



## **Case Study**

### **Town of Cumberland Advances Aging in Place Program Utilizing SMAA Expert**

**Situation:** Beginning in June 2014, the town of Cumberland conducted three town wide surveys to determine the need for Aging in Place programs. Survey results indicated that an overwhelming majority of residents wanted to remain in their homes as they aged: 72 percent of those completing the surveys said they plan to stay in their current home; 22 percent are considering downsizing, but many wanted to remain in town. To enable the town's aging residents to age well at home, the Town Council formed a committee of approximately 25 residents (AIP Committee) to spearhead the effort to make the community more age-friendly and institute a broad-based array of services to support residents in their desire to age safely and comfortably in their own homes. In addition, the committee pledged to help seniors alleviate the loneliness and isolation that often afflict those aging in suburban environments. After meeting for more than a year, the AIP Committee had not been able to get any programs off the ground. Leaders of the AIP effort in Cumberland became concerned that volunteers would lose interest in the initiative. They believed the AIP effort required a jumpstart to put actual programs in place.

**Solution:** The Town Council supported this effort in three ways:

- Contracted with Southern Maine Agency on Agency (SMAA) for the services of an expert to coordinate Cumberland's AIP initiative and provide SMAA programs that fulfilled AIP goals,
- Allotted a substantial budget for AIP expenses and operational costs, and
- Introduced a property tax relief program for the town's low income seniors.

The SMAA expert began service in Cumberland Town Hall in October 2015. She worked approximately 12 hours per week, with office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

### **Results:**

In eight months, under the guidance and expertise of the SMAA coordinator and with the leadership and assistance of the Cumberland AIP Committee and other volunteers, Cumberland's AIP initiative has become established as a model program used by the state Area Agencies on Aging organization as well as a tristate collaboration on aging. AIP volunteers have conducted webinars about the town's program, and representatives in other communities have consulted with Cumberland before establishing their own aging in place initiatives. AIP Cumberland has accomplished the following:

- **AIP Structure** The SMAA coordinator, assisted by AIP volunteers, has developed policies and procedures, forms, training modules, a volunteer handbook, and other protocols for the AIP program.
- **Registry of Volunteers** An outstanding AIP volunteer researched, put in place, and now manages the Volgistics volunteer statistics software program that AIP uses to enroll, track, and assign volunteers. Forty-nine volunteers are now registered in. Volunteers can enroll online at the AIP website (AIPCumberland.org) or by completing paper enrollment forms available at the AIP Kiosk at Town Hall. The Congregational Church keeps a record of the rides program volunteers, so there are additional volunteers involved only with that service [and not necessarily listed on the AIP registry].
- **Rides Program** Collaborated with a local church to establish a rides program (CAR—Cumberland Area Rides) providing transportation to the town’s seniors. Volunteer drivers use their own vehicles to transport seniors to medical appointments, social events, visits with friends, religious services, grocery shopping, and other errands. The service is available M-F from 9 am-3 pm and on Sundays 9 am to noon. The program was launched on March 1, 2016. As of June 23, the program had provided more than 70 rides to seniors in Cumberland and North Yarmouth and had 14 volunteer drivers, who attend a training session, undergo background and driving checks, and provide references.
- **Friendly Visitor Program** Launched a friendly visitor program for Cumberland seniors on June 1, 2016. Volunteers attend a training session, undergo background and driving checks, and provide references. They are asked to commit to one year of service and visit at least twice a month with the senior they are assigned. Volunteers under the guidance of the AIP Health and Socialization Committee interview Friendly Visitor volunteers to learn interests, background, and personality traits. Other volunteers do home visits with all potential Friendly Visitor clients. AIP volunteers match volunteer to client based on these interviews. As of June 23, the program had trained 14 volunteers and had six clients ready to be matched. Five more volunteers are waiting for a training session. Visits between volunteers and clients are scheduled to begin by the end of June or first of July.
- **Handyman Help Program** Launched on June 1, 2016. This program has two components. One is a collaboration with various church groups, who provide onetime help with gardening and other outdoor projects (removing brush, tearing down old fence, etc.). The other is manned by volunteers who are willing to provide simple household help (changing a lightbulb, repairing a window, etc.) that does not require licensure (such as electrical and plumbing work). As of June 23, two church groups had

assisted xx residents with gardening projects and other outdoor tasks. In addition, three volunteers are on the list to provide handyman assistance (indoor and/or outdoor).

- **Emergency Pet Care** Five volunteers have signed up to provide emergency pet care in a person's home in the event of accident, hospitalization, or other emergency situation during which pets need care.
- **Property Tax Assistance** Volunteers will provide guidance regarding property tax relief for seniors. After receiving training provided by town officials, they will assist and advise seniors who wish to apply for property tax relief under the town's new tax relief program. Training will be held in July, and the program will operate during the summer and fall leading up to the issuance of property tax bills.
- **Activities and Events** To combat isolation and loneliness among seniors, AIP Cumberland has collaborated with other town and local entities to provide a wide range of activities for seniors. AIP's Mornings with Friends, launched in January 2016, provides an opportunity for seniors to meet and socialize at a monthly gathering that also features a program (from town history to tai chi to Maine's loons). The new event alternates between two churches in town and meets from 10am to 11:30am on the third Wednesday of the month year-round. The AIP website contains an up-to-date calendar with listings from the town recreation department, the library, local churches, the historical society, the schools, and other local events of interest to seniors. This was set up by the SMAA coordinator and is maintained and kept current by an AIP volunteer.
- **Health and Welfare** As part of the agreement with Cumberland, SMAA offered an eight-week Matter of Balance class to Cumberland residents. The class, held in the local Methodist Church, was taught by a SMAA volunteer who is also active as an AIP Committee member. A follow-up course through University of New England is being considered. SMAA also provides intermittent programming for Mornings with Friends on Medicare, "Staying Safe and Independent at Home," and other health-related topics. In addition, the local fire department has taken the lead in developing several programs benefiting seniors in Cumberland: a call-in program designed to ensure that elderly residents will receive help if they do not telephone the CFD at a certain time each morning; a durable medical program that provides free medical equipment to residents who need it; car seat help for grandparents who need assistance in installing safety seats correctly.
- **Listing of Local Vendors** The volunteer AIP Vendors Committee has put together a listing of local vendors who provide various home repair services for a fee. To appear on the list, vendors must meet certain requirements and have a local recommendation. The

committee also created a helpful list of 12 questions to ask vendors. The listing and the questions are posted on the AIP website and are available in the new resource guide.

- **AIP Forum** An annual event held to publicize the programs and services available to the town's seniors. The first Forum, held Oct. 31, 2015, helped launch the AIP program. This year's Forum will feature four breakaway sessions, three of which will be conducted wholly or in part by SMAA staff ("Community Resources for Seniors," "Aging Well at Home," and "From Home to Senior Housing.") In addition, SMAA will have materials available at a resource table and will offer balance testing to Forum attendees. The SMAA coordinator assists with programming by coordinating speakers and programs with SMAA.
- **USM Collaboration** AIP Cumberland collaborated with USM social work students to produce videos, written interviews, and photographs of 11 of Cumberland's oldest residents. The material is being processed and edited and will eventually be on display at the town library, available to the schools, and online on the AIP website.
- **Information, Communications, and Recruiting** The SMAA coordinator has worked with the AIP Communications Committee to publicize the need for volunteers and notify residents of the various programs available to them. Volunteers on the Communications Committee produce press releases (under guidance from the SMAA coordinator), contact reporters, distribute flyers, and post signs to publicize AIP programs, events, and volunteer needs. The town posts signs advertising Mornings with Friends and the Recreation Department's Tea & Talk series, the Forum, and the AIP website URL ("Visit us at AIPCumberland.org").

The SMAA coordinator has set up an AIP Kiosk at Town Hall, which includes forms to volunteer or apply for AIP services, business/contact cards for the Friendly Visitor and CAR programs, the updated resource guide, flyers about the various AIP programs and events, various SMAA brochures and rack cards, and the *Senior News*.

Using a graphics program (InDesign) provided by the town, the SMAA coordinator has created a variety of marketing materials. The SMAA coordinator has also assisted in the production of a website for the AIP program (AIPCumberland.org), which includes:

- a running calendar of events of interest to seniors (maintained by an AIP volunteer),
- an easy online volunteer "button" to enable people to volunteer online,
- digital versions of the resource guide, vendors' listing, survey results, and committee minutes; and
- notices of upcoming trainings and events.

### **Other Important Observed Outcomes**

18 months into the program a few key outcomes which have brought benefit to the community have been noted:

- Participation at community events, forums for seniors and for the community in general has grown dramatically within the older residential population. Interest in community activities and community business matters has increased as well as volunteerism among this age group, benefitting a variety of community activities and programs.
- Calls to first responders has dropped by 25% from among this age group as there is another forum for residents to get information and assistance. This has had a favorable impact first responders.
- Older residence are receiving financial relief as the town has implemented the first tax relief program within the state of Maine benefitting their residents.