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REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The 2008-2009 Grand Jury elected to review the Senior Nutrition Program (SNP) because several of us were interested in knowing how the program works, and the program had not been investigated since 1996. Our goal was to find out: "How does the senior nutrition program benefit seniors"?

PROCEDURE

Where did we get our information? Our committee reviewed hundreds of pages of government documentation in order to understand the program, from the Older Americans Act down to the local level. In addition, we dined at each of the nutrition sites at least two times each to see, hear and taste the program!

We toured the kitchens, conducted interviews with the Director of Public Health, Director of Environmental Health, nutrition program Division Director, site managers and an Advisory Board member. In addition, we visited with seniors to gain their perspective. We also questioned some members of the Board of Supervisors and the County Chief Administrative Officer and heard their reasons for supporting the program.

Our research led us to read and review dozens of documents including: environmental health inspection reports, the code of ethics and responsibilities of the bus drivers, by-laws of the Advisory Board, a proposal for funding, forms and manuals, and much more. We've include a partial list of resource materials at the end of this report for those who want to explore this program further.

BACKGROUND

How does the program work? In 1965 the Federal government recognized the importance of good nutrition and socialization for our senior citizens. Several revisions later, the Older Americans Act (OAA) is alive and well. The program is funded through the OAA to the States' Area Agency on Aging (AAA), and in Northern California through the Passages organization.

The lunch meal provides at least one-third of the daily required nutrients. The menus are prepared by a registered dietitian.

Many resources state that the health and well-being of our senior population depends to a large degree on getting the nutrition they need, as well as keeping active through socializing with other people. Isolation and poor nutrition contribute to mental decline and poor health. The Senior Nutrition Program is specifically designed to combat those problems.

The purpose of the SNP is described by the California Department of Aging:

> ***The Nutrition Program provides nutritionally-balanced meals, nutrition education and nutrition counseling to individuals 60 years of age or older. In addition to promoting better health through improved nutrition, the program focuses on reducing***

the isolation of the elderly and providing a link to other social and supportive services such as transportation, information and referral, escort, employment, and education.

While many other counties are limiting their programs because of the economy, the Plumas County Board of Supervisors has provided unyielding and generous support for this program since 1998. Our local sources noted that Board support has been paramount to the program's success.

Funding starts at the federal level and includes state matching "in-kind" contributions. At the local level, funding is provided by local government and/or private resources. Donations from participants, grants, monetary and food donations from local businesses and community members, and fund raising events by the Advisory Boards also finance the nutrition and transportation program.

Each state sets up its own internal departments to manage the many facets of the Federal Older Americans Act. It is beyond the purview of this report to detail the various departments involved. In Plumas County the SNP is managed by the Plumas County Public Health Agency, the Plumas County Board of Supervisors and the SNP Division Director.

County governments and private entities may respond to the Request for Proposals that Passages advertises every four years. The contract to provide the nutrition and transportation services in Plumas County has been under the purview of the Plumas County Public Health Agency since 1998.

The contract for services is awarded with the money separated into two funds, one for nutritional services and one for transportation. The transportation allocation is usually not sufficient, so the California Department of Transportation also provides funding for that portion of the program. The Director of Public Health applies to Plumas County Board of Supervisors for the remainder of the basic funds. An annual update to the proposal is submitted to allow adjustments to the contract, especially reflecting the drop in attendance in the winter months when many temporarily relocate to warmer climates."

YOU'RE INVITED!
Seniors 60 years and older are encouraged to attend lunch at their SNC. Dine on delicious homemade food while you meet friends and enjoy the day! Homebound Seniors have a program, too!

Two dining options are available to seniors. They may gather for lunch at senior nutrition centers (SNC) in Quincy, Portola, Chester, and Greenville and at the Mohawk Resource Center in Blairsden. Homebound seniors, those with a medical condition or certain transportation issues, can have meals delivered directly to their home - a hot meal on delivery day and frozen meals for the remaining days of the week. Surveys are taken annually to obtain the seniors' opinion of the food.

Some of our seniors receiving the homebound service are in isolated areas of the county and the drivers of the senior transportation buses provide them a contact with the "outside" world. In addition to providing a friendly face and a little conversation, drivers are trained to alert a responsible party if they note conditions or circumstances which place the senior in imminent danger.

Senior Nutrition Contacts
(www.countyofplumas.com/publichealth/senior_services.htm)

Blairsden	*836-0446 or 832-4173*
Chester	*394-7636*
Greenville	*284-6608*
Portola	*832-4173*
Quincy	*283-0643*

For additional information regarding hours, donations, reservations, etc., for the nutrition centers and the homebound delivery program, contact your local nutrition site or check out the website. The menu is published in the local newspaper.

Why do seniors like this program? Activities vary at the five sites. The Director of Public Health, the Division Director of the SNP, and the site managers develop activities that interest their local seniors. In Portola, for example, there is a monthly bus trip to Reno so seniors can shop and enjoy a ride through the country. The Chester senior community has the good fortune to have the SNC located at Wildwood Senior Housing facility, where their lunches are often accompanied by live piano music. Quincy SNC tries to arrange a bus tour at Christmas to see the homes decorated with lights for the holiday. Blairsden's lunch program is held each Wednesday at the Mohawk Resource Center, where they may set up a card table after lunch and enjoy a few hands of cards. Greenville seniors go to Chico once a month for their shopping excursion. Other activities may include crossword puzzles, book exchanges, and jigsaw puzzles at the various centers.

Reasons to attend the SNC included chatting with friends, sharing pictures of grandkids and getting out of the kitchen. And, as one senior remarked, "Going to the SNC for lunch gives me a reason to get up, get dressed and get out of the house for a while."

Who's in charge? The Senior Nutrition Program in Plumas County involves the following:

Public Health Agency. The Director plans, organizes, directs, coordinates, and administers public health programs for the county. She is the supervisor of both the Director of Environmental Health and the Division Director of the SNP.

Environmental Health Department. This regulatory agency ensures that California State food safety standards are met at the SNCs. They perform unannounced inspections twice yearly, and follow-up inspections are done if any problems require action and re-inspection.

Advisory Boards. Each SNC's Board holds quarterly meetings to assist in problem solving and improving site operations and to keep participants apprised of all aspects of the program. They may also host fundraisers to keep petty cash on hand in case of emergency, such as for the repair of an appliance.

Approximate Number of Meals Served in a Month
Chester - 1352
Greenville - 884
Quincy - 1205
Portola - 958
Mohawk - 67
GRAND TOTAL = 4465

Senior Services. The Division Director has primary responsibility for directing and overseeing the Senior Nutrition and Transportation programs for Plumas County. This includes food service management, business administration and supervision/management of personnel, and more. She regularly visits each site,visiting with the seniors and she attends the Advisory Board meetings.

Nutrition Site Managers. Each manager is responsible for all nutrition site day-to-day operations, and this is no small task! Those responsibilities include planning, scheduling and coordinating all the homebound meals and nutrition site lunches and activities. These include transportation; outreach to seniors and the public; supervising/training kitchen staff; attending public, agency and Advisory Board meetings; handling suggestions and other issues.

Head Cooks. Each one prepares the homebound meals and food for the lunches. They are responsible for safety, cleanliness, food storage, training the assistants, record keeping, kitchen staff activities and more.

Assistant Cooks. They help prepare the food, wash the cookware, dishes and other food prep equipment, and clean the kitchen. They also help prepare the home bound meal packages and perform many miscellaneous kitchen tasks.

Bus Drivers. They not only transport seniors to and from the nutrition sites, but take them to doctor appointments, the pharmacy, the hairdresser, shopping and special events. Drivers assist passengers while boarding and unloading, load wheel chair clients, and see to the overall comfort of their passengers. They also perform a daily safety inspection of the bus for gas, oil, tires.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We found the nutrition program is an excellent benefit to our seniors. We believe the following recommendations will further enhance the program.

Advertising

Finding: The SNP menu is printed in the local newspapers.
Recommendation 1: To ensure all senior community members are kept informed, we recommend that flyers or other visible reminders of the program be posted in places such as libraries, churches, medical/dental offices, post offices, etc.
Recommendation 2: We recommend an Open House, Bring a Friend to Lunch Day, or other organized activities to introduce seniors to this great program. Advisory Board funds, as well as community business and private donations could potentially be used to support these activities.

Advisory Board Members

Finding: Some Advisory Boards face difficulties recruiting new Board members.
Recommendation: We recommend increasing public awareness of Board vacancies to encourage participation.

Donations

Finding: Donation boxes were not always placed in an area that was confidential. One was placed where the Site Manager had full view of the box; others were located at the sign-in table. The donation boxes were not fully screened.
Recommendation: We recommend the donation boxes be moved to a more secure, private area out of view.

Job Descriptions

Finding: Pertinent job descriptions dated back as far as the mid-1990s and may not reflect current job responsibilities.
Recommendation: We recommend these be updated as necessary and reviewed annually.

Policies and Procedures

Finding: Our interviews revealed that there is no policies and procedures manual for the nutrition centers. This has led to operational inconsistencies among the sites.
Recommendation: We strongly recommend that a written manual specific to the needs of the Plumas County senior nutrition sites be developed by the end of this calendar year. This manual should include but not be limited to:

- Food preparation and distribution
- Accounting procedures
- Special events
- Complaint process
- Employee conduct

Senior Nutrition Surveys

Finding: An annual survey is conducted to assess the seniors' interests and satisfaction with the program.
Recommendation: We recommend two surveys per year to address seasonal attendance fluctuations. We also recommend that the survey be expanded to include suggestions for activities.

Site Managers

Finding: We found the site managers are very "hands on" in their approach to their jobs. They go the extra mile to invest their time, energy, empathy and concern in the seniors they serve.
Recommendation: Keep up the good work!

Website and Published Contact Information

Finding: We found that Plumas County SNP information (e.g., telephone numbers, donation amounts) on several websites and in some publications was not accurate.
Recommendation: We recommend that these sources be corrected immediately, reviewed annually, and updated as necessary to maintain accuracy.

CONCLUSION

Did we answer our question? Our investigation started with the question: "How does the senior nutrition program benefit seniors"? Well, there's no rubber chicken here! The meals are delicious, as well as nutritionally balanced, which encourages seniors to dine out on healthy food. Getting away from the television, having conversation with others and being out in the fresh air is healthful for both mind and body. Requesting a donation instead of charging a fee is helpful to those who may be on limited resources but is also fair to those who wish to contribute to the funding. The welcoming attitude of the staff and management provides an atmosphere of friendliness and companionship that helps seniors stay involved and included in their community.

A big “thank you” to all of those who participated in our interview process and to the many seniors who welcomed us into their circle, shared their tables and stories and made us feel at home.

This Grand Jury is very impressed with the Plumas County Senior Nutrition Program and the all the great people who make it happen. Everyone we interviewed was committed to serving our senior population, enthusiastic about doing a good job, and very pleasant.

Kudos to the “volunteer” seniors who attend the lunches and are very helpful, assist in bussing tables, and act as “good will” ambassadors to the diners.

We STRONGLY encourage those seniors who do not currently enjoy this program to call their local senior nutrition center and sign up. We had a great time!

Partial List of Resource Materials:

- Advisory Board Functions and By-Laws
- California Area on Aging, Area PSA3, Home Delivered Meals Handbook
- California Area on Aging, Participant Confidentiality/Policy on Contributions
- Champions for Change, Healthy Communities of the North State
- Chester Senior Nutrition Program
- Congregate Meals, July 2008 to January 2009
- Congregate Nutrition Services Budget, 2008-2009
- Homebound Meals, July 2008 to January 2009
- Home Delivered Nutrition Services Budget, 2008-2009
- Nutrition Guidelines for Senior Citizens
- Passages (www.passagescenter.org)
- Plumas County Public Health Agency Divisions (www.healthyplumas.org)
- Plumas County Senior Nutrition Program and Senior Transportation (www.countyofplumas.com)
- Plumas Rural Services Community Connections Pamphlet
- Senior Services in Plumas County