Aging Programs Support Rural Idaho Families

Situation
Sixteen percent of Idaho county's residents are over age 65. Health care, social services, and living arrangement options for these rural Idaho residents are limited. A five-county northern Idaho study conducted by the Area II Home Community Base Council for the Mountain States Group identified gaps in home and community-based health services for the elderly. In addition, many seniors and their families lacked information and education about the health care choices and services that were available in our area. These families often lacked the decision-making and communication skills needed to make competent and caring decisions when dependency increases for an older family member.

Our Response
The University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System developed a multi-faceted aging program to address these rural Idaho aging needs:

Aging Alliance:
In 1996, The Alliance on Aging of Idaho County was formed. This coalition consists of health care professionals from local hospitals, nursing home and assisted living directors, the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension Educator, representatives from the ministerial association, area senior meal sites, Home Community Base Council, Community Action Agency, and the Area Office on Aging and Adult Services.

A strategic planning process was used to identify the mission and goals of this newly formed coalition.

The Alliance on Aging of Idaho County's mission is to help establish an "elder-friendly" community environment and promote public understanding of aging issues. Three specific goals were identified:

1. Provide a structure for networking among those concerned with the elderly and promote sharing of resources.
2. Develop and implement an information delivery system for reaching seniors.
3. Develop a volunteer network for assisting the elderly.

Educational Classes & Workshops
A two-year series of educational classes for the elderly and their families was conducted. This education focused on teaching families the communication and decision making skills needed to make competent and caring decisions when dependency increases. Three workshops and five classes were conducted by University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System Extension Educators in four different locations. Several of these programs were sponsored by member organizations of the Alliance on Aging of Idaho County. An additional 1,100 north Idaho residents were reached through an aging focus edition of the northern Central Idaho Area Family & Consumer Newsletter.
Educational Delivery System

Gerontology Resource Notebooks containing 16 aging publications were developed and distributed to the three area hospitals, the Community Action Agency, the assisted living facility, three nursing home facilities, and the Area Office on Aging. A training session was held to educate these groups on potential uses for these aging materials. In addition, training for using the multi-media *When Dependency Increases* programs was conducted. These materials are to be housed at various agencies for use with clientele at their “teachable moment.” In addition these resources will be used for conducting in-service training at the respective facilities. This new educational delivery system will provide a consistent, on-going method for education of families when, and where, the information and education will most likely be needed.

Achievements

With encouragement and assistance from The Alliance on Aging of Idaho County, a Camas Prairie Resource Directory has been published and distributed by the Idaho County Department of Health & Welfare. This directory will assist in networking and sharing of resources among those working with the elderly. A special delivery-system sub-committee has posed recommendations for methods of reaching the elderly. When surveyed, 100% of The Alliance on Aging of Idaho County members reported that the coalition has been beneficial or very beneficial to their respective organizations. These members reported on the impact the coalition has had at providing a structure for networking among alliance members. As one member stated, “The Alliance has been instrumental in bringing together service agencies interested in serving the aging population.” Another member reports, “I like the networking. I believe it’s important to be aware of all community issues involving the elderly.”

The Alliance on Aging of Idaho County has also worked to develop systems for assisting the elderly. The alliance has worked with COAST transportation to facilitate the placement of an 18 passenger, wheel-chair accessible van in Grangeville. Transportation for the elderly was a major concern identified in the HCBC study. In September 1997, the group received a commitment from the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) personnel to establish a volunteer program in Idaho County. This program should be operational as of January 1, 1998. The RSVP will establish a volunteer network to address a variety of our area’s seniors needs. 71% of members reported that the coalition had been very beneficial, and 28% beneficial, in helping to get a volunteer network established for assisting the elderly. In addition, 100% of The Alliance on Aging of Idaho County members reported in a survey that our community is a better place to live as a result of the Alliance on Aging of Idaho County.

Over 145 individuals attended one of the eight classes and workshops presented in the area. Several of these individuals were health care professionals who work directly with the aging population. When surveyed, 100% of participants from a workshop reported that the information presented was very useful. One individual commented, “I have elderly parents and this information really opened my eyes to a lot of issues I never thought of. This was great!” Another participant reported, “As a health care provider, I will be able to pass this on to families of residents.”

For More Information

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