



1. What problem were you addressing? What solution did you propose to address it?

Low-income older adults living in subsidized housing are aging in place without adequate support. At the same time, they are priced out of traditional assisted living facilities and, too often, end up prematurely in nursing homes. While the Assisted Living Program (ALP) model offers a flexible and creative solution to address this problem, operating and sustaining an ALP is challenging in many ways. For this reason, there are only 11 active ALPs in New Jersey and our program, known as Portable Assisted Living Services (PALS), is the only ALP in Bergen County. Medicaid reimbursement remains inadequate and the Medicaid resource limit of \$2,000 becomes a roadblock for many older adults who are reluctant to spend down their limited resources in order to qualify. Housing providers surprisingly resist change within their buildings and have not fully embraced the ALP concept, even while their tenant populations are aging and becoming less independent and in need of supportive services. At the same time, ALPs feel pushback from more independent tenants who are concerned that their buildings may start to look like nursing homes. Still, we believe in the model and are deeply committed to growing our program within Bergen County while also working with other providers and partners in advocating for increased reimbursement and removal of Medicaid eligibility barriers that thwart its growth.

As a licensed health care program, PALS has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with the unexpected consequences of increased operating expenses, especially infection control and labor costs. PALS is the only ALP that has been able to hire and retain a full-time social worker thanks to outside funding support. This has been especially important since, during the height of the pandemic, the buildings in which PALS operates ceased to offer community activities and programs to their residents. Programming has still not been restarted and PALS staff, including the social worker and social work interns, have been facilitating activities and programs and recruiting volunteers to ensure that residents have opportunities for social engagement and support. This has helped in building relationships between PALS and the housing managers as well as with building residents.

2. What actions did you take? What worked and didn't work toward your objectives? Please share any unanticipated benefits or barriers encountered.

The PALS program is unique among ALPs in employing a full-time social worker. The social worker, in turn, provides fieldwork supervision of Bachelor- and Master-level social work students who can work with individual residents and facilitate group activities. Increasing outreach activities has been beneficial in strengthening our relationships with the two housing providers we work with, residents, and their families. External challenges include long and complicated application processes for residents applying for Medicaid. The social worker has been hugely impactful in working with individual residents to collect the volumes of documents needed for these applications. We invited a team of care managers from a local social services agency to meet with our staff and discuss ways to streamline and expedite the Medicaid application process. We have increased our outreach efforts within the buildings as well as with our community partners, including health care providers,

hospitals, and rehab facilities. We collaborate closely with local age-friendly community initiatives and are an active member of the ALP Provider Coalition and, through the coalition, both mentor and learn from other ALPs.

3. How did you measure success—both quantitative and qualitative? What did you learn? Please include numbers and demographics of people touched by the work.

This past year, we have seen a significant increase in admissions to the PALS program at Westwood House. Twelve new residents have been admitted and we are currently working with several other residents who are starting the admission process. Included among these residents are a Korean couple whose son would like his parents to come onto PALS but is concerned about the language barrier. To address this, we have reached out to the Asian Women's Christian Association (ACWA) and will be exploring ways in which their home care program and other services can collaborate with PALS. The AWCA has also offered to facilitate monthly activity programs on site at Westwood House, which will support the needs of the growing number of Korean residents in the building, while also helping PALS build connections and trust with this community. PALS has finally established itself as a valued asset within Westwood House and this success is supporting the program's continued growth.

PALS has not enjoyed this level of growth, unfortunately, at Garfield Housing Authority. However, we continue to work on creative community outreach efforts and building greater rapport with the property managers who work off-site and do not have the same relationship with and understanding of their senior tenants that the Westwood House management does. While our number of PALS residents stagnated for some time, we will be enrolling three new residents in the next two to four weeks and are working with an additional four residents, who are applying for Medicaid and plan to enroll once approved.

While the majority of our residents at both sites are white, we are currently working with Hispanic and Asian family members of residents and expect to see more interest in the program from these communities as rapport and trust are established. The average age of residents at Westwood House on PALS is 83. In contrast, the average age at Garfield Housing Authority is 75. All PALS residents have at least one or more chronic conditions that they would be unable to manage on their own and would leave them unable to care for themselves. Finally, 78% of PALS residents are women and 21% are men.

4. How did partnerships/collaborations enhance or challenge the project?

Partnerships with local social service and health care providers enhance our capacity to serve our PALS clients. The ALP Provider Coalition, member organizations such as LeadingAge, and the Health Care Association of New Jersey provide ongoing technical support and guidance as well as amplify our advocacy efforts. Our relationship with the Westwood House building management has improved significantly in the past year; the housing managers have finally come to recognize the program's value and provide critical support to PALS, including encouraging residents to come onto the program and ensuring that resident families are aware of PALS as a building resource. We have struggled to forge this kind of relationship at Garfield Housing Authority. The Garfield Housing Authority (GHA) is a much larger public housing authority with tenants of all ages. GHA's management office is not located within the senior buildings within which we operate, and this creates some disconnect. We are actively engaged in efforts to ensure that GHA management understands the program, its value within their buildings and ways in which they can contribute to the programs continued stability and growth.

5. Include a budget and actual for the project during the reporting period.

Attached to report submission email.

6. What conversations have you had on how to sustain the project after the grant, and do you have plans to share your results with other organizations?

We have engaged in several discussions regarding the sustainability of the PALS project beyond the scope of the grant. Our primary approach to sustaining the program involves leveraging program fees, which have been an essential source of revenue. PALS clients have the option to pay for our services either privately or through Medicaid, and this dual revenue stream has been instrumental in supporting the program's ongoing operations.

As PALS has expanded and garnered more clients, we have witnessed substantial progress towards financial sustainability. We are rapidly approaching a critical threshold where the program will break even, enabling it to sustain itself independently. However, there are external challenges that continue to impact our financial stability. In particular, inflation and the rising costs of labor and supplies in the healthcare and education sectors pose significant obstacles to maintaining our self-sufficiency. We are acutely aware of the need to proactively address these challenges to safeguard the continuity of the program.

To mitigate the effects of inflation and rising operational costs, we are always actively seeking additional sources of private funding to support the growth of PALS. We recognize that diversifying our funding base is crucial to insulating the program from economic fluctuations and ensuring its long-term viability. By engaging with philanthropic organizations, corporate partners, and individual donors, we aim to secure the financial resources needed to not only sustain the current program but also expand our reach to serve more individuals in need.

In terms of sharing our results with other organizations, we are committed to promoting knowledge sharing and collaboration within the broader community. We actively work with our partners in the ALP Provider Coalition as well as surrounding age-friendly local initiatives to share our strategies and best practices. We understand the importance of disseminating our findings and successful strategies to benefit the field and support the creation of new ALPs in New Jersey. To this end, we will continue to actively engage in partnerships and collaborations with other organizations, both within our immediate community and on a wider scale.

7. Feedback on your interaction with FFA would be helpful. How have we helped? Made it harder? What else can we do to facilitate your work?

Firstly, we'd like to express our sincere gratitude for FFA's support. It has allowed us to sustain our social worker's role and expand our outreach efforts, reaching a larger audience of older adults in need of critical supportive services. We have had an overwhelmingly positive experience working with FFA, and the only bit of feedback we have is that exploring opportunities for knowledge-sharing sessions with other grantees could foster a sense of community and shared learning if there are programs similar to PALS or The Bright Side Family's other initiatives and facilities.

Again, your support has been instrumental in our success, and we look forward to exploring new ways to work together in the future to expand the impact and scale of PALS.

8. Additional comments: None.