

SENIOR CONNECTION

Information for Seniors & Caregivers

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What We Do Makes a Difference!

by Dr. Bob Dwyer, CMAA Executive
Director



In 1963, President John F. Kennedy inaugurated "Senior Citizens Month." By 1980, President Jimmy Carter renamed it "Older Americans Month." Yet any way you slice it, May of each year calls us to look at the services provided by the aging network to the 46 million Americans aged 60 and over.

Last month we celebrated Older Americans Month, proclaimed by President George W. Bush, reminding all of us in the aging network that "What we do makes a difference." The activities supported under the Older Americans Act through Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging (CMAA) do indeed make a difference. With 127,000 seniors in our region, and nearly 60,000 caregivers as well, the Title III programs supported locally

reach tens of thousands of people each year. Meals on Wheels and congregate meal sites, many in senior centers, help elders maintain a healthier nutrition profile as well as providing a visit or some desired companionship. Transportation grants have helped seniors with access to medical appointments all across eastern Massachusetts, and given some elders with sight problems a needed escort. CMAA Title III grants have offered emergency home repair to countless seniors over the years, and to others free legal assistance or breast cancer screening. Programs to educate caregivers or offer an Alzheimer support group, in-home respite, financial management assistance, long-term care ombudsman, guardianship or crisis intervention all serve older Americans in our 61 communities. In all, some 30 programs receive at least part of their funding through Title III of the Older Americans Act.

We are most proud of our *SeniorConnection*, the program that brings information and referral (I&R) services to seniors, caregivers and professionals in the aging network. As staff has traveled around the region, one thing that stands out is that

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access to services is most hindered by the fact that people don't know about them. I&R works to bring the knowledge about services to people. Here at CMAA, our I&R is enhanced through our work on the Internet at www.SeniorConnection.org and its special Connection for Caregivers section. These interactive web pages offer much for anyone interested in senior services.

Just as important through all of this is the partnerships we have built to make the Older Americans Act work. Seventeen organizations throughout the region, in utilizing Title III funds, have made all of the above services accessible to seniors and to those who care for them. These agencies, in concert with Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging are an integral part of the national aging network, dedicated to serving seniors and caregivers alike. One of our newest partnerships has brought CMAA together with the three Aging Services Access Points in our region to form the Central Massachusetts Family Caregiver Support Program under Title III E of the Older Americans Act and special funds from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This program offers training, education and respite to caregivers and the seniors for whom they care. Whether it's the Area Agency on Aging, an Aging Services Access Point (ASAP), senior center/council on aging or any other organization, all work together to provide what seniors need to stay safely at home in their community and have access to services.

In addition to our regional network, Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging is also a part of the national network of 660 Area Agencies on Aging. For long distance caregivers, this system can help locate services in every state and territory. CMAA has received calls from across the country from children of seniors here in our planning and service area. And, for local residents whose parents live elsewhere, we have been able to assist them in accessing services in other regions with the help of an Area Agency on Aging in another state.

In the end, what Area Agencies on Aging accomplish with the help of other organizations makes a tremendous difference in lives of seniors. Josefina Carbonell, Assistant Secretary for Aging in the Department of Health and Human Services in Washington, D.C., says, "Our partners within the network have a common goal of ensuring that older Americans can age while retaining their independence with dignity and respect." And she's right.

Whether here in Central Massachusetts, or in Honolulu, Hawaii or anywhere in between, Area Agencies on Aging and the aging network that we are a part of make a difference in the lives of elders and those who love them.



Jeffrey Black

Jeffrey Black has been the Regional Caregiver Support Coordinator since April of the year 2003.

A native of Lexington, Mr. Black received his Masters of Management from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University in Waltham. Previously he received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Clark University in Worcester.

Jeffrey has worked in Human Services for the past 10 years, having worked at Community Healthlink, Centro Las Americas, DSS and DMR. Most recently Jeffrey was part of a research team at the UMass Medical School developing a model to treat Depression in the primary care setting.

Jeffrey is a resident of Worcester where he lives with his wife, Laurie and dog, Mac.

We Got a New Face Lift!

We gathered as a team back in mid 1998 and began to plot a course that would take us beyond what we could then only begin to imagine. So in August of 1998, out of a need to better serve seniors and their caregivers, our website, the SeniorConnection.org was born. We were pleased and excited and very surprised at the number of hits we began to receive. During that first year we were averaging close to 9000 hits a month.

We wanted to empower seniors and their caregivers, so in May of 1999 we put up our Guide to Elder Services, which is our entire in-house database and, everything that is listed in the hardcover version. This database gets updated once a month to give our consumers the most current information available. Our database is free and accessible to any one who has access to the internet. After all, we are in the business to "give away" information.

By January of 2000, SeniorConnection.org began to expand once again, when we added three new features to the site. Our What's New section boasted of a Calendar of Events page, Announcement page and our Agency Newsletter. We began listing community events and announcements and encouraged agencies to send us information to put up on our site. The hits we were getting on our site were incredible and rising steadily each year, from 100,000 to 110,000 to 160,000, and currently, 243,000.

Then in May of 2002 we launched our interactive Connection for Caregiver site. This exciting new venture would allow us to cross over barriers of time and space. You could say we were about to "boldly go where few had gone before". We could now give caregivers of seniors something new and different to experience, and so we offered on-line support groups and caregiving classes, in

real time. We were a leap ahead of ourselves because, after six months of research, we could not find anyone in Massachusetts providing on-line support groups of this fashion. A scenario whereby you sit at your computer tuned into our program and listen to a social worker answer questions from you or others in the audience. Or you could be watching a slideshow presentation on Caregiving.

Soon after we had finished that project we looked for ways to enhance our SeniorConnection site so that it complimented the Connection for Caregivers. Working alongside our web developers, Ashdown Technologies, we were able to create an outstanding, professional site.

So, without further ado, I would like to introduce to you our new SeniorConnection.org. More features, more information, and a Brand New Look!



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This project funded in part by the Executive Office of Elder Affairs of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Spring 2003

What is Audience Participation All About and Why Me!

by John Belding, Director of Planning

Public input is an important part of the CMAA planning process. We're not just concerned with the problems that elders may face, but also with the absence of specific needs on their part. We want to know when you don't need help as well as when you do.

For example, while the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren has received a great deal of publicity in recent years, our needs assessment survey, sent to over 800 Central Massachusetts residents aged 60 and older in 2001 indicated that only 0.3% of respondents were caring for minor children. This is consistent with the data for Massachusetts as a whole and approximately one-third of the national rate.

You can have a voice in the priority setting and funding allocation process simply by responding to requests for feedback or telling us about your concerns at any point during the year.

At least once a year we hold public hearings where people can tell us about their perceptions of the major issues affecting people 60 and older. The scheduling of these events is noted on our website www.SeniorConnection.org, in local newspapers and in other publications. If you can't attend any of the hearings, you can send us your comments via U.S. mail or e-mail. In fact you don't have to wait for a hearing to be scheduled, we'd like to hear from you whenever you're concerned about an issue.

Many of the features on our website include questionnaires. Answering these questions is another way you can help us to better respond to the needs here in Central Massachusetts. If you receive a survey questionnaire from us in the mail please respond, even if you don't think you have any need or problem that can be addressed by CMAA. Again, knowing what people don't need is just as important to us as learning about the problems that elders in Central Massachusetts are confronting.