



Submitted by
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DIRECTOR

*We Help.
We Care*

OTSEGO COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING

120 GRANDVIEW BOULEVARD • GAYLORD, MI 49735

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It's All In How You Look At Things!

What happens when we stop thinking about “what we do,” and we think about “what *can* we do?” It really is human nature to tell ourselves “I don’t do that” or “It’s not something I can do” before we have even tried to do whatever “it” is. When we started asking ourselves that question at the Otsego County Commission on Aging regarding our fee-for-services offering, you could say the light bulb went on, and we started seeing our capabilities rather than our traditional offerings. And, those capabilities meant opportunities to serve clients in new and better ways than we have in the past. I want to tell you about a few of those clients, and what we have been able to do for them with our new services format.

One of the cornerstones of our agency is our meal program. As directed by the federal Older American Act, we have provided tasty and nutritious meals for thousands of our area’s older adults through both our Congregate and Home Delivered Meals programs. But, if a person had a special dietary need, we did not offer customized meals to meet that need. It was a great system for the majority of people, but there were others for whom it fell short.

Several months ago, we learned that Lee Magsig, a regular at our Congregate Meals, was having trouble with sodium in his diet, which had landed him in the hospital for some weeks. What Magsig needed was a comprehensive plan to limit his sodium. After discussing it with him, the agency proposed a meal plan that met his dietary restriction. Since then, Magsig has paid for 12 specially-prepared meals each week, but, more importantly, he has stayed out of the hospital. “All my readings went down to normal,” Magsig says after he began eating the meals prepared for him.

As required by Older American Act meal-program standards, the Congregate and Home Delivered meals we offer are already low in sodium, but for those, like Magsig, who have even further restrictions, our staff can accommodate those needs. “Basically, I’m still using the same food,” says Meal Program Coordinator Suzanne Bannister, “but the key to making it low in sodium is the preparation, as well as balance with fresh fruit and vegetables.” Magsig says, for him, “It’s a lot easier. This way, it’s nice.”

To make the menu as pleasing as possible, Magsig and Bannister occasionally discuss the meals and options. “I tell her the stuff I don’t like, and she lays off that,” laughed Magsig. That feedback helps Bannister keep the meals interesting and satisfying, even while she is limiting the sodium. So, in the end, the meals help Magsig stay healthy, but maybe the best part is that he doesn’t have to cook. “I hate being in the kitchen,” he admits.

Another mainstay of the OCCOA is our In-Home Services, which includes personal care, homemaking, and respite. Like many of the services we offer, this support, in many cases, allows clients to stay in their homes or with family longer than they might have been able to otherwise. Local resident Dona Vinecki and her mother, Katherine White, are one such example. White, who lives with Vinecki and her husband Ed, has been a client receiving In-Home Services through the OCCOA. Recently, though, Vinecki has used additional respite services from the OCCOA, which the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) has paid for. The respite time was over and above what was typically available from the OCCOA, but we now offer respite and other services on a fee-for-service basis.

On some occasions, when Vinecki needed to go out of town for doctors appointments, she has used the OCCOA respite care on a fee-for-service basis to insure that White was not left home alone. “It works great,” she says. In the past, Vinecki adds, her brother would have had to come up from downstate to stay with their mother for the day so that she could go to her appointments.

But, for caregivers like the Vineckis who are tied to the role 24/7, it is more than just getting away for appointments. Vinecki says the added respite care also provides some needed down time. “We need a break once in a while, Mom from us, and us from Mom,” she quips.

And, again, as with so much of what the OCCOA does, the main goal is allowing our area older adults to live as they choose, where they choose. Sometimes, it does not take a lot of help for the clients and their caregivers, but it makes a big difference nonetheless. “I’d like to have her around for as long as I can,” Vinecki adds.

Had either of the examples above been brought to our agency in past years, the answer we probably would have given would have been “I’m sorry, but we don’t offer that.” Now, though, you might say we have a different perspective. We prefer to look at opportunities and think “how can we help?” After all, if we are in the business of providing meals, or providing respite care, how can we help even more people through those services? It’s out-of-the-box thinking, and we are enjoying the challenges and opportunities it brings.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW THE OTSEGO COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP YOU WITH FEE-FOR-SERVICE OFFERINGS, PLEASE CONTACT US AT 989-732-1122.



OCCOA CLIENT LEE MAGSIG AND OCCOA MEAL PROGRAM COORDINATOR SUZANNE BANNISTER



THE OCCOA IN-HOME SERVICE DEPARTMENT ALSO PROVIDES ADDITIONAL SERVICES

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