DRIVING for SOLUTIONS
A Student Think Tank 2012-13

Improving Older Adult
and Home Care Worker
Mobility in Northeast
Westchester County
*A project of the
Westchester Alliance of
Academic Institutions for
Aging Related Studies and
Work Force Development*

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" At times it was an overwhelming task. But I was impressed with the amount of cooperation between team members and what we were able to accomplish. I hope our ideas will benefit northeast Westchester communities by improving access to transportation for both the seniors and the home health workers who help to care for them."

Agnieszka Malinska – Think Tank participant from Mercy College

Robert P. Astorino
Westchester County Executive

Thank you for your interest in the "Driving for Solutions" report, which was developed by a Think Tank of Westchester County college students.

The goal was to find ways to provide alternative transportation for seniors who live in the thinly-populated region of northeast Westchester, as well as ways for home-care workers and personal-care aides from southern Westchester and the Bronx to easily get to their clients.

Readers will find that the report offers suggestions on how to approach both goals. The next step is to try to carry out some of the suggestions.

I congratulate the county's Department of Senior Programs and Services, the Westchester Alliance of Academic Institutions for Aging Related Studies and Workforce Development, and the Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services for spearheading this project.

What differentiates this report from others is the Think Tank format used to develop it. Through the Think Tank, enterprising young people were able to present out-of-the-box solutions to longstanding county challenges.

The report also contains extensive appendices with details about how the students conducted the project. These appendices provide a wonderful road map for any agency, organization or group that is thinking about replicating the project in its own community.

Through its Livable Communities Initiative, Westchester has long been a leader in presenting programs that enhance the quality of life for our seniors.

This recognition was underscored last fall, when AARP designated Westchester as one of the first seven counties and cities in the United States to be in its Network of Age-Friendly Communities. This honor also made the county part of the United Nations' World Health Organization Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities.

The Think Tank report is yet another example of how Westchester continues to lead the way for seniors.

Mae Carpenter, Commissioner
Westchester County Department of Senior Programs & Services

Seniors across the country say that adequate and accessible transportation is their number one need.

That surely is the case in Westchester County – especially in the largely rural northeast part of the county where virtually no public transportation exists. As a result, many seniors are isolated in their homes. They no longer are part of their communities where they probably raised their children and were active members of local organizations in their earlier years.

That is why the "Driving for Solutions" Think Tank report matters so much. Isolation should never be minimized. It can lead to depression and all sorts of other problems. To remain vital and contributing members of society, seniors need mobility.

Westchester County, of course, has considered this issue in the past. But by brainstorming, the students were able to view the situation from a fresh perspective.

The Think Tank project by the Westchester Alliance falls under the big umbrella of the Livable Communities initiative, the signature project of the county's Department of Senior Programs and Services. The goal of the initiative is to improve conditions for people of all ages, but especially to enable seniors to continue to live in their homes as they age with dignity, independence and civic involvement.

The Think Tank project directly advanced that goal. If seniors can get out and about, then their quality of life improves and they prefer to stay where they are rather than move.

The second goal of the Think Tank furthered that goal as well. That goal was to find ways to transport home-care workers and personal-care aides from southern Westchester and the Bronx to clients in the northeast region. That will enable seniors to continue to live in their homes as well.

I congratulate the Think Tank students and the project coordinators on the terrific job they did on this report. Their hard work shows.

We hope to use the Think Tank format to look at other topics and involve young people in issues that involve seniors in coming months.

INTRODUCTION

Transportation alternatives are urgently needed for older Americans who live in the northeast region of Westchester County for two reasons:

The first reason is to lessen the isolation of many seniors who live there. Because older adults often no longer drive or have a car, once routine outings have become daily challenges. This is so whether it's to go shop at the mall, get to a doctor's appointment, go to the library or hair salon or simply to visit a friend.

As a result, too many seniors often end up alone and stuck in their homes.

The second reason is to enable home health and homecare agencies to transport home care workers and personal care aides from southern Westchester and the Bronx to serve their clients who live in the northeast part of the county, many of whom are seniors.

Westchester County has studied the problem in the past. But it has been felt that a fresh, no-holds-barred approach was needed.

Enter the Westchester Alliance of Academic Institutions for Aging Related Studies and Workforce Development, which formed an innovative think tank of nine students from six area colleges to brainstorm for ways to solve the problem.

This 15-page report explains how they did just that. It also includes "next-step" recommendations and discussions of the opportunities and challenges the different options present. The report also includes ideas on how to lessen the transportation burden on family caregivers.

The Westchester Alliance is a program of the Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services and the Helen Andrus Benedict Foundation. The Partnership raises funds to supplement projects of Westchester County's Department of Senior Programs and Services (DSPS).

The 30-member Alliance includes businesses, not-for-profit organizations, colleges and universities. Its goals are to interest people about the many rewarding jobs in the so-called "Silver Industries" and encourage institutions of higher education to offer more courses to train people to deal with challenges the growing number of elderly confront.

Westchester Alliance programs fall under the broad umbrella of the Livable Communities: A Vision for All Ages – Bringing People and Places Together initiative. The initiative is DSPS' signature project and its key goal is to improve the quality of life for people of all ages and enable seniors to continue to live in their homes as they age with dignity, independence and civic involvement.

It's a priority to DSPS and the Westchester Alliance to bring young people and seniors together on an informal basis, and the think tank project greatly advanced that goal.

Information about the orientation sessions and details of the research the students did, please contact Colette Phipps, director of the Westchester Alliance and executive director of the Livable Communities Initiative, at cap2@westchestergov.com or (914) 813-6441.

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THINK TANK PARTICIPANTS

Nikki Bonica – Mercy College

Christina Bryce – Cornell University

Suelee Cheong – SUNY Purchase

Carol (Cokey) Concannon – Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service

Jean Wynne Fulton – Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service

Mark Kowtko – Pace University

Agnieszka Malinska – Mercy College

Sara Rosa – Mercy College

Kate Zadek, - Sarah Lawrence College Graduate School of Health Advocacy

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Colette Phipps – LMSW - director of the Westchester Alliance and executive director of the Livable Communities initiative of Westchester County's Department of Senior Programs and Services

Catherine Wynkoop, Ph.D., Think Tank director, Westchester Alliance member and a community organizer and consultant on aging issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following for their gracious help in enabling us to bring the "Driving for Solutions" Think Tank report to fruition:

Abstract

The Westchester Alliance, a countywide coalition of colleges and universities, selected nine undergraduate and graduate students to form a Think Tank between May and July, 2012. With support by the Westchester Department of Senior Programs and Services and the Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services, the Think Tank identified innovative and sustainable strategies to address long-standing transportation challenges facing older adults in the low-density northeast corner of the County where public transportation is unavailable.   The Helen Andrus Benedict Foundation and the United Way of Westchester and Putnam are Westchester Alliance sponsors.   Of primary concern were three issues: Ensuring access to personal homecare services by workers who do not drive; improving coordination of volunteer rides and town van services; and providing relief for family caregivers through better coordination of regional ride services.

Overview

The Project

Representatives from colleges and universities within the Westchester Alliance decided that the summer 2012 intercollegiate, cross-disciplinary Think Tank would address the transportation needs of older adults in the four northeast towns of the county: Bedford, Lewisboro, North Salem and Pound Ridge.

In order to facilitate new ways of thinking about this long standing set of challenges, the Alliance planners decided that the Think Tank format would include a two-day orientation and three three-hour sessions, concluding with a final reporting and celebration with the County Executive. With financial and technical support provided by the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services and the Public Private Partnership for Aging Services, the Alliance selected three undergraduate and six graduate students to form the Think Tank.

Their charge was to develop innovative, sustainable solutions to three major mobility challenges affecting older adult residents in the sparsely populated northeast towns, namely:

1. Improving access to homecare and home health aide services for older residents in northeast Westchester.
2. Coordinating town and volunteer ride programs to improve older adult mobility across the region.
3. Relieving caregivers of transportation burdens by better use of existing ride resources.

The first step in the two-month Think Tank process was a two-day interactive orientation with speakers from the Bedford Planning Board, County Department of Public Works/Transportation, town recreation personnel, volunteer ride programs, not for profit organizations, Paratransit, home health agency personnel, and older adult riders. The Lewisboro Seniors also hosted Think Tankers at their ice-cream social at the South Salem Fire House.

In the subsequent three three-hour Think Tank sessions, the group brainstormed what they needed to know about older adult transportation issues, regional mobility needs and services. The group assigned themselves research, which they reported back to the entire Think Tank. Between sessions, they conducted telephone interviews with policy makers, town recreation personnel, a town supervisor, nonprofit organizations and public and private ride providers. They went through an intensive SWOT (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) exercise and identified facts to check about demographic trends, best practices, current regional practices, and possibilities. The final step was to consolidate and prioritize their findings. One participant drafted the final report. Two participants took on the task of consolidating small group PowerPoint presentations to share with the County Executive, the Westchester Alliance, and other dignitaries.

Findings

The Need

 Demographics and trends. The four-town project area encompasses 125 square miles roughly 45 miles north of New York City in the northeast corner of Westchester County. From 2000-2010 the overall population of the county increased 3% to just over 949,000. In the project area, the population decreased 1% and is now 39,954. During this decade, total town population numbers changed slightly:

- The Pound Ridge community increased 8% to 5,104;
- Bedford decreased 4% to 17,355; while
- Lewisboro and North Salem changed slightly (Lewisboro increased 1% to 12,411; North Salem decreased 1% to 5,104).

However, while small in total, the number and proportion of residents aged 60 and older increased dramatically and now represent a significant portion of the population in each of the four communities.

- Lewisboro 60+ increased 69% to 2,290 (18% of the population),
- Pound Ridge 60+ increased 41% to 1,187 (23% of the population).
- North Salem 60+ increased 30% to 1,272 (25% of the population), and
- Bedford 60+ increased 19% to 3,108 (18% of the population),

Even the 85+ cohort in each town grew between 2000 and 2010, although the total numbers are very small.

- Lewisboro 85+ grew 88% from 2000 to 122
- Pound Ridge 85+ grew 72% to 67
- Bedford 85+ grew 42% to 251
- North Salem 85+ grew 72% to 67

While the number of "old old" (i.e., 85+) increased in each town between 2000 and 2010, the relative size of the 85+ population fell dramatically in comparison with the 65-84 group, although less so in the 2010 census than in the 2000 census.

- Bedford lost 1,664 people between the 65-84 group and 85+ group (-87% in 2010, down from -90% in 2000 census).
- Lewisboro lost 1,195 people between the 65-84 group and the 85+ group (-91% in 2010, down from -92% in 2000).
- Pound Ridge lost 638 people between the 65-84 group and the 85+ group (-90% in 2010, down from -93% in 2000).
- North Salem lost 435 people between the 65-84 group and the 85+ group (-65% in 2010, the same proportion reported in 2000).

Think Tankers wondered, "Where are the "old old" going and why?" While important for policy makers to know, answering that question was outside the scope of this project.

Think Tankers did identify that the numbers of older adults in the four towns are small enough that it is possible for 100% of the aging population to receive services that would ensure safety and comfort, particularly within the 85+ group. Yet, town personnel reported to the group that their older adults frequently refuse service, a challenge that the Think Tank addresses in their recommendations below.

The Think Tank also recommended ways that the towns could work collaboratively across the region to identify risks among their older residents. They identified opportunities to target scarce personnel resources, perhaps more cost effectively, in ways that would continue to enhance the safety and comfort of older residents, while ensuring the livability of the entire community across all ages.

Preferences. In conversations with older residents of the four towns, Think Tankers heard that the older adults in the region prefer to remain independent at home. The group learned that there are a multitude of difficulties that work against remaining safely at home, including lack of adequate, safe, time sensitive transportation and the inability to get home personal care assistance when needed and for fewer than four hours at a time. Comments included:

- We want to stay at home safely.
- We can't afford assisted living/nursing home alternatives.
- We can't get homecare aides/personal care aides for less than 4 hour visits.
- We can't sell our homes and, if we could, we would lose a lot of equity.
- Why move now that we are debt free?
- We are independent and want to stay that way.
- This is a private car-dependent area.

Source: Anecdotal conversations at Lewisboro Seniors Ice Cream Social June 13, 2012 and with orientation panelists on June 5, 2010 at Katonah Village Library.

The Three Issues

In order to address the mobility challenges reported by older residents, The Think Tank looked at three major transportation issues affecting successful aging in place efforts in this region, and identified challenges, opportunities, and alternatives for each.

Issue I: Improve access to homecare and home health aide services for older residents in northeast Westchester.

Challenges. In telephone interviews with licensed and certified homecare providers, Think Tank participants identified several major challenges related to access to Medicare and Medicaid funded personal care, namely:

(1) Lack of direct public transport to Pound Ridge or from train stations in Bedford, Lewisboro and North Salem.

(2) Expense of agency vehicles (car or van) for transport to and from home visits for low income workers who do not own their own cars;

(3) Cost of private taxis from the train to towns (as much as $50, in some cases); and

(4)   Difficulty assessing the number of missed home care visits due to lack of affordable, safe, and timely transportation.

Opportunities. In the course of contacting various home health and homecare agency leaders, plus internet research, the group identified opportunities that could bring relief to agencies trying to serve the needs in the four towns, namely:

(1) With respect to <u>transporting aides</u> to the remote corner of the county, the group recommends collaborative use of the MetroPool's vanpooling program (511 NY Ride Share) in which homecare employees could share a van coming north from where they live in the Bronx or lower Westchester. Home health/homecare agencies would share the expense, which is considerably less than what VNA of Hudson Valley reported spending for its current van service. (See analysis details in Appendix ___.) One of the employees would drive the vehicle each day. Possibly on a demonstration basis, MetroPool agreed that the van could drop off aides at patients' homes. In the past, MetroPool required that the van stop at a single site, where it would sit for the day.

The Think Tank enthusiastically recommended this option be pursued as a demonstration for a period of time no less than 6 months. This option is especially relevant in 2012 in light of increasing pressure on homecare budgets under both Medicare and Medicaid.

This one concession by MetroPool to the Think Tank interviewer is significant. It represents a powerful contribution toward solving this long-standing problem, provided that the homecare agencies will agree to work together.

(2) With respect to <u>identifying residents at risk</u> of needing personal care at home and ensuring access to intermittent, short stay homecare and home health services, the group recommends another collaborative initiative, possibly under the leadership of the Westchester Alliance. Student social work and geriatric care management interns would work with the towns to identify and interview homebound residents regarding support systems in place and a variety of needs, including access to personal care assistance. As an intern program, the cost to the towns would be negligible, if anything. Intern work could be coordinated with emergency preparedness efforts and informed by town recreation staff, who might also provide introductions to older residents. See Appendix __ for an AARP Transportation Survey that could become part of the interns' survey instrument.

<u>Alternatives</u>. Based on additional research efforts, the Think Tank identified alternative strategies with a longer time perspective.

(1) An advocate agency (the County Department of Health, the Department of Senior Programs and Services, a nonprofit organization, and/or home health agency) could work with MetroNorth to develop a discounted train fare program for home health aides serving the four northeast towns. While this might provide partial financial relief, it would still require a 60-90 minute train commute each way, plus the expense and time associated with transit from train station to patient homes.

(2) Start up a new social enterprise with financial investment by towns, home health agencies and other stakeholders. This could be a new taxi/transport service, possibly using volunteer drivers (see volunteer driver issues below). If fees were charged, this approach would require close collaboration with the County Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC), including the possibility of conducting a demonstration to evaluate the possibility of waiving paid-ride regulatory fees for this initiative. This alternative might also be an opportunity to introduce alternative fuel vehicles, with the side benefit of federal sources of funding.

Issue II: How to coordinate town and volunteer ride programs to improve older adult mobility across the region.

The Think Tank participants agreed that by better coordinating town and volunteer ride resources, the towns have the opportunity to improve the safety of their older residents, while decreasing isolation (and related depression) due to the inability to drive. The goal would be to enhance social connections across the region as well as personal interactions with each other and with the rest of the community. Older adults who are socially connected might very well be more inclined to accept services, a belief that could be evaluated by another intern using the social work student survey results.

<u>Challenges</u>. The major challenges to coordinating transportation initiatives for older adult residents in the four northeast towns include:

(1) Finding volunteer drivers;

(2) Implementing volunteer marketing/training/management systems;

(3) Computer phobia: Making computer usage user-friendly for older adults and access to broadband computing affordable.

(4) Lack of a regional database system that can link volunteer and town efforts to enhance the experiences of volunteer drivers and minimize burdens on town staff.

(5) Over-demand and yet, paradoxically, under-use of existing volunteer resources.

(6) Government (federal, state and county) funding requirement that reimburse providers after funds are expended.   While long-standing, large voluntary organizations may have large lines of credit, the current economic environment prohibits new social entrepreneurial ventures from obtaining the credit lines necessary to start up with government investment.

Opportunities. Opportunities to address each of these issues in the near future do exist, namely:

(1) Develop a regional transportation program that coordinates town and volunteer rides using a low-cost volunteer ride management system (e.g., AssistedRides) and that is independent from other program liabilities, priorities and risk management conflicts.
- Identify a lead/sponsoring agency
- Mobilize (or re-energize) community-development task forces to develop outreach or social networking strategies
- Create ongoing Capstone projects with local colleges and universities (recruiting professors and students to adopt/adapt a yearly program addressing older adult needs and issues, perhaps starting with implementation of the transportation recommendations in this report.) This could be implemented through the Westchester Alliance.

(2) Expand the pool of volunteers. For example:
- Include younger adult drivers (e.g., ages 25+)
- Recruit student interns as volunteer drivers
- Launch a coordinated appeal across community houses of worship (e.g., Sitter City model in which willing workers put names on a list and those who need workers refer to the list of previously vetted candidates; or the TRIP model in which people who need rides identify their own willing drivers who are then coordinated by a regional ride provider).
  - Develop a regional marketing program (see Issue III Opportunities)
- Integrate gerontology sensitivity learning into volunteer class modules in order to enhance positive volunteer experiences.

(3) Increase use of RideConnect to include residents in the four towns

(4) Coordinate-and expand access to technology training across the region, possibly with intergenerational in-home tutoring through collaborations with Scouts or community learning projects.

Alternatives. There is considerable overlap between Issue #2 (Coordination of Town and Volunteer rides) and #3 (Caregiver relief). See discussion below for alternatives that address both Issues.

Issue III. Relieve caregivers of transportation burdens by better use of existing ride resources.

Challenges. The primary challenges facing older adults in the four towns who need rides and their families include:

(1) No easily accessible way to reserve reliable rides.

(2) The stigma of accepting help, possibly from strangers.

(3) Limited coordination across older adult town programs in the region, which sometimes causes duplication of costs and competition for staff time and attention across youth and older adult programs.

(4) Limited town budgets and concerns over high taxes, causing hard choices if greater investment were to be made in older adult programming. At the same time, towns duplicate effort and expense across the region when closer coordination might actually reduce overall expense. Coordination of home-delivered meals is one example; coordination of town vans to older adult activities is another.   (Management of town and volunteer ride programs under one regional management system would streamline the process and reduce town recreation staff burdens.)

(5) Lack of community awareness of the importance of providing mobility options for older adults (and people with disabilities) who otherwise are homebound and at risk of deterioration due to depression, poor nutrition due to loss of appetite (due to depression), and lack of mental/spiritual/physical engagement.

(6) Limited awareness of Paratransit services.

Opportunities. Immediate opportunities for improvement exist, as do longer range initiatives that rely on the good will and collaborative efforts of all four towns.

(1)   Expand the regional volunteer driver pool through coordinated, community-specific marketing programs designed to promote intergenerational communication. Specifically:
- Increase awareness of the needs of older adults and why older adults are important to our communities;
- Make presentations to houses of worship, schools, libraries, at town social and recreational functions about the needs of older adults and volunteer opportunities;
- Send email flyers, place PSAs in town and regional newspapers and magazines and on Channel 12;
- Use local celebrities to promote the local need for volunteers and to host fundraisers;
- Establish annual volunteer awards dinner to honor their work;

- With town older adult groups, establish an annual older adult dinner to showcase testimonials from elders on the importance of receiving home services and staying connected to neighbors and communities.

(2) Enlist the financial investment of business associations within the region to sponsor regional volunteer transportation efforts.

(3) With the Volunteer Center, enlist the aid of clergy to raise awareness of the need and importance of volunteer ride efforts within the community.

(4) As introduced in Issue I, use student social work interns to interview older residents to determine needs and wants. Include AARP transportation survey questions.

(5) Develop an ongoing regional communications strategy that:
- Promotes the honor of giving back to those who have gone before;
- Encourages older adults to use available services by emphasizing that using services is not a weakness or sign of dependence
- Engages older adults in outreach to other older adults, possibly helping with RUOK calls as an alternative to robo-calling.

(6) Work with a regional provider to develop older adult computer training initiatives in all four towns.
- Enlist youth (via DOROT, Scouts, community service) and their parents to volunteer as instructors
- Train older adults who need rides and ride providers to use online reservation and ride matching service (e.g,, AssistedRides)
- Develop easy guides that show how to use the internet safely and the benefits of broadband connections for internet speed, as well as in home monitoring systems for safety and communication with healthcare providers and families.

(7) With Paratransit and the towns, ensure that all eligible older adults (and people with disabilities) understand the service and enroll appropriately. Request that ParaTransit come to the northeast periodically so that older residents of the region do not have to travel to White Plains to be interviewed for eligibility.

(8) Implement a regional information management system that would coordinate access to ride providers.

Alternatives. While the opportunities for relieving caregivers seem to be linked to increasing the pool of volunteer drivers, there are collaborative steps that the towns could take through a regional social enterprise that would raise funds and manage services like these:
- Transform and expand utilization of home-delivered meal programs to make available good tasting, nutritious food to everyone, not just the home bound
  - Explore possibility of using food stamps for eligible residents

- Create "food on the go," vendor trucks to go into neighborhoods, possibly with federal funding for alternative fuel vehicles.

- Publicize weekly menu options online, affording people the opportunity to call ahead or order online
- Formalize regional farm to table contracts that could be split among many households
- Explore sponsorship arrangements with Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, Chowder Marching Band, business associations, and country clubs to explore van service or farm fresh vendor truck.
- Explore possibility of selling signage on vehicles.

- With the Westchester Alliance, use Gerontechnology and other students to:
  - Develop Khan Academy-like website for older adults using touch screen computers to access interactive educational programming;
  - Develop mobile apps for older adults to use on smart phones or tablet computers to connect to families, friends, town emergency services, ride providers, and local events;
  - Develop apps for volunteers to confirm rides (or use AssistedRides app)

Lessons Learned

Think Tank participants conducted extensive research between Think Tank Sessions. They conducted online searches for best practice models from across the country. They conducted phone and in-person interviews with ride providers, policy makers, healthcare and social service providers, town recreation staff and a town supervisor. When individual reports came back to the entire Think Tank, the group debated new and old ideas, sometimes with great enthusiasm, and reached a number of constructive conclusions, namely:

- Volunteer rides: The greatest need and opportunity for improving access to volunteer rides is in the volunteer management arena, including recruitment and nurturing of volunteer ride providers. It calls for coordinating volunteer drivers and other ride strategies in a coordinated, collaborative way in order to increase awareness and acceptance of both users and ride providers. Among other identified ride management systems, one of the Think Tankers interviewed a low cost ride management software system (e.g., AssistedRides) currently in early implementation stages in lower Westchester. There may be an opportunity for sharing of volunteer ride management expense across many programs, as across the northeast region or across the entire county.

- Home rule: During the first Orientation Session, a long-time Bedford Planning Board member, who is also an adjunct history professor, described the benefits of home rule for the Think Tank. While local governance provides opportunities for excellence in town management according to the values of local residents, the Think Tank observed that it can also limit opportunities to reduce cost and improve quality through cross-town sharing of duties and reducing duplication of effort. As described in this report, the group identified instances where the entire region could benefit from more regional approaches to older adult services.

- Risk management: Transportation using private automobiles or vans requires careful consideration and mitigation of risk. Federal Job Access and Reverse Commute funding was granted to an organization to enhance the ability of all homecare providers to send aides into homes in the seven northeast county towns between 2010 - 2013. While attempting to reach upper management, Think Tankers interviewers learned in a phone conversation with staff that

it currently provides no homecare services to the four northeast towns, although it does provide service in the more densely populated towns of Yorktown and Somers. The Think Tank suggested that these funds might be used to serve bring aides from other homecare agencies into the four corner towns and that the agencies might work collaboratively to address risk.

- Riding with strangers: When the think Tank researched alternative ride models like NuRide (commuters linking up via the internet and sharing expenses), Faith in Action (network of nine nonprofit volunteer ride providers in the Austin, TX area), van pooling models, and others, they realized that older adults may feel vulnerable if they accept a ride from someone they don't know. This concern may contribute in part to the hesitation of some older adults to accept ride services. The most successful volunteer ride services find ways to introduce volunteer drivers and riders through trusted sources and to create opportunities to socialize throughout the year at recognition and other events.

  Similarly, home health and personal care aides may hesitate to ride in a vehicle with people unknown to them. Add this insecurity to the travel times from the boroughs of NYC to the four northeast towns (60-90 minutes) and assignments to northeast patients become a very hard sell for homecare/home health agencies.

  Think Tankers considered whether it would be possible to make the region more attractive to homecare workers by creating a fund that would compensate personal care workers for their time and travel, expenses that homecare agencies do not normally cover in full, if at all.

- Reimbursement for funds expended: Federal, state, and county funding requires that organizations expend funds first, then apply for reimbursement of funds expended. This practice makes it difficult for social entrepreneurial ventures to start up to address targeted social issues. Current bank policies make obtaining lines of credit impossible. One Think Tanker researched the possibility of using municipal bonds as a way to raise funds, only to learn that the required project funding would not be sufficient to suggest bond funding. She was advised to seek a bank line of credit.

- Advocacy is effective: While researching MetroPool's van sharing model, one of the Think Tank participants convinced a MetroPool program administrator during a phone interview to modify established policy in order to accommodate drop offs at patient homes. Previously, the van sharing program required that the van drop employees at a single site where the van would remain the rest of the day. The benefits of this Think Tank effort may prove to be substantial!

- RideConnect, a program of Family Services of Westchester : Through interviews with the director, town recreation staff, a town supervisor, and older adult residents, the Think Tank identified several recommendations to improve the program:
    - Outreach and marketing. RideConnect received funding to improve transportation choices for older adults in seven towns (including the four target Think Tank towns) of northeast Westchester between 2010 and 2013. Currently, it provides no services to the four target Think Tank towns. Currently RC provides limited volunteer rides in the more densely populated parts of Yorktown and Somers, and recently began to market their volunteer ride program to the entire county. The Think Tank recommended concentrating on building ride connections in the primary grant towns in ways that they identify in this report, including: Working with the towns to identify eligible riders,

marketing to families as well as to older adults, teaching technology, and partnering with houses of worship to recruit and train volunteers.

o <u>Phone coverage.</u> Students attempted unsuccessfully to reach RideConnect (RC) by phone during Think Tank breaks and again between Think Tank Sessions. Once they connected with the Director, they were able to ask their questions, but they recommended that the phones be answered by a person.

o <u>Expand volunteer opportunities</u>. RideConnect started its volunteer ride program using RSVP volunteers only, which limits its volunteer pool to age 55+. The Think Tank recommends expanding the volunteer pool to younger age groups.

o <u>Volunteer management</u>. RideConnect's mobility management information and referral system relies on collaboration and communication across town programs, volunteer ride programs, private taxis, and Paratransit, as there is limited public transportation. However, during Orientation towns report that no means of coordinating efforts is in place. The Think Tank recommended that some method be instituted.   The Think Tank also suggested that a regional volunteer ride management system would be useful to them.

o <u>Personnel.</u> In addition to the Director and Dispatcher, dedicate personnel for:
  - Full time marketer/outreach coordinator/speaker
  - Volunteer coordinator/trainer
  - Technology instructor/training program developer

Possible Policy Implications

- Towns invest mostly in youth programs; perhaps greater investment in the 65+ population would enable older adults to stay longer in their own homes and communities.

- The age 45-64 Sandwich Generation may be supporting both parents and children, but they also need to be planning for their own futures.

- Any volunteer driver effort needs to market to younger, as well as older, drivers, possibly through faith-based congregations, in order to ensure an adequate volunteer pool.

- Making communities livable involves addressing the interconnectedness of broader issues relating to the environment, transportation and community. See, for example, Bedford 2020 and past Livable Communities regional development efforts.

- There are no senior centers in the four towns, which rely on Fire Houses (South Salem and North Salem) and other town-owned buildings for older adult programming. Older residents appear to appreciate these programs, although a number travel to Ridgefield's Founder's Hall for college-level lectures, exercise, classes in painting, languages, and computers. Some library programming addresses part of the local need in the four towns, but the Think Tank observed that sharing the costs of an enhanced regional program of educational and social services for

older adults across the four towns might deliver a number of benefits, similar to those of Founder's Hall.

- Only one of the four towns dedicates a full time employee entirely to the needs of older residents. Recognizing that on average communities experience chronic disease needs in 41% of the 60+ population, Think Tankers recommend that the four towns begin to develop plans to ensure that the required community infrastructure will be in place as they older populations continue to grow:
  - o Towns could negotiate low cost broad band service in older adult homes to ensure wireless communication and capacity for in-home monitoring systems.
  - o Coordinating with town recreation programs, nonprofits and libraries could coordinate internet and tablet training so that older adults can stay connected with services like transportation, meal delivery, and emergency preparedness.

Lessons Learned: The Think Tank Experience

- At times Think Tankers felt confused and overwhelmed – "so much information."
  - o Sharing of research and inter-team communications generated too many emails.
  - o Easy to get behind on emails.
- Live.com was more reliable for posting research and other documents than was Google Docs.
  - o A system is needed to post revisions as the research comes in, but Google wasn't the right one.
  - o Finding the right system may reduce the number of emails!
- Google+ video/audio also proved unreliable for small group discussions for more than two participants.
- One person found it hard to reach other team members.
- Lack of response from resources. It was hard to schedule interviews and phone calls.
- There are MANY opportunities to address the challenges identified.
- The diverse backgrounds of Think Tank participants produced bigger & better ideas.

Next Steps

The Think Tank recommends a number of specific steps for service providers, county departments, not for profit organizations, and the Westchester Alliance to take immediately and over the next several years. All of these recommendations acknowledge the importance of close communication and coordination across towns, county departments, older residents and other stakeholders.

Van pools – number one recommendation!

1. Designate a sponsor to coordinate the program. *[Note: At this time, RideConnect, a program of Family Services of Westchester, cannot provide rides to employees of other homecare programs due to risk management concerns.]*

2. Present analysis to (attached as Appendix   ) and explore willingness of DSPS, DSS and DOH to support a van pool demonstration with drop offs at patient homes.

3. Recruit participation of VNAHV, VNSW and other home health/homecare programs that serve the four corner towns.
   - Finalize details with Carol Ryan and Heather Reiners at 511NY/MetroPool.
   - See Application for van pool setup in Appendix   .

Communications & Marketing:

4. Mobilize communitywide support for older adult programs and services:
   - Identify lead agency
   - Re-energize cross-town task forces (e.g., Livable Communities Northeast Transportation and Homecare Access Task Forces and coalitions, including new members Angels on Call and Barksdale Home care Services).
   - Develop community-specific marketing program with town older adult recreation services geared to families, houses of worship as well as to older adults. (See marketing and communications details under Issue 3.)

5. Expand the regional volunteer pool: Help RideConnect, FISH and/or other groups to recruit volunteer drivers in the 4 towns – Make this a big deal.
   - Identify lead agency
   - Develop awareness campaign of why mobility and continued connections are important for older residents
     - o Pinpoint message: Why is it important
     - o Schedule presentations to all Houses of Worship across the 4 towns
     - o Raise public awareness/fun
     - o Promote via grocery stores, local newspapers and magazines
     - o Flyers in home delivered meals
   - Launch Older Adults Dinner (preferably coordinating with town recreation departments and other volunteer ride services) – Collect and showcase testimonials: what does it mean to receive services and stay connected.
   - Honor volunteers

6. Develop sensitivity training modules: How does it feel to be old. (cf., Pace University Gerontechnology sensitivity training).

7. Enlist Channel 12, local celebrities to promote need for volunteers and to share humorous stories of local efforts to age in the 4 towns.

8. Encourage intergenerational connections & activities across the region through nonprofit organizations (aging in place organizations like ALOFT, At Home in Somers, Boxwood Alliance, and Livable Communities Villages)

The Westchester Alliance/ Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services:

9. Identify social work/geriatric care management graduate program partners and develop social work intern assessment project with and for the towns. For example, towns invest mostly in youth programs; perhaps greater investment in region's 65+ populations would enable older adults to stay longer.

    This assumption could be tested as a natural experiment with data generated by student interns assessing the current home safety/health status and satisfaction of older adults before towns make specific investments and again after.

10. Through the Westchester Alliance, develop a continuing Capstone project to develop and fund social enterprise solutions with Fordham or other Business School.
    - Adopt a project each year
    - Recruit professors
    - Build a plan and implement it. Use interns to staff at first.
    - Find funding to cover expenses and stipends

11. Develop tablet and smart phone computer applications for requesting rides and confirming ability to provide rides.

12. Mobilize a task force to develop outreach and social networking strategies for rides in the four corner towns of northeast Westchester.

Conclusions

The 2012 Westchester Alliance Summer Think Tank identified new ways of thinking about old transportation problems that continue to challenge older adults who want to remain in their homes in the four northeast corner towns of the County. They identified challenges, opportunities and alternative strategies to address needs and wants in ways that build on existing strengths of town and county programs and services, and then they moved beyond. They identified the need for regional collaboration across towns and with local businesses and schools. They made specific recommendations regarding communications and marketing efforts to raise awareness about living as older adults in the region, while celebrating their value and contributions to the region. And finally, they identified that houses of worship are essential sources of volunteer drivers in neighborhoods where people live at a distance from services and often from their neighbors.

The Think Tank discussions returned several times to the need for a regional entity to coordinate town and volunteer resources and to launch social enterprises specifically for the benefit of the region's older adults. As the number and proportion of older adults increases in each of the four towns, communities can and must work together to ensure safe and reliable older adult programming, including rides and access to homecare personal care workers, so that older adults remain engaged members of their community.

Appendices

1. Westchester Alliance Think Tank Planning Session 5/29/12
2. Recruiting Flyer
3. Orientation Day 1, references and contact information
4. Orientation Day 2
5. Notes from The Three Think Tank Sessions
6. "Finding Transportation Services for Seniors"
7. Final Think Tank Presentations by Students
   - 7.1 Improving Access to Home Health Aides in Northeast Westchester
   - 7.2 Government-Owned Vehicles
   - 7.3 MetroPool Van Sharing Options
8. AARP Transportation Survey
9. MetroPool/Easy Street Information and Contract

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JANUARY 17, 2013

> **THINK TANK STUDIES MOBILITY PROBLEMS IN NORTHEAST WESTCHESTER**
> **Westchester Alliance project explores transportation options for isolated seniors**

Nine students from six local colleges took part in a think tank to brainstorm fresh and creative ways to end a persistent problem: the isolation of seniors who live in northeast Westchester County because the area has no public transportation and other options are limited. The students also considered ways to transport home-care and home-health aides from southern Westchester and the Bronx to clients in the northeast region.

"The think tank was a terrific way to harness the brain power of some of our smartest young people to help resolve a crucial issue that Westchester confronts," said County Executive Robert P. Astorino. "Brainstorming encourages out-of-the-box thinking and spontaneity, which can give us a fresh way to look at situations we've considered in the past."

A brief summary of the report will be presented at the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services' annual Legislative Breakfast and Speak-Out on Jan. 25 from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the County Center in White Plains.

DSPS Commissioner Mae Carpenter said that isolation and loneliness for seniors is a serious issue, which should never be minimized.

"Isolation can lead to depression and all sorts of other problems," Carpenter said. "Mobility helps seniors remain the vital parts of the community that they should be. We must have dependable ways for seniors in northeast Westchester to get around."

The entire project took seven weeks. No tax dollars were involved.

Among other things, the think tank found that:

- A car is essential to live in that large region, especially in the sparsely populated four towns of Bedford, Lewisboro, Pound Ridge and North Salem, which were the focus of the initiative.
- Many seniors who live there, however, can no longer drive or do not have a car.

- As a result, once routine outings have become daily challenges, such as shopping, getting to doctor appointments, to the library to borrow books, to the hair salon for a touch-up or to visit a friend.
- Taxis are available, but they can be expensive. In some cases, it can cost as much as $50 for a ride from the nearest train station to a senior's home.
- The county's ParaTransit program provides transportation for disabled residents, and the recreation departments at the local municipalities provide some rides to their residents. But neither meets the growing demand.

Think tank sponsors were the Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services, DSPS, the Helen Andrus Benedict Foundation and United Way of Westchester and Putnam.

U.S. Census figures from 2000 to 2010 indicate that 7,857 people age 60 and older live in the four northeastern towns the students studied, and they comprise between 18 percent and 25 percent of their total populations.

The innovative think tank is a project of the Westchester Alliance of Academic Institutions for Aging Related Studies and Workforce Development. Its 30 members include businesses, not-for-profit organizations, colleges and universities.

Catherine Wynkoop, of Pound Ridge, a Westchester Alliance member, community organizer and consultant on aging issues, was the think tank coordinator. She said the project was successful beyond her expectations.

"The research the team provided will fuel lots of activity over the next couple of years," Wynkoop said.

The students agreed it was an enjoyable and valuable experience, even if it was daunting at first.

"At times it was an overwhelming task," said Agnieszka Malinska, a Mercy College student from Putnam Valley. "But I was impressed with the amount of cooperation between team members and what we were able to accomplish. I do hope our ideas will benefit the northeast Westchester communities."

The Westchester Alliance's goals are to interest people about the many well-paying jobs in the so-called "Silver Industries," and to encourage institutions of higher education to offer more courses to train people to deal with the challenges the growing number of elderly confront.

The alliance is a program of the Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services, which raises funds to supplement programs of the county's Department of Senior Programs and Services. DSPS' Colette Phipps is alliance director.

DEPARTMENT OF SENIOR PROGRAMS & SERVICES
Mae Carpenter, *Commissioner*