

Testimony of Denise Niese
Executive Director, Wood County Committee on Aging, Inc.
before the House Education and the Workforce Subcommittee
on Higher Education and Workforce Training
February 11, 2014

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Kline, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Hinojosa, and subcommittee members, on behalf of the Governing Board and older adults served by the Wood County Committee on Aging (WCCOA), I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee on the important issue of the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act. I am Denise Niese, Executive Director of the Wood County Committee on Aging, a self-incorporated non-profit organization with the mission to provide older adults with services and programs which empower them to remain independent and improve the quality of their lives. Our service area is located in Ohio's 5th District, represented by Congressman Robert Latta.

As a 501(c)(3), a self-incorporated non-profit, the corporate powers, property, and affairs of WCCOA are vested in, exercised, conducted, and controlled by the Governing Board. This Governing Board operates with a membership of 35. These members are representative of the entirety of Wood County and include liaisons to the Wood County Job and Family Services, Health District, Board of Developmental Disabilities, Alcohol Addictions and Mental Health Services Board, Social Security Administration and Bowling Green State University. While this is a large group, it is a working Board. With nine (9) committees with assigned responsibilities, they make recommendations to the full Board for action. The philosophy of this Governing Board is that "committees propose and the Governing Board disposes". Along with this Governing Board, we work closely with County Government keeping them apprised of activities of this organization.

The Wood County Committee on Aging operates seven (7) designated multipurpose senior centers throughout Wood County, Ohio, and a centrally located Production Kitchen from which all meals for the senior centers and home-delivered clients are prepared. With this designation we are responsible for the planning, development and implementation of services for older adults. As a direct service provider at the local level, WCCOA works closely with our local Area Agency on Aging (Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio) to provide comprehensive and coordinated service systems to serve older individuals as defined in the Area Plans. While entities such as WCCOA are in the local communities delivering programs and services, we look to the Area Agency for information and technical assistance to assist the aging network to best serve our client base. Since 1977 WCCOA has developed programs and services ranging from medical escort and adult day care to recreation and exercise to congregate and home-delivered meals. In 2013, WCCOA served more than 6500 unduplicated individuals. In 1999 the WCCOA became the first Senior Center in the State of Ohio (25th Nationally) to receive accreditation by the National Council on Aging / National Institute of Senior Centers. This accreditation recognizes the professionalism

and structure of this organization as well as our programs and services. WCCOA has been successful in maintaining our national accreditation status by successfully completing the process in 2006 and 2011.

Without a doubt, the Older Americans Act (OAA) has been instrumental in the creation of a wide array of programs and services intended to enhance the well-being of older adults. This chief piece of legislation was designed to be the focal point of federal government policy on aging and it established the Administration on Aging, state units on aging, and area agencies on aging. The programs and services provided through the OAA are needed now more than ever before as the “graying of the population” is most evident with 10,000 Baby Boomers turning 65 each day.

How Do Older American Act Funds Leverage Local Dollars

In 1977, the operating budget of the Wood County Committee on Aging, Inc., was \$42,089, which included \$25,928 in Older Americans Act funds (61.6% of the total budget). The first award of Title III was made to the organization in 1977 to fund supportive services and nutrition at two locations in Wood County (Bowling Green and Rossford). In 2014, Older Americans Act funds awarded to the WCCOA total \$257,282 of our projected revenues of \$2,711,610 (9% of our total budget).

These funds, which are administered through our local Area Agency on Aging, support direct costs associated with congregate meals (C-1), home-delivered meals (C-2) \$187,612 (with 133% cash match), and Medical Escort (Transportation 9) and Minor Home Repair \$69,671 (with 100% cash and in-kind match). An additional \$62,860 is provided through NSIP and \$19,386 from Ohio Senior Community Service Block Grants.

The remaining 91% of our operating budget is comprised of the following sources:

- 74% Senior Services Levy (.7 mil county-wide property tax passed 11/2011 by 69.32% of vote)
- 8.4% Program Income (donations for meals)
- 5% Medicaid Waiver contract for medical transportation and home-delivered meals
- 3.6% Cost Share contributions, program fees, sponsorships, private grants, and other miscellaneous income

As you can see, the majority of funding for programs and services in Wood County, Ohio, is non-federal.

In looking at each component of the Older Americans Act, you can truly appreciate the impact that each title can make in local communities. With this structure from the federal level, with guidelines and accountability, the Older Americans Act also allows for States, local Area Agencies on Aging, and providers such as WCCOA, to have the flexibility to develop and implement programs and services that meet the needs of our local constituency. The credibility that these regulations provide enables WCCOA to demonstrate the effectiveness and accountability of these services to our Board of County Commissioners and to the voters of Wood County, who have supported County-wide senior services funds through the property tax levy since 1986.

While WCCOA receives Older Americans Act funding only to supplement nutrition services (26,320 congregate and 35,663 home-delivered meals annually), along with 371 home-delivered meal assessments, and transportation (2,142 units annually), WCCOA utilizes standards defined in the OAA for non-funded programs and services.

One of the most positive aspects of a multipurpose senior center is the ability to provide the “*front door*” for services for older adults in their community. Senior Centers are an inviting presence where older adults find a “one stop shop” for services and resources. In a non-threatening, non-institutional environment, we can assist with a multitude of issues and concerns. If staff cannot solve the situation directly, we can assist in connecting the senior (or their family and/or caregiver) with the appropriate entity.

The flexibility to collaborate with businesses, corporations, K-12 schools (including career centers), institutions of higher learning, and other community organizations allows us to expand our programs and services to meet the needs of our constituency. WCCOA is constantly exploring our options to meet the needs of our older adults while being frugal with our resources.

At our local level these offerings and collaborations include:

- **Delay the Disease*** - “Delay the Disease” is a fitness program designed to empower people with Parkinson’s Disease (PD) by optimizing their physical function and helping to delay the progression of symptoms.
- **Matter of Balance*** – Matter of Balance emphasizes practical strategies to reduce fear of falling and increase activity levels. Participants learn to view falls and fear of falling as controllable, set realistic goals to increase activity, change their environment to reduce fall risk factors, and exercise to increase strength and balance.
- **Club Fit** – This is a local initiative which meets the needs of older adults who want to remain healthy and flexible through a 1-hour exercise session which focuses on flexibility with light weight training. *This offering is a collaboration between WCCOA and 5 local nursing facilities. The facilities provide their Physical Therapist/Occupational Therapist to lead the exercise. As an outreach effort for the rehab units of these facilities, these sessions are offered at no cost to the participants.*
- **Chronic Disease Self-Management – Diabetes*** - Subjects covered include: 1) techniques to deal with the symptoms of diabetes, fatigue, pain, hyper/hypoglycemia, stress, and emotional problems such as depression, anger, fear and frustration; 2) appropriate exercise for maintaining and improving strength and endurance; 3) healthy eating; 4) appropriate use of medication; and 5) working more effectively with health care providers. Participants will make weekly action plans, share experiences, and help each other to solve problems they encounter in creating and carrying out their self-management program. *This program is provided locally by staff from our Area Agency on Aging.*
- **Healthy IDEAS*** - Healthy IDEAS is a depression self-management program that includes screening and assessment, education for clients and family caregivers,

referral and linkages to appropriate health professionals, and behavioral activation. *This program was developed by Baylor College of Medicine and was made available through grant funding provided by the Toledo Community Foundation.*

- **Project LifeSaver** - is an active response to the problem of locating people who may not be able to find their way home – before they become victims. The average rescue time is less than 30 minutes. A lost person with any kind of dementia or a developmental disability is unaware of his or her situation. They do not call out for help and do not respond to people calling out to them. The Project Lifesaver team is trained to approach a person with Alzheimer's disease or a developmental disability, gain their trust, and put them at ease for the trip home. *This is a collaborative project with the Wood County Sheriff's Office.*
- **Durable Medical Equipment Loans** – WCCOA has a variety of assistance equipment available for loan to 60+ residents of Wood County. Available equipment may include, but is not limited to: Grab Bars, Bed and Toilet Rails, Commodes, Canes and Quad Canes, Walkers, Crutches, Wheelchairs (6 week loan limit), Shower Seats, Kitchen Seats, Transfer Boards, Stepstools, Portable Ramps, There is no charge for the use of this equipment, but we do accept monetary donations.
- **OSHIIP** – Provides information and assistance specifically for those enrolled or eligible for Medicare. We will answer your questions about any of the following matters: Medicare health coverage for seniors and for people under age 65 with disabilities, Medicare prescription drug plans, Medicare Advantage Plans (example: HMOs and PPOs), Medicare supplemental insurance, Financial assistance programs for people with limited income, and Long-term care insurance.
- **Non-Emergency Medical Transportation / Escort** - The Title III B funds received by the WCCOA are used to supplement local funds for transportation of older adults to medical appointments, grocery shopping and into their local Senior Center. A unique component of the transportation is that we provide door through door service. What this means is that whether the older adult is being transported for a medical appointment (lab work, a doctor appointment, dialysis, etc.), or coming into a multipurpose senior center for lunch, the driver will assist them from their threshold into the vehicle and then into their destination. The level of assistance is in keeping with the need and choice of the older adult.

*Denotes an evidence-based program

Local Efforts which enable expansion of services

Nutrition services are by far the largest program operated by the WCCOA. And it continues to grow in participants for both the congregate and home-delivered meals service. We are able to continue to meet the demand through use of volunteers to assist in the production kitchen as well as to deliver meals to our "in-town routes".

In 2004 WCCOA was serving an average of 263 congregate and 304 home-delivered meals per day (total 567) and identified that WCCOA was nearing capacity for meal production at the 400 square foot kitchen in our Bowling Green location where all meals

for 5 seniors centers and home-delivered meals were prepared (since 1981). It was anticipated that within 3 years it would be necessary to create a waiting list for meals, not because of funding but due to capacity.

It was at that point the WCCOA Governing Board members and administrative staff approached our then State Senator Randy Gardner and then State Representative Bob Latta for consideration of a capital funding project as part of the SFY 2004/05 State of Ohio Capital Budget. State Senator Gardner and State Representative Latta were successful in securing \$500,000 for use toward this project. Over the course of 2005, the WCCOA Governing Board, staff and the community raised an additional \$800,000. to fund the balance of the project. The Wood County Board of County Commissioners provided the property where the kitchen would be located. Ground was broken March 31, 2006, and the new 5400 square foot, state of the art Production Kitchen went into operation on January 3, 2007. Since that time average daily meals produced are at 850+ and WCCOA has never had to resort to a waiting list for nutrition services.

Since 2007, we have continued to develop meals which comply and exceed standards of the OAA. Not only are we licensed and inspected by our local health district for food service, we are also inspected and licensed by the Ohio Department of Agriculture. With the Ohio Department of Agriculture licensure and inspection, including compliance with the Seafood HACCP requirement in order to serve dishes such as tuna salad and tuna noodle casserole, we are also licensed to prepare, package and freeze meals prepared in this production kitchen. This means that we are able to prepare frozen meals for our clients who require 2 meals per day and weekend meals. When compared to commercially prepared meals, our locally produced meals are lower in sodium and can be made at a lower unit cost.

A component of the capital budget funds requires a State fiscal agent to serve as the conduit for the State money for the project. We were fortunate that our community partner, the Bowling Green State University, agreed to be the fiscal agent for processing the State funds. They generously allowed the percentage set aside for their administrative costs to be used for the building project. Additionally, the State funds required the development of a formal agreement, a "joint use agreement", between the WCCOA and BGSU. This official agreement is in place for a 15-year period (through 2022). This official relationship has also benefitted BGSU greatly as the placement of internships, capstone projects, and research by graduate and doctoral candidates has drastically increased.

In 2013, the Wood County Committee on Aging served 186,510 meals to 3,017 older adults throughout the County. It should be noted that 749 of these people are home-delivered meal clients (who received 96,037 meals, 57% of the total served).

WCCOA Social Services Department processes all Home-delivered Meal (HDM) intakes. When staff receives a call about the meals, we explain the program and our criteria for the meals to see if the client is eligible. The client must be 60 years of age or

over, live in Wood County and be considered “homebound” (meaning they do not leave the house under normal circumstances or without assistance from others). A spouse of an eligible client may also be on our meal program as a caregiver.

If the client meets eligibility, we then collect the following information on the assessment form: if the client is a diabetic (they will get a sugar free dessert), client’s name, DOB, age, street address, city, zip, gender, phone number, homebound status, last 4 digits of social security number, number of persons in household, primary care physician, and two emergency contacts. We also write in the date we are registering them and who referred them to us.

Once we take a new HDM start, we are able to start delivering them the meals within 2 business days. We are able to begin services sooner if there is an emergency. We also collect from the client any pertinent directions and/or descriptions of the house or what door to use for the driver delivering the meals.

We then determine if the client is going to get 5 hot meals or 5 hot and 2 frozen meals for the weekends. Frozen meals are available upon request. We will also ask the client for a brief health history.

All clients are reassessed annually. If it is determined that situations have changed in the household during the course of the year, staff will reassess on more frequent intervals.

In addition to receiving a hot lunch Monday through Friday, each client also benefits from a mid-day safety check from our home-delivered meal drivers. In many instances, in our rural County, the home-delivered meal driver is their only face-to-face contact with someone on a regular basis.

Real Life Impact

The support of the Older Americans Act has a significant impact on the lives of the older adults served by the Wood County Committee on Aging. We measure impact with established standards and measurements for services and annual monitoring conducted by the Area Agency on Aging, and pre- and post-testing that we conduct for the evidence-based programs. We also use other methods, such as the client satisfaction evaluations and questionnaires completed by the participants to measure impact and client satisfaction. We also have tools to survey for programming ideas and for modifications. There are multiple layers of assessment for programs and services provided by multipurpose senior centers.

Following are two real life examples of how we are making a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable clients:

Just last week, on Monday, February 3, 2014, at 12:30 pm, our driver Nikki arrived at a residence in Luckey, Ohio, to find our client on the floor. The 77 year old widow, who lives alone, had fallen during the morning and was unable to get up or to a phone. She

was alert when Nikki arrived and “911” was called. Staff waited with the client until the ambulance arrived and transported the client to the hospital. While awaiting the ambulance, Nikki contacted her supervisor who in turn alerted the client’s daughter of the situation, and the daughter was able to meet her mother at the hospital. These situations are the ones with the positive outcome. Clients in this situation often comment that they were not afraid because they know their home-delivered meal driver would be coming to their door soon.

There is also the potential for home-delivered meal drivers to find a client who has expired during the night. As family members have shared with us, at least “Mom” was found quickly. In situations like this we work with the Wood County Sheriff’s office to summon the coroner and notify the family.

Summary

As the Reauthorization process of the Older Americans Act moves forward, I would encourage Congress to strive to maintain the flexibility that is an integral part of the success of the Act. The flexibility permits service providers such as WCCOA to meet the unique needs of our communities while maintaining the high standards set by the Act.

In honoring the genuineness of the Older Americans Act of 1965, focus on opportunities for the Older Americans Act to be used as the seed money for programs that will allow service providers to leverage other dollars to further develop services to meet the needs of the older adults in their communities.

As I developed this testimony, I have had an opportunity to reflect upon the legacies of Lyle Fletcher, Harold Siek, Ann Baty, Nellie Garner, and other visionary community members who identified the need for organized and comprehensive programs for the older adults of Wood County back in 1973.

As this sub-committee begins the process of the Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, which will affect seniors and their families throughout our Country. I hope to inspire you to consider the legacy that you will impart to the senior citizens of today and those that will age into our Older Americans Act programs over the life of this reauthorization.