



FINAL REPORT

***Warren County Congregate Nutrition Program
Priorities Project***



DIVISION OF AGING & DISABILITY SERVICES

WARREN COUNTY, NJ

February 13, 2011

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Warren County, NJ, Division of Aging & Disability Services
Congregate Nutrition Program Priorities Project

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

For 35 years, Warren County, through the Division of Aging & Disability Services (Division) has offered a Nutrition Program to its residents age 60 or over, using funding from the Federal Older Americans Act (Title III), the State of New Jersey and the County of Warren. The primary focus of the Senior Nutrition Project has been providing a hot and nutritious mid-day meal, along with round trip transportation, if needed, and limited socialization, recreation and wellness opportunities. Participants of the Nutrition Project are asked to contribute a suggested daily donation to the program. The Division also provides a successful Home Delivered Meals program, using dedicated volunteers to deliver meals; however, the home delivered meal program does not fall into the purview of this study.

THE PROBLEM

The Division has documented a dramatic decrease in resident participation over last ten years. Participation went from 688 seniors in 2006 to only 380 in 2009 and it dropped by another 25% in 2010. This small percentage of residents, 2.1% of the older population, benefits from 58%, or \$598,176, of allocated County, Federal, and State funds. The Division believes the Senior Nutrition Project may be perceived as a program exclusively dedicated to residents who are either low income or very old, or both. The Division is concerned that their valuable array of programs, information, services and resources are not reaching the majority of county residents age 60 and older who could benefit.

The County Freeholders approved this study to look at ways existing resources could be maximized to serve a broader spectrum of residents with a greater variety of activities, programs, support, and services. The County's five leased facilities for the Senior Nutrition Project are regionally located in the following areas: Belvidere, Blairstown, Hackettstown, Phillipsburg and Washington. All operate during the weekday hours from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM, but many guests arrive close to the noon time lunch and leave immediately when the meal ends, less than an hour later. Recognizing their five leased regional facilities for the Senior Nutrition Project are underutilized and could be a valuable resource used to serve many more older adults than those who currently use the existing programs, the County has sought direct input from older residents on their preferences, through this research study.

SURVEY GOALS

1. Determine program priorities of current participants of the Senior Nutrition Project
2. Determine program priorities of Warren County residents age 60 and over who DO NOT attend any of the Senior Nutrition Centers
3. Define services, activities, programs, that will attract a wider segment of the older population
4. Provide recommendations for implementation of evidence-based health, wellness, recreational, social and educational programs

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

1. Random Telephone survey of 300 Warren County residents, age 60+ who are not registered participants of the Senior Nutrition Project (This carried a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 5.6%.)
2. Written Surveys by 251 of the 380 Senior Nutrition Project participants (66%) (Surveyed in person at the Centers for those who attended in a given week and via U.S. mail for those who did not attend that week)
3. Written surveys by 44 members of the Warren Council of Seniors, representing 15 different towns in Warren County

(In those three surveys, a total of 595 residents age 60 and over responded, which is about 3% of all Warren County seniors.)

4. Researcher observation (“Secret Dining Guest”) Mingling with Participants and having lunch at all five Centers, prior to project start provided broader exposure to participants, staff, food, facilities than more limited “focus groups” would have.)

To ensure the County and the Division of Aging & Disability Services had great confidence in the results of the study, TM Consulting & Training (TMC) conducted two major surveys, one random and one “convenience,” as well as a minor “convenience” survey of seniors known to have interest in senior activities –members of senior clubs and the Warren Council of Seniors.

TMC conducted the Participant Survey in two parts, on site for those “active” members (n=178) who attended in a given week and via U.S. mail to those “inactive” members (n=73) who did not attend that same week. The random telephone survey of 300 residents age 60 or over provided a representative sample of the older population of Warren County. The combined value of these two major surveys will provide the Division adequate information to make decisions on program priorities and strategies. (The small number of respondents to the Warren Council of Seniors Survey (n=44) means that the results from that survey have less statistical value than the two larger surveys, although the results provided good comparative data. The results of the Warren Council of Seniors survey appear in the Appendix. In

the body of this report we document the two main surveys, “Nutrition Program Participant Survey” and “Random Survey.”)

One primary goal of the surveys was to have older residents identify and prioritize activities, programs, and services the Division could offer or expand at the existing Senior Nutrition Project locations. The data analysis and graphs related to these key questions on rating the importance of activities, programs and services follow below. Related questions covered level of interest respondents had in attending such an expanded program, if offered, and whether they had “any skills, crafts or ideas” they might share with other seniors at the Center.

After completing a telephone survey, TMC probed a bit on this question of “potential volunteering” as any program expansion could get very costly without maximum use of talented volunteers.

The surveys also covered basic demographic information, health and independence of respondents and their awareness of, use of and satisfaction with services offered by the Division. Copies of the two survey questionnaires appear in the Appendix of this report, while the data analysis, charts and interpretation of responses to all questions appear in the main report.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RESULTS – PARTICIPANT AND RANDOM SURVEYS

- Mean age of Senior Nutrition Project (SNP) participants is markedly older than the mean age of the random group—men, 80 to 69.5 and women, 79.5 to 72.
- 15% of the random (non-participant) respondents serve as a primary caregiver, usually for another senior
- 27% of the random respondents work part or full-time and are less likely to use a Center
- 40% of the SNP participants need transportation, while only 11% of random, non-participants need transportation to a center
- 46% SNP participants are unaware of the range of programs and resources the County offers while 62% of the random (non-participant) respondents are unaware
- Seniors who have used County programs and services, other than the Nutrition Centers, are satisfied. 87% of SNP participants were either “very satisfied, satisfied or somewhat satisfied” while 98% of the random respondents were “very satisfied, satisfied or somewhat satisfied.” **(The number of respondents to this question was low but their satisfaction level was very high.)**
- All those surveyed have high interest in almost all possible new programs
- Younger seniors, those in the Random Survey, are less interested in meals and more interested in programs and activities, while the SNP participants rated the availability of a nutritious meal as second highest in importance among all the services, programs and activities listed.
- Access to information on ALL programs, resources and services for seniors is the #1 priority for respondents in both Participant and Random Surveys.

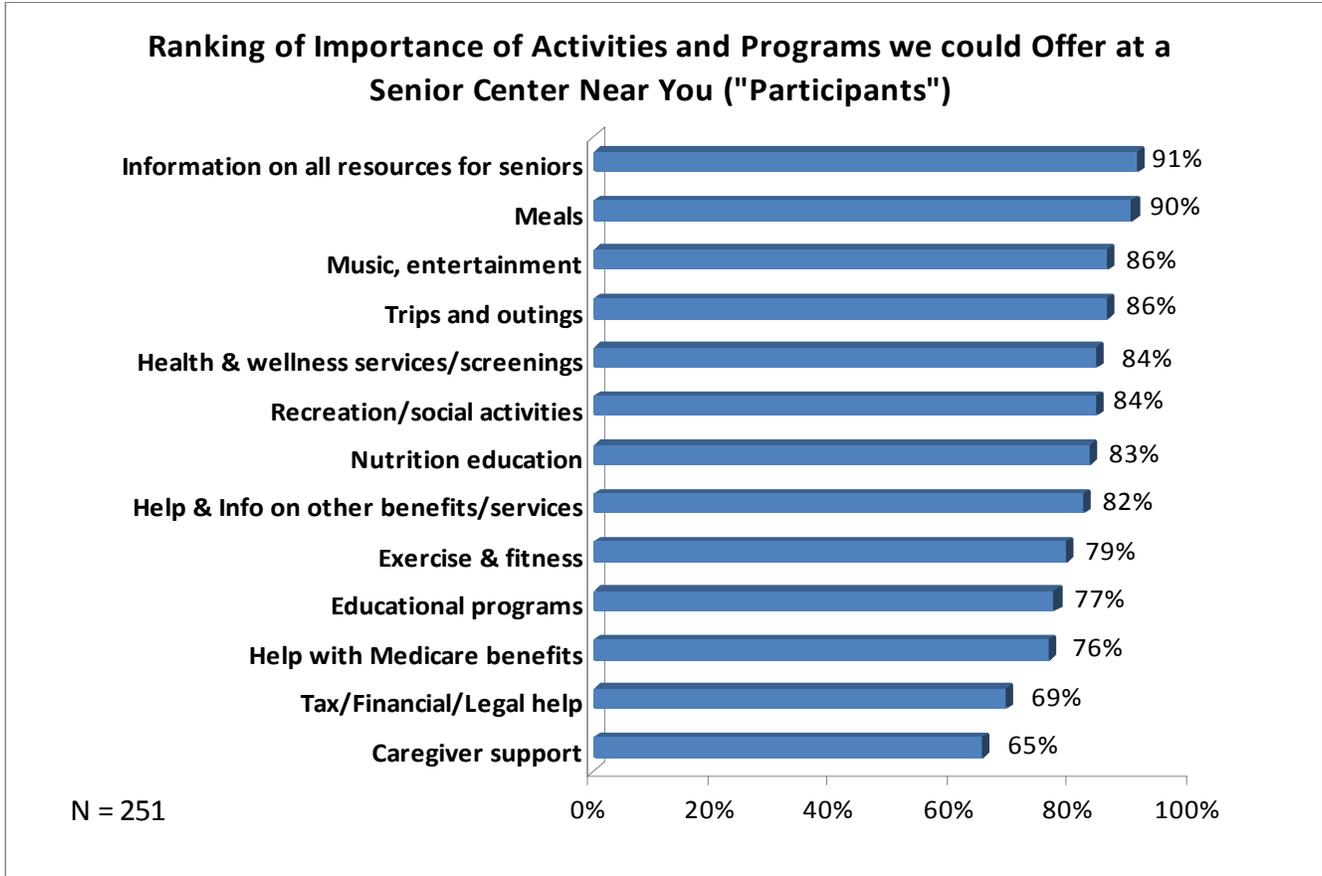
- If the County offers these newly identified programs and activities, 92% of the SNP participants would go “sometimes, often, or in the future;” 78% of the random sample would use a Center with such programs and activities now, if available, or in the future
- 27% of SNP participants and 37% of the random sample would offer their “skills, crafts or ideas” as a volunteer at a Center (This means that in the general population of County residents age 60 and over, there are thousands of potential valuable volunteers.)

The two following charts are among the most important of the dozens that appear in the full report. They summarize the responses of older residents who participated in this study on the topic of activities or programs they believe are important.

Chart # 1: Senior Nutrition Project Participant Survey - 251 written survey responses

Chart # 2: Random Telephone Survey – 300 responses from Non-Senior Nutrition Project Participants

PLEASE RATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ACTIVITIES OR PROGRAMS THAT WE COULD OFFER AT A SENIOR CENTER NEAR YOU. Question 13, Participant Survey

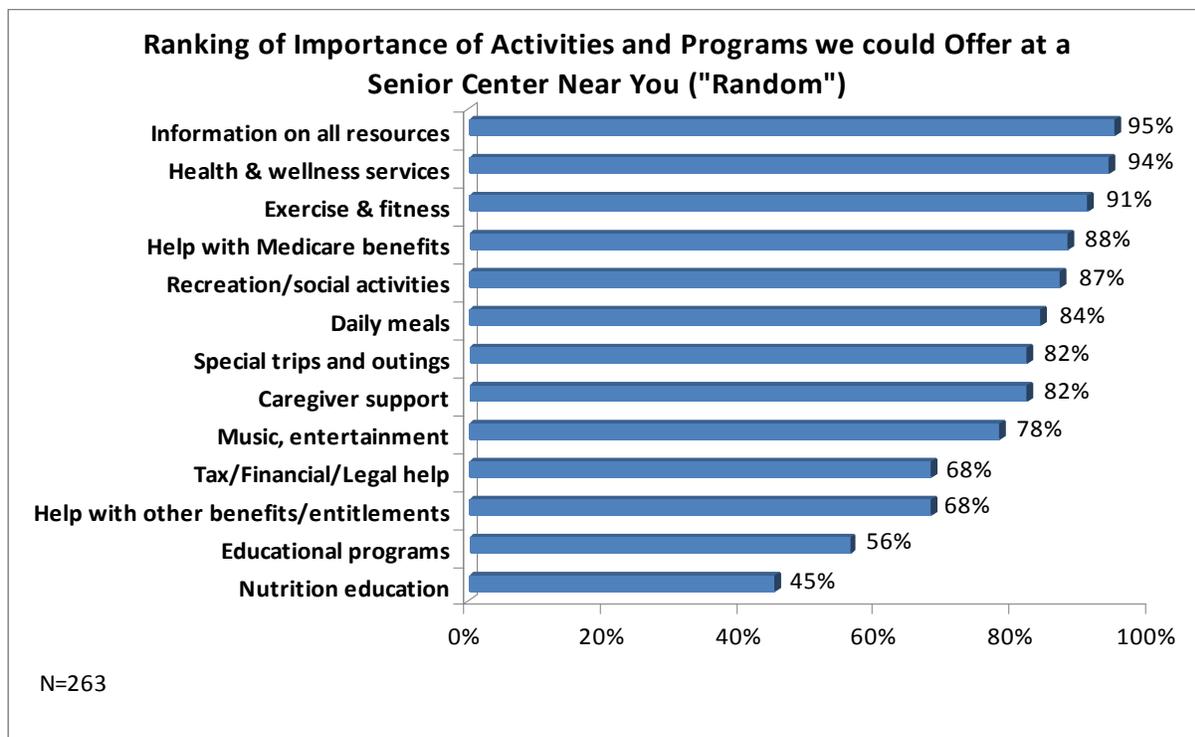


Very Important = 5, Important = 4, Somewhat Important = 3, Somewhat Unimportant = 2, Not Important = 1

Note: "Importance" in the chart represents % of respondents answering "Very Important, Important or Somewhat Important." For example, 91% rated "Information on all resources for seniors" important which means that 91% of all respondents picked this activity or program to be either "Very Important, Important or Somewhat Important."

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PLEASE RATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ACTIVITIES OR PROGRAMS THAT WE COULD OFFER AT A SENIOR CENTER NEAR YOU. Question 12, Random Survey



Very Important = 5, Important = 4, Somewhat Important = 3, Somewhat Unimportant = 2, Not Important = 1

Note: "Importance" in the chart represents % of respondents answering "Very Important/Important/Somewhat Important." For example, 95% rated "Information on all Resources" important means that 95% of all respondents picked this activity/program to be either "Very Important, Important or Somewhat Important."

This key question provided a good deal of data but the essence of the responses shows:

A. In both major surveys, as in the Warren Council of Seniors Survey, residents gave a high level of importance to almost all of the services/activities/programs. In the Random survey, many respondents specifically, emphatically stated, "They are ALL important, offer them all!" However, **"Information about all programs and resources for seniors" was rated number one in importance in the Participant and Random Surveys.**

B. The level of importance given to the programs and activities didn't vary enough to set specific scheduling priorities for program A over B over C.

C. The more “active, engaged” Warren Council of Seniors respondents and to a lesser extent the Random respondents, saw a daily hot meal as much less important than most other activities and programs. They are representative of the guests who will come for an excellent program and leave.

D. Education in general (56% in Random) and specifically nutritional education (45% in Random) did not rank high in importance.

E. The answers to this question serve as a mandate that the residents of Warren County want a dynamic, comprehensive, stimulating senior center accessible to them. All of the narrative comments provided by the respondents appear in the Appendix of this study and strongly support the data on this “mandate.”

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS -- based solely on the data and narrative comments offered by respondents in the surveys

- Improve the flow of information on all programs, activities, services, and resources relevant to older residents
- Improve the quality of the food served at the Nutrition Centers (Note: a new food vendor, NuWay, begins serving the County Nutrition Centers on January 3, 2011.)
- Increase and improve transportation services available to older residents
- Offer most of the activities and programs listed in the survey
- Use volunteer services heavily, starting with the individuals identified in the random survey.
- Offer programs 2:1, morning vs. afternoon, and none in the evening

SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Tom Martin Consulting (TMC) has presented an array of detailed “Secondary Recommendations” corresponding to the above six primary recommendations. Those 31 additional recommendations cover 25 pages in the full report. Those recommendations go deeper into “possible solutions” and will serve as a major source for development of the Three Year Plan, which is one of the recommendations. The Secondary Recommendations are based on data from all surveys, the narrative comments from survey respondents, the direct observation of TMC as a “secret dining guest” at all five nutrition centers; extensive interviews with some of the random telephone respondents (including two former board members of the Phillipsburg senior center); visits to several “model” senior centers and nutrition centers (operating in other NJ Counties) ; extensive review of professional literature, and extensive personal experience in senior program planning, management, and evaluation.

INITIAL ACTION PLAN BASED ON A NEW MODEL: “INTEGRATED NUTRITION PROGRAM AND TRADITIONAL SENIOR CENTER”

TM Consulting identified five primary “program models” used across the United States to deliver a variety of services/activities/resources to seniors. They are:

1. Nutrition Program,
2. Traditional Senior Center,
3. Integrated Nutrition Program and Traditional Senior Center,
4. Contemporary Senior Center
5. Innovative Models.

(These models are described in detail in the body of this report, along with examples.)

Currently, Warren County’s Senior Nutrition Project operates five centers in the “Nutrition Program” model, with primary focus on a mid-day meal, transportation and other limited services and activities. In the “Integration Model,” Warren County would add many components of a traditional senior center to its nutrition centers, as budget, staff and facilities permit. So, in addition to the mid-day meal and transportation, the centers would offer a much broader array of activities, programs and services that address the health, wellness, socialization, recreational and educational interests of seniors of all ages and abilities. “Contemporary” and “Innovative” programs typically would have an even wider range of services, more expansive indoor and outdoor facilities, more funding sources, a greater use of current technology, more consumer control, less focus on services than activities and programs, etc.

In discussing the Preliminary Report, Division staff suggested that given the existing budget and limitations of the currently leased facilities, the most realistic, short-term plan to implement is the “Integration Model: Nutrition Program and Traditional Senior Center.” With that in mind, the following

outline is intended to offer a starting point for “program change” based on the “Primary Recommendations” outlined above and some of the secondary recommendations. Movement toward the implementation of most of the “Secondary Recommendations” will require the Division to develop a formal, long-range plan, with corresponding funding.

- Initiate and maintain excellent communication with all stakeholders as you begin the transition.
- Assist current members to understand the goals of the expanded programs, the “change process”, and how they will benefit
- Language is important to create a positive image: It’s a “Club (or Center) with Members,” not a “Site with Participants,” as formerly called
- Select a new, snappy, positive name for the expanded program
- Develop and maintain a solid plan for enhanced “information flow” since access to information on all activities, programs, and resources for seniors was the #1 request of respondents
- Create and maintain a comprehensive, current website with **PIZZAZZ** for older residents, which crosses County Divisions and Departments (Use the PRINCETON SENIOR RESOURCE CENTER’s website as one model)
- List on the website, activities, programs, resources offered by non-county organizations.
- Continue to use the five existing facilities, but continue to search for new facilities that offer more space/more rooms to facilitate offering the programs, activities, and services the respondents have requested
- Work with current landlords to make modest changes that will benefit their users as well, such as mini-Information Centers on resources for older residents
- Experiment with portable partitions to create multiple “rooms” within existing facilities. These can then be moved to new facilities
- Create more space with portable tables, with locking wheels (Store 50% of fixed tables and replace with 50% of new ones)
- Create “cozy corners” in each Center, with comfortable furniture, decorations
- Add color, warmth, music, tablecloths
- Add colorful WELCOME signs on large, portable quilts (Survey found many quilters looking for projects)
- Add signs inviting new members, as close to the street as permitted. If current landlords won’t permit that, include that in all future leases
- Immediately implement at the current centers, evidence-based programs and activities, such as those outlined in this report

- Begin to add additional activities and programs sequentially to attract new members.
- Members will start to come earlier and leave later as activities and programs get added to the schedule. Anticipate transportation and parking challenges, as everyone will not want to arrive or leave at the same times
- Begin to identify a variety of volunteers—activity leaders, special program facilitators, outreach “ambassadors” and others, among current members
- Add computers, offer classes, guide members in emailing children, grandchildren...
- Reach out to registered, but inactive SNP participants, with the new message: “New food vendor! New programs and activities!”
- Reach out to random survey respondents who indicated they would volunteer to lead a class or group; contact established senior clubs, civic clubs, religious and service organizations, board members of the community centers in senior residential communities, etc. Seek not only individual volunteers from these groups but possible organizational partners.
- Start to explore new funding sources, in conjunction with select new partners. Working with a non-profit partner will increase the County’s chances for non-governmental funding.
- **CHANGE THE IMAGE AND SPREAD THE WORD!**

CONCLUSION

By shifting toward the Integration Model of Traditional Senior Center and Nutrition Program, with an emphasis on socialization, mental and physical stimulation, mental and physical health and FUN!--and de-emphasis on congregate meals--far more older residents will benefit from the Centers, while those wanting the hot meals will continue to have them.

A primary challenge the Division faces in implementing these recommended changes is merging these two types of consumers: 1. Those interested primarily in the daily meal and 2. Those interested mostly in activities and programs.

Within two to three years, the Division could offer diversified, substantial programs in dynamic community centers on par with the best of those in other New Jersey counties. Moving the programs to larger facilities with multiple rooms as soon as feasible and giving them some character, charm and comfort, would greatly facilitate that successful transition.

The surveys identified a vast pool of potential volunteers who could help the programs flourish while helping the County reduce staff costs. The more the programs shift toward “consumer control” and away from “staff control,” the more likelihood of success.