

VENTURA COUNTY AREA AGENCY ON AGING

INTRODUCTION

In its review of prior Grand Jury activities the Grand Jury found that the Ventura County Area on Aging had never been considered. The scope of the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging is covered in its following mission statement:

"The responsibility of the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging is to serve all of Ventura County's sixty plus population including those with different social and cultural needs; support self-determination and independence among the older population and provide leadership in the development of a community-based system of care. This mission is accomplished through a network of education, advocacy, problem solving, program planning, and funding."

It is the purpose of this report to examine the performance of the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging to see if it is meeting its goals and objectives in a timely and cost-effective manner.

BACKGROUND

Ventura County presently has a population of some 97,000 seniors, representing 14 percent of the county's population. By the year 2030 it is estimated there will be more people over the age of 65 than people under the age of 15 in the United States. Thus, the future will bring a need for increased, comprehensive, community based services with diminishing resources for these services. If Ventura County is going to be responsive to the needs of this growing population, community involvement as it pertains to the nonmedical services in the home remains a number one priority.

The range of services is vast. Included are legal, health, nutrition, housing, adult day care and transportation. These services can, and do, allow some form of independence for frail senior members of our community, especially those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

SCOPE

Focusing on unmet issues in our community was the goal of Ventura County Agency on Aging for the 1995/96 year. Compliance with the Older Americans Act mandates the duty and responsibility of the governments of the United States to meet the needs of our aging population. Under the Older Americans Act, the Area Agency, under the leadership and direction of the State Agency, shall be the leader in such functions as advocacy, planning, coordination, interagency linkages, information sharing, brokering, monitoring and evaluation of community based programs. These programs will be designed to assist older persons in leading meaningful and dignified lives in their own homes for as long as possible.

There is established in the Office of the Secretary of Health and Welfare Services an Administration on Aging, headed by an Assistant Secretary for Aging, who is appointed by the President. It is the purpose of this agency to encourage and assist State and area agencies in carrying out the defined needs and goals of the Older Americans Act with the cooperation of agencies and departments of the Federal Government.

Established in 1980, the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging is accountable to the State of California for ensuring the effective and efficient implementation of the assurances required by federal law. The Ventura County Area Agency on Aging operates under the auspices of the Ventura County Board of Supervisors. An Advisory Council, composed of volunteer citizens, makes recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding programs, policy making and funding.

A survey to prioritize unmet senior needs included the following:

1. Nonmedical Services in the home
2. Transportation Services
3. Housing/Rent Assistance
4. Nutrition Services
5. Services for Protection, Outreach, and Safety
6. Respite
7. Health Services
8. Adult Day Care/Alzheimer's Day Care
9. Home Care Medical Services
10. Health Care Clinics
11. Information & Assistance
12. Employment Services
13. Senior Centers
14. Adult Education

INQUIRY

- Past performance levels and accomplishments have been maintained by the hard work, dedication and cooperative efforts of local councils and federal and state agencies. It is the continuing hope of this agency that each year will bring forth even greater and more effective leadership and development in the field of senior concerns.
- The Agency responded to our inquiry with extensive samples of their current directories, programs and services available through their office. This printed information is constantly being updated and reviewed to keep seniors apprised of the latest knowledge which can sustain and improve their health and happiness.
- With the cooperation of the Ventura County Area Transit Committee, which provides transportation to some 14 nutritional centers within the county, transportation goals are 85% complete. A Ventura County Transportation Directory is now in its second year. This directory lists transportation access information available to seniors county-wide.
- The State formula for distribution of aging monies for seniors is based on ten year census figures. It is a fact that larger counties are losing senior population and smaller counties are gaining senior population, thus creating an inequitable and possibly unsolvable hurdle for this Agency.

- Preventative health service is an ongoing priority for Ventura County's aging population. Brochures have been updated to enhance community support for health care delivery through a grant provided by Public Health. Independent caregivers are given a three year window to prove that their projected program, or programs, have met the needs of the elderly. Likewise, the Agency has the opportunity to assess the various programs as to their goal effectiveness.
- Respite services are twofold. With a total \$92,000 in funding , four weekend retreats for the caregivers of Alzheimer's patients will be provided. Adult day care centers and support services will continue to be available for frail and functionally disabled seniors. A new support system is now available for the grandparents who care for their grandchildren because of financial restraints, illness or other family problems. These programs teach the newest procedures in child care and give support to this important caregiver.
- Elder's rights from abuse, neglect and exploitation are continuing objectives. A proposed program in conjunction with all Ventura County law enforcement agencies, would make available hotel rooms for the abused for a short period of time until placement in a safe environment could be found. A target date of January/February 1997 has been set by the Agency to implement this pilot three year program. The Fifth Annual Elder Abuse Conference was held in October of 1996 addressing the aspects of financial abuse, fraud, and bunco tactics perpetrated on seniors. The District Attorney's Office operates a hot line for reporting local fraud or any other such crime against our senior population.
- Two in-home support services have been given funds to provide visiting, personal care services, housekeeping and respite for the major caregiver. In conjunction with these services, funding has been used to recruit and train volunteers for these services. One program recruits teens from public and private schools; under adult supervision, teens provide household chores, gardening, shopping, and other services. The teens receive school credit for their participation.
- Nutrition programs continue to provide holiday meals for the elderly. Continuing outreach to minority communities remains a high priority and is considered an ongoing program. A central kitchen for the preparation of meals is presently housed in the old courthouse on Ventura Blvd. in the city of Camarillo.
- Reaching the public through written publications, appearances at Ventura County Fair and the expansion of bilingual information, hopefully will encourage recruitment and training of volunteers who in turn will provide services to minority communities.
- Older worker employment is funded by a state grant whereby 10 seniors are contracted to nonprofit community agencies, at the existing salary range. Such agencies include the library systems in Thousand Oaks and Simi Valley. Expansion of this program is a continuing goal.
- Grant opportunities will be pursued to establish, extend or enhance adult day care services. These are costly services for Alzheimer's patients and are designed to provide some relief to the caretaker. For example, Fitzgerald House in Thousand Oaks has formed a successful alliance with the City of Thousand Oaks. The city provides the building and the agency provides the services.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Ventura Area Agency on Aging continues its mission to provide leadership in the development of a community based system that promotes dignity, self-determination and independence for our senior citizens. With a budget of \$1,700,000 for the fiscal year 1996/97, this agency hopes to continue services that will enhance and/or protect the quality of life for our older citizens.
2. With limited funds and personnel, and sadly lacking physical space, this Agency has accepted its leadership role as mandated under the federal Older Americans Act.

RECOMMENDATION

There are vast numbers of Ventura County citizens who could bring to this Agency a wealth of knowledge and experience to further enhance the existing programs and lay the groundwork for new and exciting projects. This valuable resource can only become a reality through extensive expansion of office space. It is the recommendation of the 1996/97 Ventura County Grand Jury that an effort to bring about this expansion be vigorously pursued by the Board of Supervisors through grants or whatever means necessary to fulfill this need of the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging.

"We haven't forgotten the meaning of respect your elders."

VCAAA Motto

RESPONSE REQUESTED

Ventura County Board of Supervisors

General Services Agency