

**Great Plains Senior Services Collaborative
Phase 1: 2015-2018**

Final Report Executive Summary

Lutheran Services in America established the Great Plains Senior Services Collaborative (Collaborative) in October 2015 together with Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota (LSSND) and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSSMN). The goal was to expand community-based services and supports for vulnerable seniors living in rural communities. LSA convened the Collaborative as an active learning community with a common mission: to improve the health and quality of life of low-income seniors, share program implementation learnings within the Collaborative for faster adoption, and partner effectively with payment entities to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of these critical services. LSA engaged an academic partner, North Dakota State University (NDSU), for its gerontology and program evaluation expertise, and the institution brought an objective perspective to the Collaborative. This Phase 1 grant supported the implementation and evaluation of five community-based service models in rural Minnesota and North Dakota: 1) Volunteer Companion Program; 2) Remote Caregiver Support; 3) Supportive Services for Seniors Living in Affordable Housing (SASH); 4) Aging Life Care Managers; and 5) Volunteer Networks.

SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During this grant, the Collaborative successfully improved the health and quality of life of over 1,550 vulnerable older adults in over 70 communities throughout rural Minnesota and North Dakota. The Collaborative's programs served adults typically over age 76, with an annual income of less than \$20,000, frequently living alone with multiple comorbidities and reporting a high level of social isolation and depression. An independent evaluation of the programs indicated that over 95% of older adults who participated in Aging Life Care Management reported higher life satisfaction, lower stress, better health, and improved access to resources/services. In addition, 85% of caregivers who participated in Remote Caregiver reported that the program enabled them to provide better care, as well as to remain healthier and more balanced themselves. The SASH program evaluation found stakeholder feedback and client experience were positive, with clients stating that the services met their expectations, that they would return to the program in the future, and that they would recommend it to others. Overall, client needs were greater than originally expected and, as a result, program interventions frequently lasted longer than anticipated. In many cases, a broader set of services was required.

For many older adults, loneliness and depression can be debilitating obstacles. During the Phase 1 grant, the Collaborative tested several community-based social engagement models. These programs brought together diverse and isolated rural older adults and offered them an opportunity to socialize, bridge cultural boundaries and establish commonalities. Friend's in the Kitchen was identified as one of the most successful Volunteer Network programs, addressing food insecurity and social isolation by offering cooking classes to low-income rural community residents. The program provides insights into healthy eating on a limited budget and cooking with limited mobility through a cooking class format where meals are prepared and eaten together. Initial evaluation results indicate 95% of clients report satisfaction with this program. Additionally, the Volunteer Companion program grew significantly after startup.

The broad impact of the Collaborative is illustrated in the infographic below. These key metrics highlight the achievements of the Great Plains Senior Services Collaborative in serving rural seniors:

Great Plains Senior Services Program Impact powered by
MACP Funding

>1550

Older adults and their families engaged and served across all programs



>6,000

Volunteer hours
logged



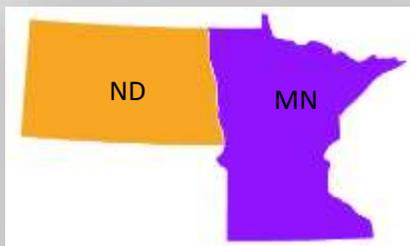
>63,000

Miles driven



>70

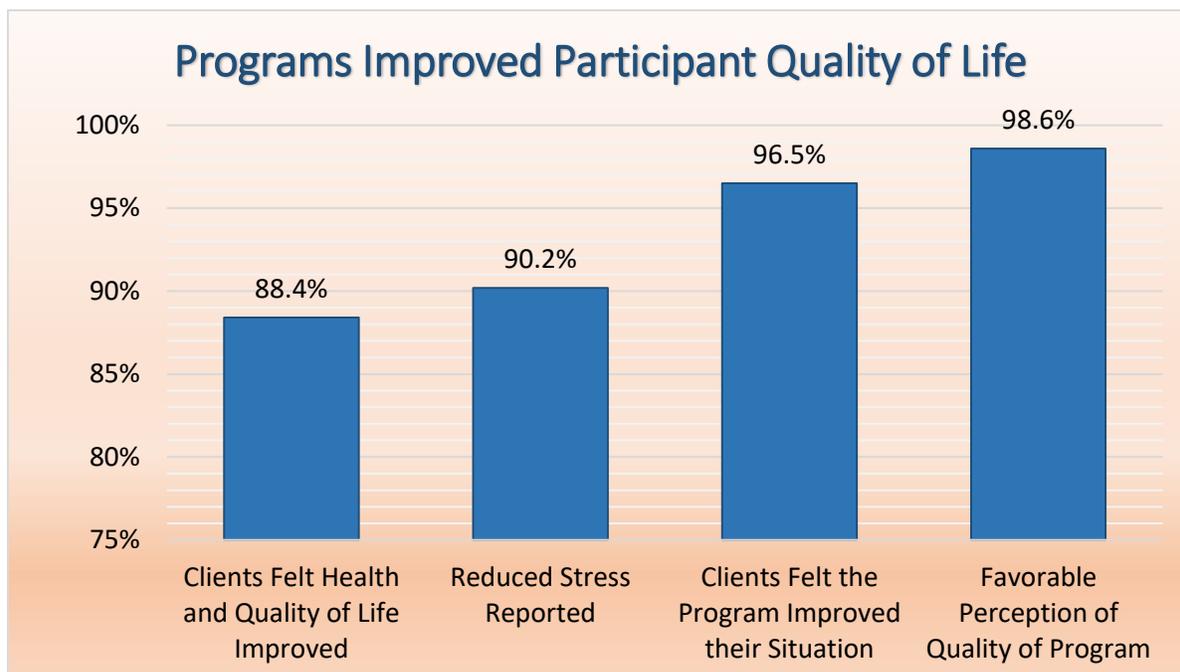
Rural communities
supported across
ND and MN



>130

Partners and
Stakeholders
engaged

The NDSU independent evaluation detailed the positive impact the programs had on older adults in rural North Dakota and Minnesota. This chart indicates that participants thought the programs were of high quality, and resulted in reduced stress, better health, and improved quality of life.



LEARNINGS

A number of key learning themes emerged throughout the Phase 1 grant. Some of these themes are summarized below.

Achieving a pathway to sustainability is challenging and requires focused investment in time and resources. Sustainability is an industry challenge in today's rapidly evolving health and human services sector, but it is most trying in rural communities. To achieve success, programs need to focus on creatively engaging new funding sources and standardizing programs to aid with efficiency and service delivery scaling. Focused time and effort is required to achieve sustainability. Access to outside technical expertise plays a crucial role in providing a framework for creating new financial partnerships with health systems and other payers.

The fabric of rural communities is changing. Rural communities rely on collaboration and trust, and faith-based organizations play a significant role in the buy-in and adoption of programs. Yet, increasingly, rural seniors come from many different cultures and backgrounds and the communities can be diverse and isolated. This is evidenced by the need to translate the NDSU program surveys into eight different languages. Given the diversity of the people living in rural communities, activities that used to bring people together now play a more limited role and few natural opportunities exist to bridge cultural boundaries and establish commonalities. The Collaborative found that fresh approaches like Friends in the Kitchen, which focuses on the social aspects of relationship building, are necessary first to build trust and facilitate community solutions.

Investment in trusted community stakeholders is critical. Creating and establishing partnerships is not a new concept or model as all members of the Collaborative have successfully collaborated with community partners over the years. However, this project emphasized that in smaller rural areas even

well intended programs designed to fill community gaps cannot happen without local stakeholders. Investing in partners with an established presence, knowledge of the community, and the trust of the potential clients is essential in rural America. Developing local partnerships takes time and flexibility, and results are not immediate. Often there are external factors and other challenges that precede successful program implementation. 84% of stakeholders believe the Collaborative's services are a good investment for the community.

Scaling programs across rural communities requires balancing a repeatable approach with community and person-specific solutions. While a certain level of specialization is required for each unique rural community, the Collaborative must focus on programs that have potential for efficient replication and quick adaptation in different settings in order to achieve scale. In addition, the Collaborative realized the importance of investing in the training and technology needed to create the job aids and other tools that streamline onboarding of staff and expedite program delivery.

Client needs are greater than originally anticipated. The programs delivered through this Collaborative are reaching some of the lowest income, most vulnerable seniors in rural MN and ND. As a result, program interventions frequently last longer than originally anticipated and, in some cases, a broader set of services is required. This impacts caseloads and the number of people that can be served.

LOOKING FORWARD

In the second grant cycle, the Collaborative will be expanded to include rural communities in Montana and will carry forward the successful programs in rural Minnesota and North Dakota. The new work will build on the learnings of the initial grant project and will collectively invest in resources to effectively scale these services and reach more older adults in the Upper Midwest. The Collaborative is committed to implementing sustainable solutions that enable older adults to maintain their autonomy and independence, improve their health and well-being, and achieve a higher quality of life.

This executive summary concludes with two quotes from the Volunteer Companion program in North Dakota and the Remote Caregiver program in Minnesota, respectively:

A Client in North Dakota, 2018

"I met my new Volunteer Companion lady and we instantly hit it off. She knew six members of Roger's family (my husband is Roger) besides his parents and come to find out she lived 1 mile from where I did as a young child. She knew all of my siblings, my parents and I also knew one of her sons. How ironic that 65+ years later we would meet. We have had wonderful reminiscent times and learn so much about each other. She is losing some of her eye sight so does not drive any more. She wanted to go to the cemetery in Hampden, ND where her parents are buried and my relatives are also buried there. We both saw our growing-up homes. Our time together just gets better and better. Our God is so great. I love my job."

A Caregiver in Minnesota, 2018

"I gave up my job as a nurse to care for Mom, which meant making a lot of sacrifices which were all worth it! Financially it was difficult and eventually I had to give up my cell phone, internet and computer. Again all worth it. The Remote Caregiver technology project was a lifesaver! LSS provided me with an I-pad and internet and this was really my only connection to the outside world. I was able to connect with friends and family, watch movies and listen to music. I also attended a virtual caregivers group and received caregiver coaching from LSS staff. Because of this help, it lifted my depression and gave me hope. I am forever grateful!"