Section 4 Case Study: Lutheran Senior Services, Missouri

Enterprise is a leading advocate for the Section 4 Capacity Building for Community Development and Affordable Housing (Section 4) program. Over the past 10 years, Enterprise has distributed approximately $80 million in Section 4 grants and loans to more than 900 local nonprofit organizations across 48 states and Puerto Rico. These organizations develop affordable housing, finance small businesses, revitalize commercial corridors, and help address local health care, child care, education and safety needs.

Section 4 is the only federal program that is exclusively focused on increasing the effectiveness of these organizations. Through grants, loans, training and guidance, Section 4 provides local organizations with the staffing, program development and financial resources to maximize the impact of the services they provide and ensure the long-term sustainability of their investments.

With Section 4, organizations develop core skills that strengthen their ability to implement HUD programs, raise capital for community development and affordable housing, coordinate on cross-programmatic, place-based approaches, and facilitate knowledge sharing.

Spotlight on Section 4 Grantee: Lutheran Senior Services

Lutheran Senior Services (LSS) is a faith-based, mission-driven, not-for-profit service provider based in St. Louis, Missouri, that specializes in enhancing the lives of seniors. With 21 locations in Missouri and Illinois, LSS offers quality choices and exceptional support for retirement living. Through affordable housing sites, home- and community-based services, and senior living communities, it provides a person-centered approach to a comprehensive continuum of life choices. Building upon a tradition of excellence for more than 155 years, LSS is fulfilling its Christian mission of older adults living life to the fullest.

Over the years, LSS has grown from a single nursing home into one of the nation’s 10 largest not-for-profit senior living providers. Each year, LSS serves more than 8,500 older adults.

Local challenge

As seniors age, many struggle to maintain good health and live independently. Without the information, tools and services to help them age in place, many seniors suffer from poorer health outcomes and more expensive health care costs due to increased hospitalization. According to the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP), the average cost for inpatient care at a hospital for seniors is more than $2,100 per day with an average length of stay of 5.4 days.

Without formalized wellness or education programs in place to promote healthy behaviors or lifestyle changes, LSS residents also struggled with hospitalizations and health care costs. Over the course of one year, senior residents at LSS’s Rose Hill House I and II developments had 53 unplanned hospitalizations and three subsequent readmissions due to falls, exacerbations of chronic health conditions, medication errors, depression and poor nutrition.

LSS believed that a comprehensive approach to providing housing and health services would help improve the health of
its residents and reduce health care costs, but it needed an objective platform to measure outcomes. The grand opening of Village of Mackenzie Place, a 121-unit senior housing in Affton, Missouri, provided LSS with an opportunity to measure how effective this comprehensive approach could be.

**How Section 4 funds were used**

LSS used $32,200 in Section 4 grants in 2012 to support its work with the Washington University School of Medicine Collaborative Assessment to Revitalize the Elderly (CARE) to administer Senior LIFEsteps™, a comprehensive, validated assessment system that provides an objective, reliable and consistent approach for senior living and service decisions to 180 residents living in two of its senior developments: Rose Hill House I and II and the Village at Mackenzie Place.

This joint project, called Project Wellness, was developed to demonstrate that when the appropriate health and service components are in place, independent living can be maintained and even extended. While Senior LIFEsteps has been in use for over 10 years, LSS used Senior LIFEsteps to help measure how implementing a service and education enriched environment with the support of medical professionals and telehealth technology can make a difference in reducing hospitalizations and falls in affordable housing populations.

Section 4 funds allowed LSS to complete resident health assessments, purchase a telehealth kiosk, support the salaries of a wellness nurse and service coordinator, cover the costs of fall sensors for high-risk residents, purchase a blood pressure cuff, and provide wellness programming, including balance and exercise classes.

**How Section 4 funds enhanced capacity of organization**

With Section 4, LSS has been able to establish a pilot program using Senior LIFEsteps to help residents identify their health needs and develop appropriate service interventions.

The service coordinator has played a critical role conducting resident assessments, identifying residents who are at risk of hospitalizations and who could benefit from using the telehealth kiosk and fall sensors, and encouraging residents to participate in its “Matter of Balance” classes and other programs.

The on-site wellness nurse provides a first line of defense by identifying resident health issues and offering targeted interventions. For example, the nurse helps residents prepare for doctor’s visits, make referrals to a chaplain for help with depression, and connect with doctors to make adjustments to their medications. The nurse also provides feedback to doctors and follows up with residents to track their progress.

As a result, residents report feeling more in control of their health and enjoy participating in the health activities.

Since receiving Section 4 funds, LSS has pursued additional grants to expand the wellness project to at least one additional housing community. LSS has also hosted a silent auction with donated gifts to support the “Wellness Bucks” program.

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