

THE NEW YORK NORC-SUPPORTIVE SERVICE PROGRAM

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Over the past two decades, UJA-Federation of New York has played an instrumental role in promulgating the concept of NORCs (naturally occurring retirement communities) as an excellent locale for the organization and delivery of supportive service programs that help individuals remain in their own homes as they grow older and frailer. It has shaped public policy, spearheading the successful effort to secure government funding, and is currently working with aging policy experts to formulate a federal NORC-SSP Program. This article provides an important case study in how an effective, long-term investment of financial and professional philanthropic resources in developing innovative approaches to service delivery can inform and transform public policy.

UJA-Federation of New York is a network of 100 social service and health care organizations that serve the New York metropolitan area. Each year our network of agencies provides care for millions of New Yorkers on a nonsectarian basis. The UJA-Federation local agency network is a highly evolved and sophisticated array of agencies, many of which serve the senior community. The reason is obvious: New York City's general population is aging, with seniors — those over the age of 60 — representing almost 16 percent of the total population (New York Department of Planning, 2000). In turn, the Jewish elderly represent 24 percent of New York's Jewish population (Miller & Ukeles, 2004).

The history of the NORC-Supportive Service Program (SSP) in New York is dynamic and continuously evolving. It emerged from simple but important insights: (1) many communities have high concentrations of seniors, who are aging in place; (2) significant numbers and density of elderly resident can provide a critical mass to justify locating services on-site where the seniors live; and (3) effective and efficient services can be organized to help enable seniors to remain at home even as they grow older and frailer. In New York State, NORCs (naturally occurring retirement communities) are defined as

communities in which 40 to 50 percent of heads of households are at least 60 years old. Although scarcely a decade ago this term was recognized only by those in the aging field, it is now part of the vernacular.

This article describes the critical role that UJA-Federation of New York has and is continuing to play in promulgating NORC-SSPs as an important programmatic response to the challenge posed by New York's gray-ing demographics. It also highlights our collaboration with the United Hospital Fund's Aging in Place Initiative, undertaken not only to help ensure the program's quality but also its continued refinement and expansion into communities across the country.

PENN SOUTH

The UJA-Federation network of geriatric service agencies is highly regarded in both the general and professional communities. Therefore, in 1986 we were in an excellent position to respond to a request from the board of the Penn South Mutual Redevelopment Corporation, a moderate-income cooperative of 2,800 apartments located in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. The International Ladies Garment Worker's Union (ILGWU) had sponsored the construction of Penn South, which was built with government assistance, to provide affordable hous-

ing for its workers and their families. They were joined by civil servants and other white-collar professionals of moderate means.

The Penn South board cited the grave problems that they as a community were facing now that a majority of their residents were senior citizens: the difficulties that many were having in coping with growing infirmities, the inadequate social and health care services in their community, and the difficulty in securing those that were available. They recounted the problems that some of these residents posed to the housing management, which was not in a position to provide the support services that were increasingly required. Moreover, the large number of lonely, frail seniors hanging around in lobbies and on the benches had a depressing impact on the quality of life of all the residents.

Out of these discussions emerged the Penn South Program for Seniors (PSPS), a service program that was established on-site at the housing complex with a consortium of UJA-Federation agencies: Selfhelp Community Services, which was the lead agency and responsible for social work services; the Jewish Home and Hospital for Aged, which provided public health nursing, a critical addition to a geriatric community program; and the Educational Alliance West, which organized social, recreational, and volunteer services. It was organized along the following principles: (1) seniors are a resource, and they have much to contribute from their life experience; (2) seniors are partners, whose aspirations and needs help shape and define the program services; (3) seniors across the age spectrum should be able to benefit from the program; (4) seniors need to be deeply involved in the program's governance; and (5) the services required are multidisciplinary programs, requiring at a minimum that social service and health care agencies become service partners.

The core program includes social and recreational programs, case assistance, information and referral, entitlement counseling, case management, and community nursing

services. Volunteers are a major source of coverage and program extenders. The program does not duplicate services that are available in the community; rather it helps link and organize those services for the residents. However, the SSP provides an important nexus to attract other resources from the community. For instance, Penn South seniors were receiving free psychiatric consultations because it was a training site for a local teaching hospital's gero-psychiatry fellows. As needs emerge, new services are developed, such as financial management, transportation, or social adult day care.

This program's original budget was \$250,000 and was funded entirely by philanthropy, with a grant that was channeled through UJA-Federation. It was understood that this funding was to be short-lived and that other sources needed to be developed if this program was to survive and grow. UJA-Federation assumed the responsibility for raising funds for this program and worked closely with the agency partners and the co-op board on resource development. The co-op board recognized and valued the important contribution that PSPS was making to the quality of life of Penn South seniors, providing them an appropriate place to seek assistance while freeing the housing management to perform its proper role. When asked, the co-op agreed to become a funding partner, initially providing \$50,000 from the housing company's operating budget. This expense is now recognized as an annual obligation, and 15 years later, the annual fee has increased to \$150,000.

Replication

It was clear that for the Penn South program not only to survive over the long term but also to expand its services — and hence its budget — to meet the needs of an increasingly aging, frailer senior population, the government would need to become a funding partner. We realized that there were many other urban housing projects like Penn South, NORCs of significant size and density that might also benefit from a supportive service program. We recognized further that,

to secure public funding, we would need not only to document the need for the program but also to prove that the model developed at Penn South could be replicated in other aged-in communities, including those that might not share the same social vision as the Penn South community. This vision was reflected in the board's involvement, in the significant volunteer activity that helps makes the program run, and eventually in a significant ongoing financial commitment by the housing company to help support the operations of the program.

To prove this was a replicable model, in 1993 UJA-Federation, in partnership with its network agencies, raised \$2 million and successfully developed the Co-op Village and Warbasse NORC-SSPs, supported in part by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). We knew from a study we commissioned in 1991 (Schwartz, 1991) that there were many more New York City communities, in which more than 300,000 senior citizens lived, that had demographic patterns comparable to those of Penn South, particularly those that had been built after World War II with government assistance. The RWJF-supported demonstration project answered the replicability question with a resounding yes! Twelve years later Co-op Senior Cares and Warbasse Cares for Seniors are fully integrated into the social fabric of both communities.

The funding for the replication project flowed through UJA-Federation, which provided support and direction to both programs' organization and operation. A lay committee was convened to provide oversight to this initiative.

Lessons Learned

We learned from the Penn South experience that the SSP must be the community's own program. Although there are key common and critical service components vital to the program model, the menu and priority of service responses should in no small measure be determined by the needs and aspirations of the residents of each community. Resident

surveys, focus groups, and numerous community meetings helped identify these needs and aspirations. We recognized that the success of these programs would be determined by how well we could respond by building a service program with the housing community and residents that addressed their vision.

Doing this was no small challenge for our service system, which was forced to set aside its traditional way of doing business of coming into a community with its own set of services and designing a program to fit its (the provider) needs. For many it meant trying to relearn and apply basic community-organizing skills long forgotten. But we insisted on keeping true to a vision of a genuine partnership among the community, the housing company, and the service providers.

Moreover, we recognized that no one agency had the capacity to address the spectrum of seniors' needs that a program would be required to deal with to meet the goal of successful aging at home. This meant that a team of agencies — to the maximum extent possible, those agencies were locally based — would have to join together to collectively organize the SSP. It was clear that a lead agency had to be designated as site director. We also learned that serving as lead agency is the appropriate role for the social services provider.

We also recognized that the housing company's financial participation is crucial, not only because the funds are needed to support the program's operation but also because they become invested in a critical way in helping make the program a success. We found that, having paid for a seat at the table, the housing company becomes engaged in both the planning and implementation of programs and feels more comfortable turning to the SSP for help when it identifies a resident in trouble.

From the beginning, we believed that government had a significant role to play in helping sustain these projects. We believed that local initiative, which includes financial participation, was crucial to the long-term viability and effectiveness of these programs.

Journey to Government Funding

Based first on Penn South and then on the RWJ-funded service model, state legislation that incorporated those principles was crafted. Starting in 1992, UJA-Federation's government relations and planning staff helped organize a coalition of other NORCs (some with programs, others without), housing and co-op activists, and committed service providers to help educate our state government on the need for these services and the necessity of state funding. Within two years we had achieved our goal. In 1994 the NORC coalition secured enabling legislation and \$1 million to get the program off the ground. It funded ten sites, eight in New York City and two upstate. In 1996 we secured an additional \$200,000, which funded four additional sites in the city. Of these twelve New York City sites, ten are in moderate-income co-ops and two in public housing projects. The program is a public-private partnership, providing funding up to \$150,000, but no more than 50 percent of the budget, and mandates that the housing company provide at least 25 percent of that match. The program is targeted to assisting moderate- and low-income seniors and uses HUD guidelines to establish maximum income eligibility.

The basic belief in this program that motivated us to organize at the state level brought us also to challenge the city to do no less. Given the significant concentration of New York City seniors who reside in NORCs, we knew that there were many more housing complexes and communities that could benefit from this program. In 1999 UJA-Federation staff helped organize an expanded NORC coalition that secured \$4 million to create the New York City NORC Fund. The city program funds 27 NORC programs in a broad mix of housing types: moderate-income co-ops, rentals, garden-apartment complexes, and low-income public housing. The city financing provides up to \$200,000 per site and requires a one-third match, divided evenly between the housing management and private philanthropy. UJA-

Federation network agencies are the lead agencies in 15 of the 27 New York City programs. As a result of these efforts, more than 46,000 New York City seniors live in NORCs with publicly funded supportive service programs and have the surety that they have a place to turn when they need help right in their own community.

To enhance our city advocacy, we commissioned the computer mapping of census data to depict graphically the intensity of the aging in place phenomenon. Those maps played a significant role in helping us get our message across and in securing passage of the funding. The maps also made us aware of the significant concentration of seniors living in near-in suburban communities adjacent to New York City.

NEIGHBORHOOD NORCS

Although they share demographics with our "classic" NORCs, more typically suburban NORCs are communities or neighborhoods of detached private homes and low-rise unaffiliated apartment buildings. The "classic" publicly funded NORC-SSPs were developed in communities that have a common ownership, such as a co-op board, a private landlord, or a public housing authority, as well as a definable boundary. Organizing a neighborhood that has neither defined boundaries nor an organizational entity with which to partner or from whom to secure a financial contribution is far more complex than our "classic" model.

Nonetheless, the demographic imperative and challenge presented by these suburban NORCs led us to find the Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, which was willing to fund the development of a neighborhood NORC-SSP model. In 2003, UJA-Federation directed that funding to two affiliated agencies: (1) the Samuel Field YM-YWHA, a full-service community agency in northeast Queens, which had developed outstanding NORC-SSPs in two garden apartment complexes, and (2) the community-organizing arm of New York's Jewish Community Re-

lations Council. That project is known as NORC WOW, or NORC without Walls.

Their joint effort involved extensive outreach to the 1,800 single-family homes in this community, which are occupied by at least 900 seniors. Through multiple meetings, focus groups, and a written survey, they have been able to engage a broad representation of seniors and the civic leadership to embrace the concept of a SSP. This program recognizes that maintaining a house compounds the challenge for seniors of living in their own home as they grow older and frailer and has developed services to help address those needs. Residents must elect to participate by becoming a program member, which has an annual fee of \$50 per person. The membership fee is waived or reduced for those seniors unable to pay it. The program provides the core services of a classic NORC-SSP while responding to the particular needs of homeowners.

In the spring of 2005, UJA-Federation helped organize broad coalitions to advocate for increased funding from both New York State and New York City to assist the existing NORC-SSPs and to help create new ones. We persuaded the New York State Legislature to expand the definition of NORC-SSPs to include the neighborhood model and to provide an additional \$1.2 million to help fund them. This increases the state's program funding to \$2.4 million. The State Office on Aging issued an RFP, and awards were announced in October 2005. New York State funded nine programs, three upstate and six in New York City and Long Island. The NORC WOW program was one of those selected.

The New York City Council responded by increasing the city's support by \$1.5 million, bringing its program to \$5.5 million. The new money provides additional support to the existing 27 programs, as well as funding for new communities both classic and neighborhood, and several planning initiatives. Clearly, New York City and State policymakers have embraced the NORC-SSP concept and recognize its important role in

helping our society grapple with the challenge posed by the rapid aging of our population.

National Effort

UJA-Federation of New York shared its vision with the staff of the United Jewish Communities' Washington Action Office, the advocacy arm of the national Jewish community, which recognized its potential to help bring change to the lives of seniors across the country. Since 2001, when NORCS were added to the Jewish community's national agenda, over 45 communities have secured more than \$23 million through Congressional allocations. These one-time grants are enabling Jewish communities around the country to experiment with new approaches to helping seniors remain in their homes as they grow older. The expectation is that this work will culminate in the development of federal legislation that will incorporate principles, lay out a framework for organizing NORC-SSPs, and provide the funding to support their development and operation.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED HOSPITAL FUND

The New York Jewish senior community is a major beneficiary of New York's NORC-SSP. However, we were and are committed to making this important program available to all qualified New York NORCs across racial, religious, and ethnic communities, as well as economic strata. We understood that there was a significant need to help educate the public as well as New York's senior service providers about this innovative and challenging approach to the delivery of services. Even though it would create competition for our system, we wanted to ensure that the city would receive many well-conceived proposals in response to its NORC-SSP RFP. We believed that future support and expansion of funding would necessitate that this program be serving diverse communities across the city. We turned to New York City's highly regarded United

Hospital Fund, a health services research and philanthropic organization, to undertake this work and provided a grant to fund it from a UJA-Federation supporting foundation.

In the summer of 1999, New York City's human services and housing communities were invited to educational sessions held in every borough where they could learn about the NORC-SSP's potential to address the needs of aging New Yorkers and could receive technical assistance to help them respond to the city's RFP. This work launched the United Hospital Fund's (UHF) Aging in Place Initiative. What began as a short-term educational program rapidly evolved into UHF becoming a major player in helping shape the implementation of these programs. This near-revolutionary approach to aging service delivery has challenged how government, the provider agencies, and philanthropy traditionally have done their work. Working in collaboration with each of these sectors and with UJA-Federation, the Aging in Place Initiative is providing the technical expertise and vision to assist these programs and their funders as they struggle to cope with the changes required if they are to succeed. This center of excellence has been critical to making the New York SSP program the success that it is.

This year a consortium of foundations has provided the Aging in Place Initiative funding to develop a National NORC Action Blueprint project. This project intends to draw upon the experience of the more than 80 programs from across the country and involve a broad array of experts to produce a resource guide. This guide should prove invaluable to policymakers, as well as program developers and funders, and could help shape the future course of a national NORC-SSP Initiative.

CONCLUSION

In September 2005 the U.S. Administration on Aging (AOA) announced that New York City's Department for the Aging (DFTA) and its NORC-SSP model won a

national competition, which singled the program out for "overall excellence on innovative models for developing livable communities for older people in this country."

UJA-Federation of New York has made a major contribution to the field of aging services by bringing the concept of NORCs and their potential as an important locale for the delivery of services into the public consciousness. It recognized its obligation to share the important insights that emerged from its work at Penn South and took a leadership role in the development and dissemination of this revolutionary approach to aging services while helping develop funding mechanisms for its long-term sustainability. Although ever mindful of its responsibility for the Jewish elderly, UJA-Federation's work has already helped transform and enrich the lives of thousands of seniors who are not Jewish. Moreover, as we look to the future and recognize the challenges to our geriatric, social, and medical service systems resulting from the explosive growth of the senior population, it is likely that the NORC-SSP model, which mobilizes and organizes the human, professional, and financial resources of a community to sustain and support individuals in their own homes, will make a significant contribution in helping our society address those needs.

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