



Volunteers Drive 20,000 Miles to Help Elderly Neighbors in Lake County, Calif.

Faith in Action: Replication of the Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers Program

SUMMARY

Starting in July 1996, Catholic Charities in Lake County, Calif., provided transportation and other services to the elderly in a rural community.

The project was part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) *Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers Program, Faith in Action®*, *Generation 2 and Generation 3* national program.

The day-to-day project was run by the Lake County Interfaith Volunteer Caregiver Program, a coalition of health and social service agencies and local member churches that seeks to address unmet caregiving needs in the county.

The area includes Clear Lake, the largest natural lake in California. Some 110 miles around, the lake is surrounded by mountains that create barriers to travel. Some residents have to travel 60 miles to the nearest doctor's office.

Lake County has one of the highest proportions of elders in the state, yet is one of the most medically underserved regions. The main accomplishment of the project was to provide transportation to medical appointments for elders who could not drive.

Those drives were often the bridge to other services because the volunteer drivers got to know the needs of the elders. In one case, a volunteer drove an 82-year-old woman for a biopsy for breast tumor, and learned that her only son lived in Korea. When the tumor turned out to be malignant, the volunteer drove the woman to all of her appointments, and the project arranged for her to talk to another woman about her age who had had breast cancer.

Key Results

- In all, 58 volunteers assisted some 600 people. Many of the volunteers came from seven congregations, where the project did most of its marketing.

- Of that, about 20 people provided more than 500 transportation services covering over 20,000 miles.
- Volunteers also visited, provided telephone reassurance, made minor house repairs and performed small chores.

Afterward

When RWJF funding ended, the project struggled financially. Money from the other main funder, the United Way, had decreased and the project director spent more of her time fund raising than developing volunteers.

The project's sponsor, Catholic Charities, has given some funds to continue this work but that will not last. The project director is concentrating on seeking grants from local groups and hopes to expand to two more communities.

Funding

RWJF supported this project with a grant of \$25,000 from July 1996 to December 1997.

Prepared by: Susan G. Parker

Reviewed by: Janet Heroux and Molly McKaughan

Program Officers: Paul Jellinek, Rosemary Gibson and Judith Stavisky

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