

AoA Older Americans Month 2008 Program Champion



Project: Milwaukee County's Assistive Technology Awareness Campaign

Organization: Milwaukee County Department on Aging

Project Description

Milwaukee County is a diverse urban community. Of the approximately 150,000 older adults who reside here, 40% of those aged 60 and older are of minority ethnic heritage. The Milwaukee County Department on Aging (MCDA) serves all elders in our community with special attention to low income and minority elders. Target audiences for all our programs (and specifically for this initiative) include healthy to frail individuals.

In Milwaukee, the MCDA found that many older persons are not aware of how technology can be of help to them. The prevailing attitude seems to be that technology is for the profoundly disabled. Seniors do not keep up with rapidly changing advances that range from high tech devices such as speech synthesizers and new designs in prosthetics to low tech "helpers" like reaching tools, button hooks or ergonomically designed cup handles. Enhanced consumer awareness of new and developing assistive technology has an impact on quality of life for all older persons. Many disability issues can be remediated through the use of assistive technology thereby allowing older adults to remain independent at home for as long as possible.

A technology workgroup formed as part of the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging's Advisory council, includes MCDA staff and key community partners from the following local agencies: Independence First, Center for Deaf-Blind Persons, Inc., Badger Association of the Blind, Inc., Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Interfaith Older Adult Programs, the Milwaukee County Office for Persons with Disabilities, Goodwill Industries and the coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups (CWAG) provided input on needs and issues. Additional consultation came from Community Care, Ejj Olson & Associates and the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

The group developed a two-pronged approach to getting the word out on the benefits of assistive technology.

1. Educate and Inform Care Managers, Service Providers and Community Volunteers.

A resource guide was developed and introduced at information sharing "in service" sessions in late 2007. Representatives from workgroup partner agencies were available at these sessions to answer questions and discuss options for new technologies and lifestyle "re training" support that could benefit clients in the long term care system. Each Care Manager, Resource Center and Human Service Worker in our aging network received the resource guide and had the opportunity to attend the

information sharing sessions where they also learned about how to low income help clients with funding issues.

2. Educate and inform the general public

A brochure called “Tools for Independence” highlights the fact that everyone needs a helping hand now and then and encourages people to call local gatekeeper groups to discuss how technology can improve their lives. A web page with links to resources was added to the popular MCDA website. Advertising art and a 1-minute public service announcement were developed around the tag line, “Imagine a World where Seniors are Superheroes... Technology Can Take You There” All of the materials are ready for rollout as a coordinated Public awareness campaign set for May (for Older Americans Month).

The work group convened without compensation. A \$10,000.00 grant from Industries for the Blind funded development of the service provider resource guide and in-service training. Poster artwork was donated by a local artist. MCDA staff developed the brochure, booklet layout and website design. WMSE radio donated production of the radio PSA. Voice talent was provided by MCDA staff and one local actor (donated). The entire program was developed for a total cash outlay of about two hundred and fifty dollars (\$250.00).

The innovative combination of outreach to professionals, consumer oriented information and attention grabbing multimedia advertising, will help MCDA and its partners reach a broad target audience with a message aimed at enhancing life quality for all older adults from fit to frail.

Visit <http://www.milwaukee.gov/Wellness12727/ToolsforIndependence.htm> for more information on the campaign or contact Linda Cieslik at 414 289 6633 or via e-mail at lcieslik@milwaukeecounty.com