

Aging Services Reach for Green Horizons

Core values prove to be strong motivation for environmental responsibility.

by Arlene Karidis

Mission-driven providers promote the well-being of seniors while encouraging staff to take care of themselves so they can best embrace their roles in caring for others. It only makes sense that providers take their values and actions further by respecting the environment. Providers are doing just that, and their initiatives are reaping all types of benefits.

Janet Hamilton Miller, CNA (left), Althea Pelle, CNA, and Teresa Soliva, R.N., were among the nearly 300 employees of the Sarah Neuman Center who happily carpooled on Jewish Home Lifecare's "Leave Your Car at Home Day" in 2008.

In one among dozens of eco-friendly initiatives, Jewish Home Lifecare, New York, N.Y., sponsored a system-wide "Leave Your Car at Home Day" in 2008. Nearly 300 employees opted to get to work via public transportation, walking, cycling or carpooling. They were supported in the effort by New York's Department of Transportation, which offered bus service schedules, assistance arranging carpools and help mapping out personalized public transit routes.

The result? A 7,434-mile reduction in distance traveled to work by car, and a 6,810-pound reduction in carbon output. Then there was the element of fun.

"We raffled off Metro cards, American Express gift cards and movie tickets," says Alaine Marx, Jewish Home Lifecare's environmental responsibility coordinator.

Jewish Home Lifecare



"Beyond that, the event was a chance to appreciate a new experience while simply promising to make a commitment for just one day." She is now planning the next Leave Your Car at Home Day and, based on enthusiasm over the first event, anticipates more to come.

A Brandeis University graduate with a degree in international and environmental studies, Marx was hired when the organization's environmental initiatives grew to the point that it was beneficial to bring in a program coordinator. A two-year grant from the Brenner Family Foundation helped to realize this new position. Marx organizes green projects and advises staff on eco-friendly practices.

Another example of what the organization is doing is given by Gregory Poole-Dayam, assistant administrator for resident and clinical services at the Sarah Neuman Center, the Westchester division of Jewish Home Lifecare.

"There are over 1,100 personal computers in our organization, and by powering them off when they are not in use, we can save \$50,000 per year in electricity," says Poole-Dayam. "Reducing our use of electricity not only has a beneficial impact on the environment, but also means that there are cuts that will not have to be made during these difficult times in other areas affecting resident care."

From One Generation to the Next

Central Connecticut Senior Health Services, based in Southington, is saving \$70,000 a year in utilities at two sites while supporting energy conservation and renewal. Leveraging a grant from

Environmental Accountability and a Leader's Development

Gregory Poole-Dayan, assistant administrator for resident and clinical services at Sarah Neuman Center, Jewish Home Lifecare, was a Leadership AAHSA Fellow in 2007. The year-long fellowship prepares participants to further develop their leadership roles in the aging-services field.

Every Leadership AAHSA fellow must develop and implement an Action Learning Project to help realize the leadership concepts of innovation, transformation and person-centeredness. Poole-Dayan's project was an environmental responsibility initiative to address the pressing issue of global warming. He reflects on his experience developing his initiative while serving as a Leadership AAHSA fellow.

FutureAge: How did your participation in Leadership AAHSA help you in developing your environmental responsibility initiative?

Gregory Poole-Dayan: The unique opportunity to work with other fellows and a mentor while simultaneously receiving support from my CEO, Dr. Audrey Weiner, and board trustee Michael Jaffe, gave legitimacy to start a program that was outside of my daily job responsibilities of resident care. The process of the Action Learning Project was especially helpful, as it involved reflective analysis to successfully build an effective program. This program has become systemwide, affecting the behaviors of thousands of employees, elders and their families.

FA: In what ways do you think Leadership AAHSA will affect your career going forward?

GPD: Leadership AAHSA was extremely helpful in exploring diverse thoughts on leadership. I met many different leaders and saw that they all possessed a high level of genuineness that helped them to be successful. However, I believe that the most valuable aspect of Leadership AAHSA was, and continues to be, the relationships that were formed among the 33 fellows, along with the faculty, coaches and AAHSA staff associated with the program. This network of supportive, knowledgeable and wise colleagues will always be there for me to draw upon and contribute to as my career evolves.

FA: Are there any lessons you have learned that you may be able to permanently instill in your organization's culture?

GPD: The year spent with Leadership AAHSA continually emphasized that leadership exists throughout all levels of an organization, including with CNAs and elders, as well as managers. I am working with my management team not only to look at and improve their leadership skills, but to enable them to do the same with their staff. Leadership development must remain a focus at all levels for the organization to grow, be innovative and succeed. Additionally, by keeping the issue of environmental consciousness on everyone's agenda, I hope that it will become more integrated into our everyday culture. **if:**

Editor's note: The application period for next year's Leadership AAHSA program begins April 1. Applications are due **May 15**. Please visit www.aahsa.org/leadership/application. If you would like to receive an electronic notification that the application is live, please send an e-mail to kjacobs@aaahsa.org. For more about the Leadership AAHSA program, visit www.aahsa.org/leadershipaaahsa.

the Connecticut Department of Public Utilities Commission, the organization invested in a cogeneration system with a combustion engine that provides 50 percent of the buildings' electricity. Additionally, the system's exhaust is captured and used to provide most of the hot water and heating for both buildings.

The organization's energy conservation initiative also includes a system reducing electrical usage during emergency and high energy-demand periods, and an HVAC automation system setting back temperatures in unused spaces at night.

One project with especially substantial returns was the upgrade of 90 commodes in a 130-bed skilled nursing community. Through this investment, the provider has saved 400,000 gallons of water a year, resulting in a nearly 50 percent reduction in the overall water bill.

"We engaged in each of our environmental missions, not only to improve cost efficiency, but because it is up to us to carry the baton to the next generation with regard to protection of natural

resources. If we act as stewards of the land, those who follow along our path will be able to do the same," says Trish Walden, vice president of Central Connecticut Senior Health Services.

Porter Hills Retirement Communities and Services in Grand Rapids, Mich., recently opened the first two Green Houses® anywhere to earn LEED certification. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is a national program outlining guidelines for developing and designing environmentally sustainable buildings. A LEED rating system is used to accredit facilities at various levels.

The Green Houses marked this provider's first time attempting LEED certification with new construction. Integrating the plans into the existing culture of inclusiveness was a natural fit.

"What made us decide to go green was our residents' long-standing interest in earth-friendly activities. And everyone was involved in the planning process, with our architect meeting with residents and staff beyond management,"

says Ingrid Weaver, vice president of operations for Porter Hills. "Including everyone resulted in a design that staff from all disciplines as well as residents felt would create a home with functionality to meet our frail elders' needs."

Inside the two 10-bedroom houses, recyclable carpets cover the floors. Low-VOC-emission paints cover the walls. Energy-efficient dishwashers, refrigerators, clothes dryers and washing machines were chosen. The houses' many windows allow ample daylight inside, minimizing the need for artificial lighting.

Outside, a geothermal pump draws heat and cold from ground water and transfers it into the building, translating to a 50 percent overall reduction in energy use.

Residents and staff enjoy the setting with its views of natural wetlands and wildlife. Fieldstone front porches with screened windows invite residents outside to chat or play cards, even when it rains, as long as it's warm.

Furthermore, Weaver says, “Our environmental initiative has not only had an impact on Porter Hills’ Green House homes but all of our existing communities as well.”

Porter Hills’ project was a tall task with high upfront costs, though there will be sizable savings in the next few years. But you don’t have to think so big to carve green paths. Some providers are taking on projects with easily reachable goals, regardless of budgets and resources.

“There’s a lot of low-lying fruit out there, like recycling paper, cans and bottles; using compact fluorescent light bulbs; and not idling the transport vans. What you need most to make a difference are champions who are motivated and passionate. We found that getting staff and residents on board was not difficult as long as we developed organized initiatives,” says Poole-Dayan.

Green and Socially Accountable

As they work toward making their organizations more environmentally sound, providers find that one action can have multiple advantages. A prime example is an initiative Jewish Home Lifecare joined to benefit third world countries. Working through the Afya Foundation, which collects and distributes medical supplies and other goods in Africa, Jewish Home Lifecare recycled its medical equipment, supplies and mattresses by having them shipped to Rwanda, Malawi and Uganda.

“The equipment and supplies were in good condition, and the mattresses were being replaced for preventative maintenance. They would have gone to the landfill if we did not give them away,” says Poole-Dayan.

“So donating them fills our environmental goal in that we are reducing our waste stream, and it also fulfills our commitment as a nonprofit organization to be socially accountable.”

Revenue savings. Social accountability. Environmental consciousness. Just doing the right thing across the board. These are the core values and topmost goals that have aging-services providers reaching for greener horizons. ■

Arlene Karidis is a writer who lives in Mt. Airy, Md.



Central Connecticut Senior Health Services

Central Connecticut Senior Health Services is reaping substantial utility-bill savings from a new cogeneration system, automated systems to reduce energy use in buildings and low-flow plumbing fixtures.

Resources

Jewish Home Lifecare, New York, N.Y.

Contacts: Alaine Marx, environmental responsibility coordinator, amarx@jhha.org or (212) 870-4829; Gregory Poole-Dayan, assistant administrator for resident and clinical services, Sarah Neuman Center, gpooledayan@jhha.org or (914) 698-6005.

Porter Hills Retirement Communities & Services, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Contact: Ingrid Weaver, vice president of operations, iweaver@porterhills.org or (616) 954-1790.

Central Connecticut Senior Health Services, Inc., Southington, Conn.

Contact: Trish Walden, vice president, waldent@ctseniorcare.org or (860) 378-1226.

The Afya Foundation, Yonkers, N.Y.

www.afyafoundation.org.

Related Guidelines from AAHSA Quality First

Each Guideline offers additional information on the attributes of the quality characteristics laid out in the Aging Services-Providers’ Checklist for AAHSA Quality First:

- Guideline 3.6., Developing a Plan for Environmental Stewardship, www.aahsa.org/environment.aspx.