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Some Observations

By Jonathan Lavin
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Jonathan Lavin

As I prepare to retire from AgeOptions, I am struck by the opportunity we offer to the community providers who are the heart of our service to suburban Cook County older persons. The Area Agency on Aging is the most accessible and interested organization for advocating and supporting those who are delivering services at the community and home care levels.

We realize that participation and involvement in this network has a cost. It requires a variety of contacts, agreements and active involvement with other organizations in the communities. It means that local resources must be contributed to the program in order to obtain the federal and state dollars administered by the Area Agency on Aging. It means participating in provider meetings and being asked regularly to look in on your clients and offer assistance when there are weather or other types of disasters. It means that the AgeOptions monitoring staff will measure you against all the assurances and requirements that exist in a notice of grant award.

The Older Americans Act was amended in 1973 to include the national aging network. The legislation called for regional involvement, community service delivery and maximum participation of older persons and their caregivers. That plan then and now is the blueprint for all area agencies on aging. It envisions opportunities to conduct research and demonstration programs, support services that are meaningful to communities, engage staff to involve

community organizations in every program and service contemplated, and it is a commitment to advocacy for the best environment and service system possible for older residents.

This is a design that celebrates leadership and recognizes champions within the organization and throughout the region. This type of network is not built around one program with only payment relationships. It is a wide umbrella of commitment by community organizations, government and older persons to prepare for the future and honor the contributions and offer support to our elders. It was the reason that in 1983 the home care program in Illinois was moved from the then-Illinois Department of Public Aid to the cabinet level Illinois Department on Aging with authority to apply for Medicaid waivers and offer a full range of support for those who require home and adult day care.

For many of the agencies participating in Older Americans Act programs, the area agency on aging has offered opportunities to be involved in the Community Care Program, Adult Protective Services, Caregiver Support, Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Benefits Access and other supported programs that challenge and enrich the network. It has protested when problems are presented that inhibit the ability to deliver services (e.g. a dysfunctional reporting system, time consuming requirements, etc.)

I urge all of us, AgeOptions and the more than 50 community agencies that receive our funding, to make our provider relationship a staple of planning and advocacy efforts. Service, unmet needs, policy concerns and options for how we deliver our services can be discussed and visualized during every provider meeting. There can be time for engaging and challenging each other, learning and identifying areas where we can jointly develop and improve.

The Diversity and Inclusion Day at Dominican University last year was an excellent example of the power of sharing and learning together. The HR Source Recruitment and Retention seminar this past spring offered fresh and important information to all in attendance. With these types of respectful and dynamic relationships, suburban Cook County communities will benefit by seeing outcomes that include the absolute best efforts, high quality services and success.

As Diane Slezak assumes the CEO position at AgeOptions, I believe the goals, values and principles we share will be ratified and our capacity and capabilities increased. We have an

outstanding history, great people in our network and tremendous potential to celebrate leadership and enjoy opportunities to be the best service system imaginable for our clients. Keep up the excellent work and thank you!

Jon