

Meeting the Needs of Our Diverse Clients: Why Culture Counts in Columbus, Ohio

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Brief Description:

Many older adults and the chronically ill are at increased nutritional and health risks due to low-income, uninsured/underinsured status, social isolation, multiple medications, food insecurity, and a variety of other factors. Our method of treating clients holistically ensures each client has their nutritional, health care, emotional and psychological needs met.

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.

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Our clients experience:

- Increased access to nutritious food, which reduces their food insecurity and malnutrition.
- Reduction of social isolation and associated psychological/mental challenges.
- Elimination or delay of institutionalization by remaining independent in their own homes.
- Increased quality of life and of "successful aging," defined as the avoidance of disease and disability, maintenance of high cognitive and physical functioning, and engagement with life.
- Increased access to related health and wellness services through linkages from our RNs to LifeCare Alliance and community services/resources.
- Increased access to supplies/equipment, medication, food & nutritional supplements, and social and health related services.

- Increased knowledge and ability for clients to improve their own health and independence through healthy eating and physical activity.
- Prevention of homelessness by helping clients remain independent and in their own home.

The purpose and goal is to assist clients in remaining independent and in the comfort of their own homes or the community with dignity, where they want to be.

Our Carrie's Café Model was developed by Café Plus, a senior center model developed by NISC member Mather LifeWays, and this prototype is spreading around the United States and even as far away as Japan.

Interest has intensified as organizations prepare for baby boomers' needs and expectations. NISC member LifeCare Alliance was an early adopter with its Carrie's Café in Columbus, OH.

Carrie's opened in March 2009 and continues to grow every month. It's a hybrid, meaning its open to the public, older adults, and older adults who are specifically part of the Older Americans Act Title III program; however, nothing in the name, décor, or menu shouts “senior.”

The café itself is named after LifeCare Alliance founder Catherine Nelson Black, who in 1898 was a philanthropist and visionary married to then mayor of Columbus, Ohio Samuel L. Black. Catherine Nelson Black was concerned about the health needs of the sick and poor and the high rate of infant and maternal mortality. To address those needs she established the Instructive District Nursing Association, a community and in-home nursing care organization. While our name has changed to LifeCare Alliance, we continue to provide comprehensive health services, as Mrs. Black envisioned.

Even 114 years later, our goal remains the same to break down stereotypes that might keep people of all ages from coming inside.

Like Mather's other Café Plus locations, Carrie's Cafe offers freshly prepared, made-to-order meals and more, such as shuttle service for customers and activities.

The idea behind the café wasn't “build it and they will come;” rather, it's “offer food and they will come!” The initial lure for the experience is through the restaurant, but the benefit is really Repriorment,TM defined as “discovering the joy of new directions and rethinking shelved but not forgotten priorities, passions, and dreams.”

This idea is in full swing at Carrie's as customers engage in line dancing, Valentine's Day parties, fashion shows, "LifeCare Idol" competitions, and proms. Participation in these events is approximately 300 plus. It is a wonderful venue to include not just the clients but local elected officials, volunteers, and donors. Everyone joins in the fun to learn what LifeCare Alliance is doing to help older adults in their community.

Hosting the larger events has allowed for our volunteer base to grow from 5,800 to now 7600 people in just three years. Now days when we have the fashion show or host "LifeCare Idol" we have volunteers from major corporations like Nationwide Insurance, American Electric Power and Huntington Bank participate by serving a meal to our clients while enjoying the show. This makes it a win-win for the agency by cutting labor costs.

Carrie's is open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. The restaurant is open for a quick breakfast and lunch. On the fourth Friday of every month, a hot breakfast is offered, which is particularly popular for our staff and Meals-on-Wheels drivers/volunteers who literally 'fuel up' before delivering those hot meals to our clients.

Programming is offered from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Monday through Friday, and a large event is occurs once a month. Biannual focus groups and a survey assess customer satisfaction and interest. Participation with this type of dining center is truly more than just a meal. Stepping inside Carrie's Café, you will find ageless design, wireless computer access, an exercise area, and plenty of natural light. The setting is inspiring and far from institutional. The goal is to provide service with no stigma to older adults. We are truly more than just a meal. There is a full-service Wellness Center on site and we offer programming like chair yoga, tai chi, Wii, line dancing and exercise classes. Additional wellness programming includes blood pressure checks, foot-care, healthy cooking classes, mammograms, prostate, and skin screenings.

What has been fascinating is the influx of customers who are 69 years old and younger. One-third utilizes the restaurant and participates in programs, which means they don't see a stigma associated with places like Carrie's Cafe.

In 2011, Carrie's served more than 2,300 unique individuals. Our daily average consists of approximately 85-100 people eating lunch at the Café. The Café is also open to the public for a casual luncheon dining experience. This assists LifeCare Alliance as an additional revenue generator, which allows us to continue to serve all clients in need without a waiting list.

Our clients rely on LifeCare Alliance to support their medical and nutritional needs. Every service we offer is free of charge or on a sliding scale. Clients no longer have to decide between paying their rent, utility, medical or food bills. The health and nutrition services we provide in the home and in the community setting directly contribute to an individual's ability to remain safe and independent in the comfort of their own homes, where they want to be. With nursing home costs in Ohio now averaging more than \$62,000 per year, LifeCare Alliance saves taxpayers money while serving the needs of the community.

Below are excerpts from a few of our clients:

"I know that I can always get a hot meal - I live alone. And the companionship can't be beat!"

"I come for the friendly faces and for the good food. Keep up the good work!"

"I come to see the people. I am glad we have this service. Thank you!"

"The dining center helps me get out of the house. Keep up the good work!"

"The meals are so affordable and nutritious."

"I love all of the people. And the food is good, too!"