first training that are nurtured through ongoing emails and biannual in-services where they get together to share their experiences, reflect on their service, and build new skills.

Program Management

RSVP staff determines the skills and interests of possible RSVP candidates for volunteer stations and new projects through the completion of a volunteer enrollment form and an interview. This process ensures a high quality experience for prospective volunteers. RSVP is based on sustained volunteer placements: appropriate candidates are offered jobs where there is potential for leadership, growth, and support of community needs. New volunteer stations and projects are selected only if they offer meaningful volunteer opportunities that impact community needs and are willing to support the

Narratives

requirements of CNCS. Volunteer stations are reviewed annually to insure that the majority of all volunteers are involved in assignments that impact community needs.

RSVP volunteers must submit monthly timesheets signed by both the volunteer and the station supervisor; timesheets are reviewed by the project manager and all data is recorded in the Volunteer Reporter database. This database allows for the generation of a variety of reports that demonstrate the impact of RSVP. Examples of reports regularly used by the program include total volunteer hours and their wage value, the number of volunteers in impact assignments, and the number of volunteers sorted by service category.

To assess the quality and effectiveness of RSVP, all active volunteers are asked to complete a general satisfaction survey once every other year. In 2012, the annual volunteer survey results revealed that 85% of the volunteers felt they were making a contribution to the community, 99% felt either satisfied or very satisfied about their volunteer experience, and 71% felt their skills, talents, and abilities were being well-used.

RSVP assessment also includes formal feedback from several sources that help RSVP staff to continually improve and modify the program. Program accomplishments and effectiveness will be assessed annually by AASCC, the Connecticut Department of Social Services, and the Corporation for National and Community Service. AASCC's Advisory Council conducts site visits annually to ensure programmatic quality, interviewing site supervisors and volunteers to assess accomplishments and results in line with the program's work plan and Agency's goals. In addition to site visits, the Project Director submits monthly reports to the AASCC's Board of Directors and Advisory Council to ensure ongoing programmatic success and continuous improvement.

Additional resources that are secured to enhance the RSVP program include:

- * In kind space and publicity from volunteer stations.
- * In kind publicity and volunteer recruitment through Connecticut AARP, the AASCC newsletter, and volunteer stations.
- * In-kind support and participation from the Experience Corps program members.
- * Training and support materials from AARP (BenefitsCheckUp and Money Management) and the West Haven VA Medical Center

Narratives

Additional resources are tracked by the Project Director and managed by the AASCC following all generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). AASCC currently manages federal grants from the CNCS in support of RSVP, FGP, SCP and AmeriCorps. AASCC's President & CEO has over 20 years senior level accounting and finance experience at both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. The Finance Director, who reports to the President & CEO, has a bachelor's degree in accounting, an MBA, and 12 years' experience in non-profit accounting and reporting. AASCC has been fully compliant in meeting all required aspects of grant management.

Organizational Capability

AASCC serves a 20-town region in greater New Haven and the lower Naugatuck Valley, oversees an almost \$45 million budget and employs 145 staff, and collaborates with four other regional agencies on aging to serve the needs of older adults and individuals with disabilities in Connecticut. AASCC has sponsored RSVP of South Central CT since 1990.

In addition to helping older adults and individuals with disabilities with financial literacy and benefits assistance through a continuum of services, AASCC has sponsored the Veterans Directed Home and Community-Based Service Program since 2010, which provides care management services to veterans referred by the VA.

AASCC follows all generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) and currently manages federal grants from the CNCS in support of RSVP, FGP, SCP, and AmeriCorps. AASCC's President & CEO has over 20 years of senior level accounting and finance experience in non-profit and for-profit sector. The Finance Director has a B.A. in accounting, an MBA, and 12 years of experience in non-profit accounting and reporting. AASCC has been fully compliant in meeting all required aspects of grant management.

The RSVP staff includes a new director (30 hours/week) and a new part-time (15 hours/week) program specialist. The RSVP Director has been with AASCC since 2005 and has extensive experience working in non-profits, particularly with older adults and individuals with cognitive disabilities. Her time at AASCC has provided more extensive exposure to volunteer management and identification of and viable solutions to the needs of communities served. Her previous work experiences focused on the management of outcome-based, goal-oriented programs that enhanced the lives of participants,

Narratives

including staff and volunteers, and provided adults with cognitive impairments with the opportunity to lead more self-directed, independent lives. The RSVP Program Specialist began working at AASCC in September 2013. She has spent the majority of her career in the non-profit sector working with community-based, culturally diverse physical and mental health programs. Early in her career she served in the Peace Corps and, prior to joining AASCC, directed a nationwide foster grandparent program for Save the Children. She has a bachelor's degree from Middlebury College and recently completed a master's degree in social work at New York University.

AASCC is able to provide all necessary facilities, equipment, and supplies for the successful implementation of the RSVP program. Computers, phones, Internet, and the use of fax, copy machines, and projector for presentations are provided to staff and any volunteers. Supplies are ordered by the AASCC receptionist based on needs of the program. Personnel support is provided by the human resources director and management team. All procedures, including those regarding grievances and travel procedures, are outlined in the employee orientation handbook.

The RSVP director reports directly to the director of the Volunteer and Training Department (VAT). The VAT director is responsible for RSVP, Foster Grandparents Program, Senior Companions Program, Experience Corps of Greater New Haven, and New Haven Education AmeriCorps VISTA Project all of which are impact-based programs; and also oversees the Senior Community Service Employment Program. The VAT director has been employed by the AASCC for over 30 years.

AASCC is monitored annually by the Connecticut Department of Social Services. In addition, AASCC is overseen by a volunteer Board of Directors and is guided by an Advisory Council. These groups meet monthly to assess AASCC operations and programs, including RSVP, to ensure best practice and continual improvement towards the Agency's goals.

In addition to CNCS and internal review, RSVP is evaluated by:

* AASCC Advisory Council: Serving the entire agency, the advisory council provides perspectives and assistance from individuals in the larger community, and each agency department is represented on the council. The Advisory Council is responsible for conducting an annual review of the program, including visits to RSVP sites.

* Connecticut Department of Social Services

Narratives

* Volunteer Station Supervisors: In 2012, 76.5% of site supervisors said that the support provided by RSVP volunteers allowed staff more time to address the needs of their clients and 82.4% reported that RSVP volunteers help staff better meet the mission of the organization.

The RSVP Project Director submits monthly reports to AASCC's Board of Directors and Advisory Council, and the Advisory Council performs annual site visits to evaluate progress towards RSVP's work plan and overall programmatic quality. The feedback received from these evaluations, in addition to site and volunteer survey results, helps the staff of RSVP to continuously improve and modify the program.

Other

n/a

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

n/a