

**Communications Committee Meeting  
Notes  
May 16, 2022**

**Attendees**

**CoA**

Jean Dinwiddie, Co-Chair  
Beverly Rollins, Co-Chair  
David Engel  
Eddie Rivas  
Barbara Selter  
Marsha Weber  
Arthur Williams

**Alumni**

Marcia Pruzan  
Revatha Vikram

**Staff**

Shawn Brennan, Montgomery County  
Jennifer Long, Montgomery County

**Guests**

MaryAnne Beatty, Director of Community Outreach, Social Services of Alexandria  
Margaret Shetler, Nutrition Program Coordinator, Social Services of Alexandria  
  
Cathy Nestoriak, Director of Senior Employment, Jewish Council for the Aging

**Roll Call**

Roll was taken and the minutes of the April meeting were approved.

**CoA Ambassador Program/Speakers' Bureau**

Prior to when the guest speakers joined the meeting, Jean Dinwiddie opened by saying that the Committee would like to invite representatives from the DC Ambassadors program to address members at the June meeting and then Arlee Wallace of the African American Health Initiative to speak at the July meeting. Marcia Pruzan stated that she understands that Loudoun County has an Ambassador program and the purpose of that program is to inform individuals about scams on older adults. She offered to invite a representative from Loudoun County for an upcoming

meeting. Jean said that the Committee will need to discuss what the ambassadors will cover and when and how they will do it and suggested that Marcia hold off on the invitation until those things can be discussed.

Jean then welcomed guest speaker MaryAnne Beatty, Director of Community Outreach at the Social Services of Alexandria (SSA). MaryAnne introduced her colleague, Margaret Shetler, Nutrition Program Coordinator of SSA. MaryAnne and Margaret discussed SSA's Older Adult Ambassador program.

MaryAnne provided an overview of their program. She said that SSA is a small non-profit that works closely with the city of Alexandria. It has a couple of contracts with the city. About 4 years ago when Alexandria was starting its Age-Friendly program, SSA stepped up and said it would develop an Ambassador program. She stated that Loudoun County's program is a triad program, working with law enforcement to help prevent scams. SSA got a lot of good information from them and subsequently formed a task force with community members, the local Commission on Aging, SSA staff, and County employees and developed its own plan. The task force developed goals such as recruiting 50 volunteers to be ambassadors and reaching out to diverse communities.

SSA developed the program with help from Alexandria's Division on Aging, especially on ways to reach the different communities. It developed a list of about 20 locations for the Ambassador program and started reaching out to individuals to work with those communities. A notebook was developed that explains services that the city and other organizations offer for older adults. MaryAnne stated that she will share that notebook with the Communications Committee. She noted that at least one of the communities has a great database and following.

MaryAnne explained that SSA gave the volunteers a template of how to get started within the different communities. Twice a week an email with information is sent out to the volunteers to disperse to their communities. The program has about 100 volunteers. The volunteers can forward to their own communities the information that SSA sends to them. Every Wednesday SSA hosts 30 minute Zoom calls showcasing different speakers. The calls are recorded and sent to all the volunteers. MaryAnne noted that because being an ambassador is a volunteer position SSA does not tell individuals how much work they have to do.

MaryAnne stated that during COVID, SSA has been sending out information regarding vaccinations and transportation. Currently, they do not measure how much the volunteers are sending out and how they are involved. SSA asked the volunteers how many individuals the program is reaching and the thinking is that about 2000 individuals are receiving the information.

Jean asked about the monthly speaker series and whether it is SSA-sponsored. MaryAnne responded that yes, the speakers are arranged by SSA. These individuals discuss things such as older adult issues, as well as local organizations, newspapers, and community centers that deal with older adults. Jean asked how SSA ensures that the ambassadors are delivering a consistent message. MaryAnne responded that she prepares the message and sends it to the volunteers. She is not sure whether any of the ambassadors are now actually meeting in person but she stated that she thinks most are meeting by Zoom call or just sending emails.

Barbara Selter asked whether there are designated individuals going to specific communities. MaryAnne responded yes, and that SSA also distributes specific information to libraries and other places that serve older adults. For instance, there are four people who are ambassadors at a local independent living center and they have work schedules for each person.

Eddie Rivas asked whether the SSA contracted with the local Area Agency on Aging for the Ambassador program. MaryAnne responded that no, the SSA did not contract with the AAA, SSA does it in conjunction with the local Commission on Aging. The program is part of what the City of Alexandria does for its older adults. SSA works closely with the City's outreach person; it works in *collaboration* with the City, not to replace its services. SSA's work overlaps with the City's work.

Art Williams asked whether the information sent out by the program is specific to the different communities. If it is specific, how is it determined what information is sent to the various communities? MaryAnne said that when they are passing along information to the different communities SSA makes sure the information is translated appropriately. Margaret Shetler stated that the Spanish Ambassador program is in the early stages. She translates MaryAnne's messages and sends it out weekly. Margaret has also organized one of the weekly meetings.

Art said that SSA may also want to consider the cultural issues as well. MaryAnne said that some of the ambassadors represent diverse communities, but it has been difficult since the pandemic started because they cannot meet in person. In addition to the weekly emails, she and her staff offer other services, too, like health fairs. SSA tries to hear from its ambassadors about what kinds of services the different communities want. Eddie clarified: when the SSA ambassadors relay information how do they bridge the cultural gaps? MaryAnne responded that they try to send everything out in multiple languages.

Jean asked how often the notebook is updated. MaryAnne said that SSA updates it quarterly for the new volunteers. She noted that they probably also need to update it for the longstanding volunteers. Jean asked how many hours the volunteers put in each week. MaryAnne responded that she puts in about 6 hours a week on the program and Margaret stated that she puts in 1-2 hours a week.

Revatha Vikram stated that not all senior communities have the same needs. She asked whether SSA has any way to tailor Ambassador programs to the different communities? How does SSA know what the needs of those communities are? Communicating has to be a 2-way street. MaryAnne responded that it's been difficult to make inroads to the different communities and Margaret agreed. Art said cultural needs and concepts are difficult to consider but that needs to be done; the program must be aware of cultural differences. MaryAnne said that they are aiming for that.

Beverly Rollins asked whether the City of Alexandria has to approve what the ambassadors send out. MaryAnne responded no. Marcia Pruzan commented that to implement a program like this may require a paid staff person to do it, a person to be in charge of it. She suggested that possibly a Senior Fellow could coordinate it.

## **Committee Discussion of Ambassador Program**

After the speakers signed off the Committee continued its discussion of an Ambassador program. Art reiterated that the program will need to be developed carefully to be culturally sensitive. It must be designed to note the different cultures and needs of the County's diverse communities. Cathy Nestoriak said that the volunteers must be invested in and know the needs and culture of the communities. A wide net will have to be cast to get individuals from all the different communities to participate.

Marsha Weber stated that she found the presentation confusing. She did not understand exactly what SSA does with regard to the Ambassador program. She said that she also agrees with Marcia Pruzan that a paid employee will have to coordinate the program in Montgomery County. She suggested that requesting a paid staff person should be brought up with the CoA's Executive Committee. Maybe the Communications Committee could write a job description? Cathy commented that her information indicates that the other Counties that have the program have paid staff coordinating it. And, Cathy noted, it takes more time than MaryAnne claims it takes to lead the volunteers. Volunteers take a lot of care and feeding.

Jean stated that the Communications Committee is currently in the beginning stages of investigating what the surrounding jurisdictions are doing. Rev commented that Montgomery County is larger and more diverse than its neighbors and a coordinator who only works 6 hours a week would not work. The program needs to feature a hands-on, person-to-person contact and be culturally aware and tailored to the communities' needs. A paid staff person or Senior Fellow needs to be in charge. The program is a great idea but one that needs a lot of planning.

Art noted that one of the beauties of this proposal is to get individuals in the different communities to participate. But, he continued, we should not use the Villages as model, they have not gotten the different communities involved. The program has to be culturally sensitive. Marcia Pruzan said that she asked the DC professional involved in its Ambassador program about using the CoA as the volunteer program and that person said that there is too much volunteer turnover to carry it out. Cathy said that the Jewish Council for the Aging (JCA) works with all of the diverse communities and that takes a lot of work; it takes a lot of time trying to figure out how to reach all of those communities.

Beverly asked whether JCA or Montgomery County staff would be willing to discuss hiring an individual to head the ambassador program. Cathy responded that JCA would be receptive to something like this program but it needs to figure out how it would work. Marsha Weber noted that the program cannot be all things to all people; it needs to be determined what this program would do. It has to find the right niche.

Shawn Brennan stated that she agrees that this would require a fair amount of staff time. She asked, "If we would target different communities and invite their participation, could we do this on a community-by-community basis?" Jean suggested that the CoA put on its budget priority list a request for a Senior Fellow for an Ambassador program in addition to a Senior Fellow

marketing older adult information. The positions should be housed in Aging and Disability Services within HHS.

Barbara stated that she likes the idea of a multi-purpose Senior Fellow. Jean commented that the duties (ambassador coordinator and marketing coordinator) would require 2 Senior Fellows. Cathy said that her Senior Community Employment program leader requires 20 hours a week. Also, how much you put into supervision will depend on the extent of the program. There is quite a mix when it comes to the activities of the volunteers.

Eddie commented that the County needs to have better outreach; the CoA needs to address the fact that the County does not have good marketing of older adult programs. Individuals do not need to receive emails about services that they do not know about. Jean stated that individuals do not often ask for information until they are in a crisis. Cathy added that there is not a lot of ways to get information to individuals who do not know where to look. Jean said that the Communications Committee is looking at County printed materials, its website, and also producing the public access TV show, *50+ in Montgomery County*. She invited Eddie to share ideas on additional actions the County can take.

Shawn said that individuals do not see what they are not looking for. What would a good marketing program look like? She suggested that be fleshed out so that staff could work on it. She suggested that be a topic for a future program.

### ***50+ in Montgomery County Update***

Jean stated that the May *50+* show that discussed gardening went well. She reminded the attendees that the June show will be about end-of-life issues and will feature NPR host, Diane Rehm.

Jean said that the Public Information Office wants drop-in ready videos to use for the Public Service Announcements. She asked whether money from the CoA's treasury could be used to produce a couple of PSAs; specifically one regarding the County's 3000 line and one regarding the *50+* program that can be shown on other County Cable Montgomery shows. The Committee members agreed that this should be discussed at the next CoA Executive Committee meeting.

### **Website Update**

David Engel is still exploring how to get the Senior News email posted on the CoA's website. Aging and Disability staffers, Shawn Brennan and Tremayne Jones, are responsible for updating that website. Shawn stated that she is not sure what Tremayne is able to do with the site, such as rearranging information on it. Art requested that the Senior News link be sent to Arlee Wallace. Jean said that she will get in touch with Arlee to see what she would like to receive.

David would like to put the video made at the CoA's public forum on the CoA's website. It can probably be cut down to about 2 hours. It will cost about \$500 to edit it; the person who would edit it is a professional editor. An introduction about the CoA could be included. Eddie said he would send the Committee members the vignettes being considered for the PSAs.

A motion was made and approved to ask the Executive Committee for money to make the PSAs and for editing of the forum video. The Committee members agreed to the motion.