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6/23/2021

Letter to the Editor

Re: Impact of COVID-19 on Older Adults

The immediate difficulties and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our older adults has resulted in an incredible response by the Dane County Aging Network that includes the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) of Dane County.

When COVID-19 spread to our community, our aging population was the most impacted as they were the ones who were disproportionately affected by the easily transmissible disease. Instead of focusing programs on bringing older adults together, immediate efforts were taken to help them stay safe in sheltering at home.

AAA staff emailed daily status reports highlighting the constant changes in the agency networks' operations, updates on the virus, and new resources available to ensure the aging network had current information to safely serve our older adults.

Meals for older adults that were previously provided at local restaurants or dining sites were switched overnight to home-delivered meals or curbside deliveries. AAA staff successfully purchased emergency meal boxes and disposable utensils when all other meal providers were looking for the same things.

In order to combat the serious concern for loneliness and social isolation, AAA staff and aging providers distributed activities to the home-bound, offered virtual programming to engage those able to use technology, distributed donated laptops and tablets, and initiated telephone conferencing to reach those unable to connect via the internet.

Vital programs continued without a hitch despite staff working remotely. Caregiver grants for respite and in-home services were awarded. Elder Benefit Specialists worked diligently to ensure older adults accessed public benefits and legal rights. Case managers checked on and "window" visited vulnerable clients to address their needs and support them living independently in their homes.

Thank you to our aging program professionals and volunteers in supporting our aging population who are resilient and a valuable asset to our County.

Melissa Ratcliff
County Board Supervisor District 36
Area Agency on Aging Board Chair