

Friends Foundation for the Aging – AFSC Grant Reporting Period: 10/1/2022 - 9/30/2023

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

Through generous support from the Friends Foundation for the Aging, and other funders, AFSC has continued serving immigrant seniors in New Jersey for the last 12 months. This most recent grant has been part of a series of grants from FFA over the last seven years, that have allowed AFSC to build our work with older immigrants across New Jersey. Specifically, AFSC has sought to ameliorate the intensifying economic needs of immigrant seniors, such as challenges affording basic needs like food and housing, to improve their access to physical and mental healthcare, and to change the anti-immigrant narrative that contributes to the pervasive discrimination of this population.

During this grant period, inflation has continued to exacerbate financial insecurity among immigrants, thereby further reducing their access to basic needs. Housing insecurity, coupled with restrictions due to immigration status which lessen an individual's ability to access public benefits and services, has the potential to create catastrophic instability for immigrants. Our Social Work team has regularly witnessed affordable housing-related challenges while working with community members. Lawmakers continue to pass harsh immigration policies that reduce access to benefits for immigrant seniors. As a result, many of our clients are experiencing barriers to accessing services and public benefits due to their immigration status, pervasive discrimination, and other systemic barriers. AFSC's Social Worker has continued providing case management support to address these challenges and improve access to services that foster self-sufficiency.

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

During this grant period, AFSC's Social Worker, Jonnelle Tavarez, conducted five intake assessments for new clients and collaboratively developed intervention plans to address their individual needs. Jonnelle also continued providing direct case management to an additional three seniors, with whom she began working in previous grant periods. Jonnelle has been helping them to update their goals and intervention plans. While this direct service caseload of elder immigrants is currently under our projected numbers, these cases are very high intensity in the services needed by clients and the time spent by the Social Worker.

Primary case management activities include locating resources and providing referrals, completing, and submitting applications for benefits, accompanying clients to various agencies as needed, providing supportive counseling and overall support, and sharing activities or events to reduce the social isolation which is so common among this population. Clients have been very receptive to having weekly phone calls to check-in and share generally about what is going on in their lives. To educate service providers and community members, Jonnelle conducted four community presentations to AFSC's Women's Group, the Union County Family Justice Center-Domestic Violence Symposium, a webinar hosted by AFSC: Friend's Call to A Farm Bill for All: Addressing hunger and food insecurity, and a resource fair at Roselle Public Schools. One of the community presentations, held at our Newark office, was for our Women's Group which is comprised of women of all ages, including seniors, and was formed by staff from our advocacy and legal services teams. Each presentation and discussion covered topics related to immigrant eligibility for public benefits, available resources, and policies that impact immigrants. In total, these presentations reached 94 individuals, more specifically 45 professionals from various service-based agencies and 49 community members.

Jonnelle also regularly attended Protecting Immigrant Families Community Education working group meetings where updated policies affecting the immigrant community were shared along with a wide array of resources in various languages. Earlier this year, after years of advocacy efforts, New Jersey expanded Medicaid access to all children, regardless of their immigration status. While this Medicaid expansion does not include

immigrant seniors, we hope this provides the momentum to push advocacy efforts further to include immigrant elders.

AFSC's Social Work team, supervised interns, and a volunteer, all assisted in researching and expanding our resource lists to maintain up-to-date information for elders and others in need of services. This centralized and accessible resource list is constantly used by Jonnelle, the other social workers, and staff to connect clients and community members to services and benefits for which they are entitled.

Unanticipated barriers for elder clients were largely due to their unfamiliarity with technology, which is often required for application processes. AFSC's Social Worker addressed these challenges through accommodations including assisting clients to set up free email accounts, and meeting in person to walk them through the process. Other barriers were difficult to address, including wait times for benefit enrollment with the Social Security Administration, with the longest wait period experienced lasting over a year.

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.*

AFSC measures the success of its social work services based on each client's progress toward the goals collaboratively established in their intervention plan. During this grant period, Jonnelle provided supportive case management services to five new senior immigrants and three seniors from previous years who have continued to receive services. She provided a total of 34 services to eight clients, averaging a little over four services per client.

To gather feedback on clients' satisfaction with the services they received and to determine whether their needs were met, AFSC's Social Worker conducted phone surveys with all eight clients. Phone surveys were chosen as the method for gathering feedback to reduce barriers to participation among clients with disabilities or literacy and/or language barriers. Nearly 90% of respondents reported being "very satisfied" and 10% of respondents reported being "satisfied" with the services they received. 100% of respondents indicated their needs were met by AFSC's Immigrant Senior Project.

The population of seniors served was diverse during this grant period, with 37.5% of them being African and 50% being Latinx. Of the seniors served, most identified as men (62.5%) while the remaining identified as women (37.5%) Primary languages included English, Spanish, and French.

Client Country of Origin			
Cuba	1	Sudan	1
Jamaica	1	Ghana	1
Dominican Republic	2	Togo	1
Nicaragua	1	Total	8

Elder Immigrant Case Highlight: A 61-year-old man originally from the Dominican Republic was struggling to get his Medicare Part B benefit reinstated after being disenrolled due to lapsed premium payments. The client was paying his premiums monthly through his SSDI (disability) benefit but never received a notice about his case being reviewed. Because of this, he did not send in the requested documentation and his SSDI benefit was suspended as well as his Medicare benefit. After nearly a year of several office visits, phone calls, emails, letters, and applications submitted to the Social Security Administration, AFSC's Social Worker was able to get the client's Medicare Part B benefits reinstated with the client only having to pay back a partial amount of the premiums so as not to cause him financial hardship.

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

AFSC's Social Work team has found that networking with other organizations on behalf of clients is crucial as housing and other supportive resources dwindled in the pandemic's wake. The Social Work team regularly collaborates on cases with numerous partner organizations to ensure the best outcomes for clients. One timely example is our work with housing resource agencies, these organizations offer short-term and long-term housing, or financial support for elders in need of housing.

Partnerships with other organizations such as Seafarers International in NYC, The Reformed Church of Highland Park, and Northern New Jersey Sanctuary Coalition augmented our services for senior immigrants by providing additional supportive housing resources during our current housing crisis. These partnerships have provided short-term and long-term housing opportunities and/or financial support for housing for our clients. For example, our Social Work team was able to secure long-term housing through The Reformed Church of Highland Park and financial assistance support for food and housing costs through our partner, the Northern New Jersey Sanctuary Coalition. This has provided the client with stable housing and financial support for basic needs like food and rental cost for housing.

While our elder immigrant case load has been relatively small, our work has a much wider impact. The work done with our direct service caseload positively impacts not only the individual clients, but also their extended families and friends. Additionally, as reported above, our Social Worker provides ongoing information, support and guidance to other non-profits working with elder immigrants in New Jersey.

Include a budget and actual for the project during the reporting period. – Please see attached

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?

Thanks to support from the Friends Foundation for the Aging, AFSC has been able to widen its scope of services, extensively build our expertise in elder services, and expand our Social Work team over the last seven years. For this past year, funding sources for this work have included the State of New Jersey (through Legal Services of New Jersey and Kids in Need of Defense), the van Ameringen Foundation, the Friends Foundation for the Aging, and individual donors. In the coming year, we will be taking a sabbatical year off from Friends Foundation for the Aging, and we will no longer be supported by the van Ameringen Foundation, as they will no longer support any work in areas outside of New York City and Philadelphia. While social work, mental health services, and case management services funders are scarce in philanthropy, we continue to vigorously seek funding for this program from other sources to sustain this vital work.

5. *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?*

The support FFA has provided has been invaluable to building and sustaining AFSC's Immigrant Senior Project. FFA has provided helpful feedback and connections with other senior service-based programs. This relationship has been fundamental to the development of this project from the start. We hope to be considered for funding again after our sabbatical year.

6. *Additional comments:* We appreciate the foundation's transparency and support.