

Tri - State Summit on Aging

April 1, 2016

Upper Valley Community Nurse Project

Community Nurse of Thetford

What is the project attempting to address?

The medical care management needs of frail elders and others living independently with increasingly challenging health and wellness issues.

How did it get started?

A group of concerned nurses and others in Thetford met to discuss the possible role of a nurse in our town to address the needs of the 10% of our population over the age of 65 and others who may find themselves isolated after an illness/hospitalization or with an ongoing disability and wish to remain living independently in their own homes. The project was initially organized with the assistance and support of the Upper Valley Community Nurse Project and modeled after the parish/community nurse model described in their presentation

How is it funded?

Currently the project is funded exclusively by private/grant donations but there is a plan to ask the town for an ongoing appropriation in the next fiscal year

Are there volunteer roles in the project?

There is certainly a need for volunteers especially for transportation and household chores but these roles are currently managed by the Thetford Elder Network as well as church and neighbor support. There is currently no formal volunteer role within the community nurse project.

What outcomes have you seen?

Our nurse has only been seeing clients for 2 months. She currently has 9 active clients. Outcomes have not been measured (although a tool has been developed) but she has already seen better adherence to medications and more socialization.

Where have the glitches come into play?

1. Initially we had trouble finding a "home" in our town. Several town agencies were supportive but did not want to add the responsibilities for and supervision of a nurse to their activities. The town government was supportive but made it clear that there was no money for a nurse. As a group we felt that a direct association with a church might limit our activities to the church's congregation and we wanted to offer services to the entire town.

This lack of a sponsoring entity limited our ability to offer the nurse an “ independent contractor” position. We finally formed a simple nonprofit corporation with a 6 member board and hired the nurse as an employee of the corporation. This required us to understand and comply with the state rules for employees including unemployment insurance and WC. Fortunately, bookkeeping services have been donated by a local business which allows the board to maintain its oversight capacity and avoid day to day financial and bureaucratic activities.

2. We anticipated that finding a nurse meeting both the educational and experience criteria would be an issue. Happily, it was not as a qualified candidate stepped up almost immediately.

How are older adults responding to the project?

So far there is enthusiastic support for the project with new referrals coming in weekly

How long did it take to get things up and running?

2 1/2 years of frequent meetings, countless emails, interviews with many interested parties, several appearances at select board meetings, several discussions with the Vermont Department of labor, meetings with lawyers, insurances agents and with our fiscal agent.

Did the project require support of an existing organization? What roles does that play?

Currently we have the support of the Ompompanoosuc Community Trust, a 501c3 organization who functions as our fiscal agent by providing a conduit through which donations are made to our project. They have also been of assistance in fund raising.

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