

LifeCare Alliance, serving more than just a meal, a CHOICE.

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Brief Description:

LifeCare Alliance offers seven choices of meals for our Meals-on-Wheels clients and has 20 dining centers to choose from for the more mobile clients. Our mission is, "LifeCare Alliance leads our community in identifying and delivering health and nutrition services to meet the community's changing needs. Diversity and changing demographics is how we nourish the human spirit."

This submission was selected as part of a national challenge issued to leaders in all communities seeking new "best practices" and "best possibilities" for the future of nutrition and aging.

The challenge is meeting the needs of the fast growing population of older adults who are diverse and need assistance. LifeCare Alliance offers choice through their nutrition services specifically through our Meals-on-Wheels and Dining Center programs.

Meals-on-Wheels

LifeCare Alliance's Meals-on-Wheels (MOW) currently serves as many as 4,000 meals a day to homebound seniors. The low fat, low sugar and low sodium meals offer choice to meet our diverse population. The meals of choice include seven varieties with the most popular being the regular hot meal. The other choices include cold regular meal, diet regular hot and cold meal (for diabetics), Kosher meal, vegetarian, frozen, mechanical soft (pre-cut for those who are arthritic, etc), pureed (for those who have cancer or AIDs), and gluten free. In 2011, volunteers and staff delivered 1,030,884 meals in Franklin and Madison counties with volunteers contributing to 5,000 clients. Eighty-nine (89%) of the Meals-on-Wheels clients are over the age of 65, 99% have incomes less than \$20,000 annually, 65% are female, and 38% are minority. Included in these demographics are about 300 veterans and/or surviving spouses who are homebound, underserved minorities, low-income older adults, socially-isolated seniors, and chronically-ill and/or living with a disability. We partner with the Franklin County Veterans Commission to provide an array of services for those who have served our country.

In 2011, 4,835 Meals-on-Wheels volunteers logged 395,721 miles and 96,980 hours of service. Containing more than 7,600 active volunteers, delivering 125 meal routes per day, 365 days a week, our volunteers are cherished. Without our volunteers, we would be out of business. Each volunteer saves LifeCare Alliance approximately \$12,000 per year.

Senior Dining Centers

Senior Dining Centers provide meals for older adults and individuals with a disability and/or chronically ill adults at community dining centers and restaurants in over twenty locations across Central Ohio, including culturally diverse meals at fourteen Asian and Somali restaurants. Transportation is available to most locations. LifeCare Alliance is the largest provider of senior meals through the community dining centers in both Central Ohio and the state, according to the Ohio Department of Aging, 2008. Dining centers offer socialization, enriching programming and a nutritious meal with the purpose of increasing the number of Central Ohioans who achieve a higher level of successful aging, defined as the avoidance of disease and disability, maintenance of high cognitive and physical functioning, and engagement with life. In 2011, the program served 151,713 meals to 3,980 clients. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the Senior Dining Center clients are over the age of 65, 96% have incomes less than \$20,000 annually, 67% are female, and 56% are minority.

LifeCare Alliance specialized in diversity...

In 1993, the Asian dining program was initiated and increases in participation every year. For the past 19 years, under the direction of Dr. Youn-Chun Lu and two paid LifeCare Alliance employees who specifically work with this program we have approximately 750 unduplicated participants. Most of the participants are 73% Asian, and 27% are non-Asian (Caucasian and African-American). Forty percent of program participants are under the age of 70, which means it attracts the younger old. To provide meals that suit our Asian participants, LifeCare Alliance collaborates with a selection of Chinese restaurants to offer meals seven days a week. Columbus, Ohio has the longest running Senior Dining program for the Asian community in the United States serving approximately 15% of all Asians aged 65 years of age or older in Franklin County.

With a growing population faster than we can keep up, our goal remains the same – to keep people in their own home where they want to be....how do we do that? We listen to our clients through regular surveys on what their needs are...our clients are diverse. We offer seven different Meals-on-Wheel choices for our chronically ill and homebound.

For our clients who can get out we offer additional dining centers with different food catering to their cultural and diverse needs example Somali, Asian dining centers. Additionally we help these populations not just with food but again holistically saving our clients through our wellness programs. For example, the Somali Dining Centers are offered mammograms for the female clients. This increases access to healthcare and decreases cultural barriers

Transportation

It all ties together through transportation. For decades, gerontologists have indicated that the traditional home-delivered Meals on Wheels model worked best. For the past decade there has been increasing discussion regarding the mental and psychological well-being for seniors who are not leave their homes to run errands or to receive socialization on a regular basis. The trend is now to focus on meeting individuals (age 60+) seniors' emotional, nutritional, and psychological needs holistically by transporting them to Senior Dining Centers in Franklin County. LifeCare Alliance has 20 of dining centers in Franklin County; and developed Carrie's Café, that serves as a dining center and public café as a lynchpin, to meet this changing need for our increasing aging population.

For our sixty plus clients, this new operational model allows LifeCare Alliance to provide transportation for our clients who would otherwise be homebound. Transporting our clients to a dining center allows support for their emotional and psychological needs by providing socialization and educational opportunities that engage seniors into a healthier lifestyle.

The results in an increased lifespan and a higher level of “successful aging,” defined as the avoidance of disease and disability, maintenance of high cognitive and physical functioning, and engagement with life. A 2008 report by the Ohio Department of Aging indicated seniors are highly attracted to “extra- curricular” activities. This type of programming gives people an opportunity to meet, connect, socialize maintain relationships, and gather.

LifeCare Alliance's target market for transportation includes our current client base, which encompasses the following demographics: 77% female, 43% minority, 69% age 65 and older and 64% with annual incomes of less than \$20,000. Our experience and knowledge working within these parameters enable us to comprehend our clients' critical needs, in order to ensure that they are properly and successfully met.

In addition to our daily shuttle services to dining centers, we have noticed an increase in our clients using the transportation services to attend programming offered at Carrie's Café, specifically for special events including Senior Prom Valentine's Day dance, and LifeCare Idol, etc. Due to income limitations, these clients would not be able to access any of our dining centers without provided transportation. This transportation helps our senior population remain independent and in their own homes, while they have their emotional and psychological needs met through this type of socialization.

Through a grant that LifeCare Alliance receives, we are able to provide transportation to dining centers for more than 1,500 clients age 60+ in Franklin County. The overall population served include: (1) underserved minorities, (2) low- income older adults, (3) socially- isolated seniors and (4) adults with a chronic illness and/or disability.

Transportation to dining centers will accomplish the following outcomes:

- 100% of clients remain independent in their own homes by eliminating or delaying institutionalization and/or hospitalization
- 100% of clients will be exposed to programming, and socialization
- 100% of clients have access to health and nutrition education and referral resources

Many of our clients are at nutritional risk due to social isolation, multiple medications, food insecurity and a variety of other factors. Each of our meals provides one-third of the daily dietary requirements for an older adult. These nutrition programs along with transportation funding prevent or ameliorate malnutrition in the targeted population. As our clients have an increased access to nutrient-rich foods, access to increased socialization and increased health education and resources, all with the ultimate goal of eliminating or delaying institutionalization.

LifeCare Alliance clients spend an average of five days less in hospitals annually compared with the nation as a whole. When individuals receive the appropriate nutrition levels and regular health assessments, we are able to prevent and circumvent potentially debilitating and costly health outcomes. The vast majority of our clients are on Medicare and Medicaid, which means additional savings to tax payers. As our clients have increased immune systems, strong bodies and are able to recuperate at faster rates they can prevent hospital stays and/or reduce the length of stay.