



Celebrating Seniors

Semi-Annual Report

April 19, 2022

The goal of the Ionia County Commission on Aging is to strengthen the well-being of all Ionia County Senior Citizens and to be the cornerstone of support services for their continued independence.

Ionia County Commission on Aging

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Mid-Year Update ICCOA Operations and Services

Thank you for this opportunity to share an update on the operations and services of the Ionia County Commission on Aging. We are six months into our new fiscal year and welcome this opportunity to review agency goals for fiscal year 2022. This also offers us the chance to make any needed course corrections in order to better serve our clients.

The COVID pandemic continues to have a real impact on our agency, operations and services. At this stage, I feel the major effect is on our ability to hire and retain staff and to recruit volunteers, a key component of service delivery for our agency. We have had several staff and volunteers retire over the last 2 years. Other staff are looking to work reduced schedules, sometimes looking to spend more time with family, on vacation, or pursuing other pursuits. The workforce our agency has relied on for many decades, mainly seniors themselves, is reevaluating their work life balance. As an agency that supports seniors, we support our staff in finding the right fit for them.

As we emerge from the challenge of the pandemic, we're looking to retain what we've learned along the way, and a big part of this is to continue as an agency that is flexible, open to new ideas and opportunities, and committed to programming that is proven to support seniors remaining in the home they choose, with dignity and independence.

Following is an update on some of our goals we have yet to achieve for FY 2022 , as identified in our October 2021 Semi-Annual Report.

Goals achieved:

- Senior Center Services relaunched in Ionia
- In-person Congregate Meal Service relaunched in Ionia
- Increased Meals on Wheels delivery from 3 to 4 days per week
- Relaunch of Healthy Aging Programming at Ionia Senior Center

In the works:

- Increase Meals on Wheels delivery from 4 days to 5 per week
- Scale Congregate Meal Service back up to pre-pandemic levels at all sites

- Recruit In Home Aides and increase service delivery
- Relaunch the Making Memories Day Camp as the Blue Skies Adult Day Program
- Additional facility improvements
- Recruit, retain, HIRE!

Increase Meals on Wheels Delivery Service from 4 to 5 days a week

While we successfully increased Meals on Wheels delivery from 3 to 4 days per week in November 2021, the goal of returning to our pre-pandemic delivery schedule of a hot meal delivered 5 days-per-week has proved more elusive.

Meals on Wheels Service (MOW) is a recurring meal delivery program. A caseworker contacts a client for an assessment, determines the client's needs and based on a number of factors a client may receive up to 2 meals per day, 7 days per week.

Hot meals require delivery within 4 hours. This schedule requires a trained and dependable workforce, who must also pass stringent funding source vetting requirements. The work can be challenging both physically and emotionally.

To reach our goal, we will need to fill a part-time MOW driver position at approximately 20 hours per week and to fill the 2 vacant substitute MOW driver positions. Realistically, we should also onboard at least 2 to 3 volunteer MOW driver positions as well. We currently have no active Meals on Wheels volunteers.

Scale Up Congregate Meal Service

In-person, Congregate Meal Service has relaunched at 5 of our meals sites, once per week, and currently on an ad-hoc schedule in Portland for Congregate-to-Go meals. Again, we will need to hire additional staff to increase service levels in this area.

For our 6 meal sites, we have 7 allocated positions, of which 3 are vacant. Our 2 Ionia Site Hosts are currently filling in as MOW drivers. Our goal here will be to increase meal service days incrementally, as we hire, and have additional staff hours available.

Funding source guidelines continue to allow take-out meal service which provides welcome flexibility for both our agency and our clients. Some clients still prefer take-out meals and this

service requires fewer staff hours. We hope this option will continue into 2023 and for as long as the pandemic lingers.

For both Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals, cross-training, the flexibility of our staff and the leadership of our Nutrition Director, Lisa Insley, have helped us meet the challenge of continuing service with multiple vacant positions. However, to take it to the next level, to return to pre-pandemic service levels, and to truly meet the needs of our county, an increase in staff hours will be required.

Increase In-Home Services Delivery

For the first time since the start of the pandemic, 3 of our 4 full-time, In-Home Aide positions in this COA Department are now filled!

Having said that, with 3 aides at full-time hours, plus other part-time staff hours, we will still be only at half capacity, capable of working just 51% of allocated staff hours (approximately). Nonetheless this is an incredible improvement over 2020, when we closed the year with staff filling just 14% of allocated hours. Units submitted to AAAMW increased by almost 25% from February to March 2022 with the increase in staff hours.

We definitely feel change is moving in the right direction for this department and are we working to continue making progress. Two additional aides should return to active status by the summer and we are receiving applications and inquiries about other vacant positions.

Relaunch Making Memories Day Camp

Building back In Home Staff also figures in with our goal to re-open the Making Memories Day Camp, a low to no-cost Adult Day Program for seniors with Alzheimer's or other dementia.

Previously a collaboration between the Right Door and the Ionia County Commission on Aging, the Making Memories Day Camp was a once per week, Adult Day Program hosted at the Easton United Methodist Church. This program was discontinued when COA planned to expand to the basement of 101 West Main and launch a new program there.

Our goal has since been changed to a more modest plan, where we hope to relaunch the prior program with COA provided meals, transportation and staffing provided by In Home Aides with scheduling by our In Home Services Director.

A volunteer RN with significant experience in this area has been recruited for assessment and admission into the program. Easton United Methodist Church provides a relaxing, safe and very affordable location which has supported the goals of the program both past and present. We hope to present a completed program proposal in coming months.

I commend our In Home Services Director, Emily Higbee Gray, for tirelessly working to recruit and retain In Home Aides, to be open and enthusiastic about many outside-the-box ideas where recruiting is concerned, for enthusiastically taking on the task of staffing our proposed Adult Day Program and for her positive assistance in administering the Direct Care Worker Premium which has no doubt played a key role in building staff levels in this department.

Additional Facility Improvements

Now that renovations to our Senior Center are virtually complete, we look to make additional, important investments in our facility. These changes include new ductwork above our offices and kitchen and doing our due diligence for a kitchen renovation.

Any changes which require down time for our kitchen require extensive planning, location of alternate meal prep and staging space, and so forth. However with the first round of renovations completed, we feel it's time to start research and planning for this investment in our program and its future.

Recruit, retain, HIRE!

A recurring theme of this report, and no doubt a common theme for many county departments, is that our agency has multiple vacant positions and an acute need to hire. The other side of this issue is of course the need to value and retain our current staff. Staff who are already on board, and trained in agency policies and programs, are our most valuable asset.

In 2021, when the county raised wages up to 33% for some workers, COA adopted a more modest, alternate increase. My estimates showed that, with COA back at pre-pandemic service + employment levels, the larger, proposed increase would have been a hit of over \$250,000 annually for our agency. I saw this as unsustainable.

Instead our agency adopted an increase of 5% for staff wages, at a cost of approximately \$47,000.

I believe our agency is now able to do more, and that our employees also deserve more. For this reason, I plan to propose to the Board of Commissioners later this month that COA be allowed to increase staff wages an additional 5% as of July 1st, 2022.

This increase will still be far below what had been proposed in 2021, but will I believe make a difference as all of us see increased prices due to rising inflation. No funding will be requested from the board or the general fund for this increase. As we enter our new FY 2023 – 2025 funding cycle with AAAWM, this is in fact an ideal time to build this wage increase into increased unit reimbursement rates. I believe the increase can be offset with this additional grant funding in large part.

I hope you'll support our making this investment in our staff, our seniors and our community.

Thank you again for this opportunity to update you on some of our agency's key goals for FY 2022 and thank you as well for your support of our agency and services. I hope each of you will drop by our facility in the near future to see the changes we've made first hand and to meet some of our staff.

To a person at COA, it is our pleasure to serve our county's Senior Citizens and their families. We are proud of what we've achieved and we would like to share this accomplishment with all of you.

Carol Hanulcik
Director