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\$275,000 GRANT FOR NEW “SENIORS COUNT!” PROJECT TO HIGHLIGHT NEEDS OF SENIOR POPULATION

Collaborative program raises senior citizens’ issues in Southeast Detroit

Two local agencies dedicated to helping older adults will share \$275,000 to conduct a two year pilot program entitled, **Seniors Count!** The project will collect demographic data about seniors from a wide variety of sources, then organize and analyze it to create a comprehensive database of accurate information about southeast Michigan’s growing senior population.

Adult Well-Being Services, a local non-profit service agency, will partner with Wayne State University’s Institute of Gerontology to conduct this first phase of the two-phase study.

“Our goal is to paint a complete and accurate picture of the social, economic and health status of seniors in the seven county area of southeast Michigan,” said Peter Lichtenberg, director of the Institute of Gerontology. “The senior population in southeast Michigan will double in the next 30 years, and we need to be ready for the challenges and opportunities that will bring.”

Sara Gleicher, advocacy director at Adult Well-Being Services, and Dr. Thomas B. Jankowski of the Institute of Gerontology, will head the project, seeking input from service providers and policy makers about the kinds of data they will find useful.

Karen Schrock, president and CEO of Adult Well-Being Services, said the project is modeled after the successful *Kids Count!*, a national data collection effort used by advocacy groups and policy makers to measure the well-being of children across the country. “Our goal is to expand the efforts to all of Michigan,” Schrock said.

A recent study by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging found that only 46% of American communities are prepared to adequately address the needs of a growing elderly population.

Gleicher said accurate information about persons age 50 and up is critical for the health of seniors and their communities. “We need this information to plan services and

advocate for programs that will best serve our older residents,” she said, “including seniors with developmental disabilities who are often overlooked.”

Dr. Jankowski agrees. He explained that although demographic information about older adults has been collected, it is scattered across numerous agencies with no centralized coordination to extract meaning from the data.

“It is the *linkage* of data from multiple sources that will significantly increase our understanding of the impact of an aging community,” Dr. Jankowski said. “This impact extends to health care, education, safety, business, and governmental systems. Policy makers must have accurate data to create effective legislation that spends tax dollars wisely, especially in a tight economy.”

Funding for the project came from the Kresge Foundation, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, and the American House Foundation. “The Kresge Foundation applauds the project’s commitment to promote the health, well-being and independence of older adults and their families,” said Rip Rapson, president and CEO of the Kresge Foundation.

Adult Well-Being Services

Adult Well-Being Services promotes health, well-being and independence of adults through advocacy, services, family and community support. The developmental disability services include family support groups, skill building services, respite, supported employment and supports coordination. Mental health services include case management, guardianship, outpatient counseling, skill building services, psychiatric services, substance abuse treatment and assertive community treatment. Aging services include services and activities at Butzel Senior Center, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Services, Community Information and Referral, Health Promotion and Substance Abuse Prevention, Caregivers Education and Support Program, Outreach Support Services and Respite.

AWBS has been providing services to the greater Detroit area for over 55 years. Founded in 1953 by the Junior League of Detroit, we began as a senior center on the east side of Detroit, providing a place for seniors to socialize and use their time constructively. Today, we operate out of seven locations throughout Wayne County and provide outreach services in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. Services are provided by our highly qualified, credentialed staff. Most importantly, Adult Well-Being Services (AWBS) professionals approach their responsibilities with enthusiasm and compassion and are committed to providing caring and kind services to those in need.

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