

Council on Aging (COA)

Susan P. Jacobs, Director

The Council on Aging is pleased to present its 2003 Annual Report to the residents of Dalton. Our Department was established at the 1977 Annual Town Meeting, and will have been serving our elders and their families a total of 27 years this May. The mission of the Dalton Council on Aging is to promote the physical, emotional, social and economic well being of older adults, and to promote their participation in all aspects of community life. We do this by offering a variety of information, programs and services aimed at meeting our mission. The following report outlines many of these. We invite you to contact us with any questions.

Statistical Overview

Of the total population of Dalton, 21.5%, or 1545 are age 60 and older. During this reporting year, we provided 17,845 units of direct service to 614 residents over age 60 (44% of these were age 75 and over), and an additional 248 who were under age 60.

Information & Referral

More informally known as I&R, one of our main functions is to provide information on available programs and services, and to refer residents and their families to these services. People call with a wide range of problems, and we do our best to help residents through the maze of red tape to find the best agency or service to fill their needs. The questions we most often receive deal with in-home services, transportation, health insurance and medical bills. Over the past year, we have received an estimated 4,020 requests for this type of information.

Grant Funding

We were fortunate this past fiscal year to receive a \$7,040 grant from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs which was used to provide additional staff hours (Director: 2.5 hrs/wk; Clerical: 2.5 hrs/wk and Outreach: 3 hrs/wk), and a small amount for volunteer recognition.

MMA Study

Last year, Dalton contracted with MMA to conduct a pay and job classification study of all non-union, full time town employees. As a result, the director and clerical positions in the COA received substantial increases in hourly rates. We are grateful to the town manager and select board members for their endorsement of the study and the resulting pay raises.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

COA Lift-Van Service

Our lift-van service runs Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Trips anywhere in Dalton or Pittsfield cost \$1.75 each way, while those to COA-sponsored programs such as senior luncheons, exercise class and special programs are only .75

each way. Last year, 118 elderly residents received 4,198 rides, (with an additional 113 rides provided by our private drivers who fill in when the van is busy). In addition, nine non-elderly disabled residents received 861 rides, for a total of 5,172 rides provided during the year. To learn more about this service, please call our office at 684-2000.

Health Insurance Information & Advocacy

Our SHINE Counselor, Patricia Pero (who is also our Outreach & Wellness Counselor) has been saving our folks money since she was trained. Beginning with FY 1991 through June 2003, she has documented savings of \$597,407.01. Last year, local residents saved \$57,236.27 through insurance benefit reimbursements, correction of billing errors, and elimination of duplicate or excessive insurance policies. We are understandably proud of Pattie and her tireless efforts to help our residents to improve their quality of life on many fronts. She is a valuable member of our team and our community.

As our Outreach/Wellness Counselor, Pattie held monthly Wellness Programs on the second Thursday at 11:45 a.m., and presented topics such as Heart Health, Long Term Care, Medications & Alcohol, and How to Take a Pulse. In addition, she provided 82 residents with individual assessments and health education.

Healthy Osteo Exercise Classes

Since June of 1996, the Dalton COA has offered this unique exercise program developed by Tufts University. Osteoporosis is a serious condition affecting both men and women in which bones become thinned, brittle and easily broken, but can be prevented or slowed by exercise, diet and sometimes hormone or drug therapy. American women over age 65 have a 50% chance of developing the disease, while one in eight men older than 50 will suffer a hip fracture as a result of the disease. Four classes were held each week: Tuesdays at 10 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m., and Thursdays at 10 a.m., which were taught by Sue Jacobs, Cora Cooney and Marjorie Lillpop. During this reporting period, a total of 103 women and men participated in the classes.

Senior Luncheons

Every Tuesday and Thursday, a luncheon is served to area seniors at the Community House at 11:30 a.m. The meals are prepared by Elder Services in their kitchen in Lanesboro and delivered to our kitchen ready to serve by our dedicated crew of volunteers headed up by Doris Fiorini. Last year, over 700 meals were served. We are continuing the monthly Birthday Party and any Dalton resident age 60 or over celebrating a birthday that month can eat free. (Pre-registration is necessary). A pizza lunch is also held once a month. Beginning in January, 2004, First Tuesdays were begun, with a visit from one of the St. Agnes classes presenting a short program, and appearances by various town officials.

Dalton Travelers

Last year, with Betty/Liz Clark and Chris O'Connor as coordinators, the Dalton Travel Group enjoyed trips to such destinations as Branson, MO, Proctors to see South Pacific, and Nova Scotia. With their retirement, Jim & Catherine Rivers took on that responsibility. The Dalton Travelers will have a regular schedule of day and multi-day

trips to offer. For information, call them at 684-0357, or the COA Office at 684-2000.

Serve

Serve is a community building program similar to a food cooperative, but stressing volunteerism. We have had an active Serve program in Dalton since April, 1996. Along with the monthly deliveries of food, we receive the Serve New England newsletter which provides news, tips, recipes and contact information for the chapters throughout the five state northeast region. During this reporting period, 97 households (senior & non-senior) participated in the program. For more information, call the COA, or go online at www.servenewengland.org.

Fuel Assistance

Again this year, Delmaine Hughes and Audrey Poirier volunteered two mornings a week during September & October to help local residents through the process of applying for fuel assistance. Their quiet, behind the scenes work has helped a number of local residents, including young families to get through the winter more comfortably.

Intergenerational Programs

Intergenerational Programs are activities that increase cooperation and exchange between any two generations, through which there are shared skills, knowledge and experience. Last year, we continued the very popular Preschool Reading Program, and laid the groundwork for Bridges: Growing Older, Growing Together.

The Preschool Reading Program has been a collaboration between the Central Berkshire Community Partnership (part of the school district) and the COA. During the school year from 10 to 11 each Wednesday morning, mothers and home day care providers with their preschoolers gather in the hall of the Dalton United Methodist Church for a story read by a local retiree, followed by a snack and an art activity.

Bridges is a course in human development and gerontology (the study of aging). Meetings held in early in 2003 to discuss bringing this program to our area, resulted in both Williamstown and Craneville Elementary Schools and both councils on aging agreeing to hold the program in a fourth grade class in the fall. Marjorie Limburg agreed to coordinate the program here in Dalton, and several retirees volunteered to participate, including Dick & Joyce Lacatell, Joe & Audrey Poirier, Ann Amirault, Cynthia Reinhardt, Jim Galeucia and Dick Peters. The program was a huge success, and will be expanded into St. Agnes School and another 4th grade class at Craneville in the spring of 2004. Other intergenerational efforts are being supported by Nessacus Middle and St. Agnes Schools. We look forward to more of these programs.

L.I.F.E.: Living Is For the Elderly

This is a program which was begun at Craneville Place in February, 1995 by Rachel Mears, a VISTA Volunteer who was with us that year. LIFE brings community residents into Craneville Place every other week for a one hour, organized round-table discussion and refreshments with residents of the home. At least once a month, Dick Mullins brings his keyboard and leads a sing-along. The program is coordinated by Peri Caverly, a COA Board member.

Volunteer Programs

The 118 volunteers of the Dalton COA gave almost 5,700 hours of their time during the past year to serve our community through our various programs. Board members (COA, Hilltown COA and Friends), Sunday Lunch Steering Committee, Triad, Serve, AARP Tax Aide counselor, LIFE Program, Friendly Visitors, Food Coop., exercise instructors, grocery shoppers, transportation volunteers, Dalton Travelers coordinators, flu shot clinic, meal site workers and others contribute much more than just hours to our community. Their efforts improve the quality of life for many.

Each May, the Friends of the Dalton Council on Aging, Inc. present a Recognition Dinner for all of our volunteers. In 2003, our Dalton Fire Dept. & Ambulance Assoc. members were recognized for their important and life-saving work in the community. Also, COA board member, David Powell was recognized for his 26 years of service on the COA Board, and our retiring Travel Club coordinators, Chris O'Connor and Betty Clark were given special thanks for all of their efforts.

AARP Tax Aide Program

In late 2002, I received a call from the former AARP Tax Aide coordinator saying that we probably would be able to provide the service in early 2003. I am happy to report that Dick Lacatell stepped forward to volunteer his time here in Dalton, and assisted 31 residents with their tax returns during his weekly visits from late January until mid-April. We join those residents in offering our thanks for this important service.

Health Clinics

The Berkshire VNA holds a monthly Blood Pressure Clinic every third Thursday of each month, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Dalton CRA. These are free and open to the public with no appointment necessary. - Foot Care Clinics are also held monthly in Dalton on the fourth Tuesday from 9 a.m. to noon. The clinics are held alternately at the CRA and Pine Grove Manor. Countryside Nurse Jane Kelley, RN provides this service (by appointment only) at a fee of \$24/visit. Last year, she provided 34 treatments during her six clinics at the CRA. Call the COA Office to schedule your appointment.

Triad

Triad is a national program begun in 1988 to educate and reduce criminal victimization of older citizens. Dalton Triad meets on the third Wednesday of each month at 1 p.m. at the Dalton VFW. Last year, they presented quarterly public information meetings on such topics as Self Defense, Neighborhood Watch, and How to Identify the Signs of Child Abuse.

On July 23rd, 2003, Dalton hosted the third annual county-wide Triad Picnic & Safety Fair at the Dalton VFW. Despite the threat of rain, 155 folks from eleven Berkshire communities attended to learn about Triad and to collect information and tips to improve their health and safety. Next year's event will be hosted by Hinsdale Triad, and held in their community. Dalton residents are welcome at Triad meetings. For more information, call Triad Officer, John Thibodeau at the Dalton Police Dept., 684-0300, or the COA Office.

Goals

Last year's goals were to continue working on the Library/Senior Center project,

and to meet the daily challenge of assisting our older residents and their families with the myriad of questions and problems they face.

Reporting on the former, COA Board member, Judith Brooks and I have attended the regular meetings of the Designer Selection Committee as it first reviewed and then chose a firm to conduct a Feasibility Study, and then received regular reports from the Hill Engineering staff. In this coming fiscal year, we will continue to work with the Designer Selection Committee on the Library/Senior Center project, and hope to see it move closer to completion.

In planning ways to continue to meet the needs of our older population, projected state shortfalls and resulting cuts in aid to our communities may mean that we will have a harder time maintaining our current level of office hours and services. As we did last year, we will work with our elected state officials to advocate for a realistic level of support for our town and schools.

Summary

A Council on Aging/Senior Center is a community focal point where older adults come together for information, services and activities. It also serves as a resource for the entire community for information on aging, support for family caregivers, advocacy and education. Your COA staff: Sue Jacobs, Bev Benoit and Pattie Pero along with our van drivers and volunteers all strive to provide the best services that meet our residents' needs. If you have a question, or are concerned about an older family member, friend or neighbor, please call us at 684-2000. We are here to help.