Support by State Gives Momentum to Florida Coming Home Assisted-Living Project

Coming Home™: Affordable Assisted Living

SUMMARY

Florida developed a model of affordable assisted living—Helen Piloneo Assisted Living—a 110-unit, 100 percent affordable assisted-living project in Pinellas Park.

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs partnered with the Florida Housing Finance Corp. and the Agency for Healthcare Administration on the project. The Pinellas County Housing Authority served as the demonstration sponsor.

The Pinellas County Housing Authority contracted with MIA Management Consultants to provide the services. (Information in this case study was abstracted from an article by Jenkens, Carder, Maher in Journal of Housing for the Elderly.)

The project was part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) national program Coming Home™: Affordable Assisted Living.

Key Results

- Coordination and conflicts between state programs were greatly reduced through formal and informal relationship building by Florida Coming Home project staff.

- The Florida Housing Finance Corp. tested a lending program for assisted living through a one-time loan program.

- These program accomplishments have encouraged mission-driven nonprofit organizations, those willing to work with the existing reimbursement, to undertake development projects to expand the availability of affordable assisted-living resources in Florida.

Funding

RWJF supported the project with a grant of $295,652 from February 2001 to January 2005.
**THE PROBLEM**

Florida ranks fourth in the total number of people aged 65 and older, according to AARP (2003). Of people aged 70 and older, 29 percent require assistance with at least one activity of daily living; half earn less than $16,000 annually, and one-fourth report an average income of $6,410, according to researchers (Reynolds-Scanlon, Reynolds, Peek, Polivka & Peek, 1999).

As in most states, the default long-term care option for a low-income older person with a disability is a nursing home. This is partially due to the lack of high-quality affordable assisted-living projects willing to serve Medicaid-eligible residents at the state's Medicaid reimbursement levels.

The road to developing affordable assisted living in the State of Florida started with overcoming several barriers, including:

- A wide range of state agencies with differing requirements.
- Difficulty assessing the "market" due to the lack of a registry or standard definition of affordable assisted living.
- Low Medicaid payments for services (which provided no financial incentives to providers).
- Limited assisted-living experience among consultants familiar with the state's affordable housing programs.
- The lack of coordination between the state Medicaid agency, the assisted-living licensing unit, the Department of Elder Affairs, the state's Housing Finance Agency, and nonprofit developers.
- The lack of commitment from the Florida Housing Finance Corp. to fund assisted living.

**THE PROJECT**

As the *Coming Home* program grant applicant, the Florida Department of Elder Affairs listed three program goals:

- to establish a formal collaboration between partners to develop affordable assisted-living projects focused on serving Medicaid-eligible individuals
- to develop a web-based clearinghouse of information, including best practices and development resources
- to create private/public partnerships and advocacy to facilitate affordable assisted living.
The Department of Elder Affairs partnered in Florida's Coming Home project with the Florida Housing Finance Corp. (the state housing finance authority) and the Agency for Healthcare Administration (the regulatory agency for both assisted living and Medicaid). The partners also organized a Committee on Affordable Assisted Living Facilities, consisting of housing and service providers, regulators, policy-makers, researchers and provider associations.

Project staff worked closely with the state public housing association to recruit public housing demonstration sponsors. The Pinellas County Housing Authority understood the need in its community and agreed to become a Coming Home project demonstration.

**RESULTS**

To create the affordable assisted-living project, the Pinellas County Housing Authority demolished an aging apartment building and replaced it with Helen Piloneo Assisted Living, a 110-unit, 100 percent affordable assisted-living project in Pinellas Park, Fla. The Pinellas County Housing Authority Commission approved issuing bonds to support the re-development. Operations are funded through Florida's Assisted Living for the Elderly Medicaid waiver, 1915(c), Assistive Care Services (a state plan for adults with disabilities who receive SSI and need 24-hour unscheduled assistance), Optional State Supplementation (state supplement to adults with disabilities who receive SSI), and Housing and Urban Development public housing operating subsidies.

The Pinellas County Housing Authority contracted with MIA Management Consultants to provide the services. MIA Management Consultants focus on working with public housing agencies to develop affordable assisted-living programs.

While Florida has not been able to increase its service subsidies for assisted living during the Coming Home program due to the state's budget crisis, project staff has overcome other challenges through the partnerships and the availability of technical assistance.

- **Coordination and conflicts between state programs have been greatly reduced through formal and informal relationship building by Florida Coming Home project staff.** The state agencies involved in assisted living now work together on policy initiatives under Coming Home and make themselves readily available to address issues encountered by the demonstration projects.

- **The Florida Housing Finance Corp. is testing a lending program for assisted living through a one-time loan program and has also made pre-development lending available to demonstration projects.**

- **State and NCB Development Corp. staff members have provided training and direct technical assistance to overcome the gap in local consultants' experience with assisted living's complex blend of housing and service programs as well as**
market assessment. This technical assistance has initiated an important knowledge transfer process.

- These program accomplishments have encouraged mission-driven nonprofit organizations, those willing to work with the existing reimbursement, to undertake development projects to expand the availability of affordable assisted-living resources in Florida.

LESSONS LEARNED

This project generated the following lessons:

1. **Even with low Medicaid rates, mission-driven organizations are willing to take on the challenge of affordable assisted living when they have the support of the state.** The Florida *Coming Home* project's inter-agency coordination and individualized assistance has given projects the confidence to move forward.

2. **Providing subsidized lending programs for pre-development and permanent financing allows projects to move forward rapidly.** As of May 2004, three demonstration projects were operating, two planned to start construction soon, four were well into their development and three more were in early stages of development.

3. **The success of assisted-living demonstration projects encourages other groups to move forward with affordable assisted living.** In Florida, several other community groups have responded to recruiting efforts—recognizing that in the absence of a willing, experienced nonprofit organization, community leaders will have to lead the effort to bring affordable assisted-living resources to their community.

4. **State staff members have recognized the continuing need for technical assistance, outreach to mission-driven organizations, and consultant development to meet the challenges of producing new affordable assisted-living resources within the constraints of Florida's Medicaid environment.**

Prepared by: Paula Carder and Lori De Milto
Reviewed by: Molly McKaughan and Marian Bass
Program Officers: Nancy L. Barrand and Karen Davenport
Grant ID # 41390
Program area: Vulnerable populations
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(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

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