



Wenham Town Department Profile: Council on Aging

Department Name: Council on Aging
Website: http://www.wenhamma.gov/departments/council_on_aging.php
Department Head: James Reynolds, Council on Aging Director
No. of employees (FTE): 2.5 (1 full-time, 3 part-time, plus van drivers)
General functions: Responsibilities are to organize and direct all municipal activities and services for the senior citizen (60+) population of Wenham.
Contact Number: (978) 468-5529; (978) 468-5534
Annual budget: \$110,095

Who are you, and what is your department?

My work in elder services started in 2009. Previously, I worked for EBSCO Information Services in editorial, product and new business development. My interest in serving elders came after a mission trip to Kenya and Uganda, a place with very few resources. Returning home, I began to see aging in America and the elder demographic as the most unappreciated and underserved of all. Prior to coming to the Wenham COA I started my own elder services business helping elders in their own homes. This is my fourth year working in municipal government, assuming my role as COA Director in 2013. It's my privilege to learn all I can to help people age-in-place and to be a better steward every day of that responsibility. The mission of the Wenham Council on Aging is to provide and advance programs and services to enrich the lives of the older adults in our community.

What are some of the most common tasks you assist the public with daily?

The range of tasks we take on to serve older adults runs the gamut. For example, people may find they suddenly need adaptive equipment. We have a substantial inventory of equipment – wheelchairs, rollators, shower chairs, walkers, grabbers, and electric wheelchairs, etc. – for people coming home from the hospital or rehab who need these items for a short time. It's a tangible way to help. Our transportation program is on the leading edge of tasks integral to the older adult population. Once a person stops driving they become dependent on others. Our van program is critical to our outreach and people know we are here to help. We travel all over the North Shore - from Lahey Clinic to Peabody, from Beverly Hospital to Danvers and as far north

as Manchester. We do weekly grocery shopping trips to Market Basket in Rowley and Danvers, Stop and Shop, Shaw's and Crosby's.

What are some of the more rewarding elements of the work your department carries out?

Developing programs and watching people participate and make connections with one another. Our current offerings include exercise classes, kayaking trips out of Essex, book clubs, bridge, knitting, and The Great Courses video lectures, to name a few. Just engaging in the lives of people facing challenges is very rewarding. My master's degree in Aging Services introduced me to many of the more challenging issues facing the aging baby-boomer population. Alzheimer's disease and related dementia (ADRD) is a big problem. We recently offered a three-part series on ADRD to introduce important information about the disease, and to discuss the myriad of service options and where to go for help and support. We had between 30 and 35 people come out to learn about the disease for a variety of reasons. It's very rewarding to be providing practical information on an important subject. What's important is to talk, learn, listen and laugh.

What are some common challenges?

Participation is a challenge. We have hosted "lunch and learn" events, and although we get great feedback, we haven't had any participants. On the other hand, we built a bocce court a little over a year ago and what started slowly as three to four regular players suddenly exploded into a jamboree of activity, with teams making arrangements to come from Marblehead, Swampscott, and Danvers. It was a lot of fun, and we are looking forward to that again this spring. We would love to know if people are interested in something we don't offer because our intent is to serve the community. Sometimes, if there is someone who is interested in sharing a talent or activity, we can try to build a program around that particular interest or hobby, and that may be a way to gain participation.

In what ways do you work with other town departments daily?

We are an outpost of Town Hall, but work with other departments on many levels. We are all connected in our efforts to serve the community and we work well together. Finance, Human Resources and Payroll are important to our weekly routine, but we are not dependent daily on any department. The Wenham DPW, Fire and Police are always there when we need them. We enjoy working with other community services like the H-W Library, the Wenham Museum, Veteran Services, the Recreation Department, and Acord Food Pantry. We are always looking for ways to knit our older adult population together with each other and the rest of our community.

What are some achievements made by the department recently?

The Aging Mastery Program, which we offered at the H-W Library over a 10 week period was an important achievement in getting us started in providing pertinent information to our adult population. The program was sponsored through the National COA and the Mass COA, and we had excellent turnout. We covered important topics with outside experts, including: Exercise for You, Financial Fitness, Estate Planning, Sleep, Nutrition, Medication Management, Community Engagement, Social Relationships, Falls Prevention and Behavioral Health. We have developed three exercise classes a week and a committed transportation program and staff. In addition, our recent three-part program on dementia was timely, and will continue as an important topic for the ongoing support group.

What are your goals for the department over the next year?

Our goals for the department are to improve and expand our outreach to people who are “aging-in- place” and to improve access to available services on the North Shore. We are fortunate to have SeniorCare, Inc. in Gloucester to help with expanded resources for our daily challenges, including licensed Care Managers, LICSWs, RNs, Nutritionists, Protective Services, Financial Consultants, Tax-Prep Aides, as well as human service experts in Housing and Health Insurance, Social Security and Mass Health. One goal is to find a way to connect better with them in order to improve and increase services for Wenham residents.

What is the best way for the public to give you feedback and to get the assistance they need from you?

Communicate with us! We are eager to receive your feedback. You can call me at (978) 468-5529 or email me at jreynolds@wenhamma.gov with your concerns or if you want to get involved. We are fortunate to have the Friends of the Wenham COA who provide us with financial support and we are always looking for good people to help us with brainstorming for programs or events. Our current, seven-member Board is wonderful but we have a few openings if any residents are interested in serving. Come and check out our programs or get involved in any way that might be fun for you. You can follow us on Facebook too.