

## Innovative APS Practice

# The Texas APS Statewide Community Engagement Program

### Project Overview

*The Texas APS Statewide Community Engagement Program, a cooperative effort among communities across Texas with APS, is a public/private relationship which helps frontline caseworkers assist adult abuse victims with support and material assistance in meeting clients' emergency needs. The Texas Community Engagement Program is unique in that it uses a legislatively mandated program model and provides greatly needed resources to vulnerable adults and to APS.*

### Project Narrative

#### History

In 2004, the Texas state governor's office engaged in a campaign for state-wide reform of both the Adult Protective Service (APS) and Child Protective Service (CPS) systems. Responses included targeted legislation to ensure the timely removal of vulnerable older clients from abusive or unhealthy environments and supportive non-emergency services for this population. It was out of this reform project that the APS Statewide Community Engagement Program was formed.

In order to accomplish the state directive, two specialized functions were created in APS to work with communities: Community Initiative Specialists (nine positions formed) and Resources and External Relations Specialists (RERS)<sup>1</sup> (nine positions formed). In addition, a Community Engagement Program Specialist was hired to be a liaison between the community engagement staff and the executive management of APS to ensure that the initiatives were being met.

The Department of Family and Protective Services has a long history of utilizing volunteers, including interns, to help with various tasks including home visits, community outreach, fundraising and office work. Volunteer boards were formed in communities to help bridge the gaps in services for APS clients and to support the work of APS caseworkers through

*"Use a flow chart to explain the APS process to the community: here's what we do, here's why we do it that way and here are the gaps. When you get all of the players to touch on one case together in one room at one time to explain the challenges and to define them, it opens the room up for understanding and helps the community to respond productively."*

*Gabrielle Edwards, Board President, Adult Protective Services Silver Star Board*

<sup>1</sup> The ERS "is responsible for supporting service and professional collaborations and interactions within regions. [They] interact with service providers, law enforcement, judicial and court advocates, and other professional organizational representatives." Department of Protective and Family Services. *APS Handbook*. Retrieved from [http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/APS/Files/APS\\_pg\\_3300.asp](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/APS/Files/APS_pg_3300.asp).

fund-raising, educational campaigns, and the provision of supplies for APS clients in need. Many of the volunteer boards are non-profit organizations and can assist with non-traditional client requests (such as the purchase of musical instruments) when APS may be restricted by state laws. In Texas, there are 11 regions, four of which are combined.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, in 2005, legislation<sup>3</sup> mandated the creation of APS Special Task Units (STU) in counties with a population of 250,000 or more. The STU are comprised of representatives of key agencies and community organizations which serve older adults and identify gaps in services. The legislation is referred to as the Texas APS Statewide Community Partners Initiative.

## **The Program**

### ***Regional Boards***

The state of Texas is divided into eleven regions. Nine Community Initiatives Specialists (CIS) and nine Resource and External Relations Specialists (RERS) are responsible for developing and managing Community Engagement Programs in the regions. Twenty APS volunteer boards and three coalitions have been formed across the state of Texas through the efforts of the CISs. These volunteer boards are non-profit registered organizations formed to raise funds and to donate to APS without ties to the state. Several regions have preferred that their efforts focus on a broader spectrum of aging concerns, thus forming a coalition rather than a registered volunteer board. These coalitions provide support to APS as well as to other elder service providers in the community.

The CISs not only help recruit members for the volunteer boards, but also serve as a liaison between APS and the local community. The CISs promote support for APS caseworkers and programs by networking with universities and faith-based organizations. Universities often provide interns to support caseworkers, while faith-based organizations typically donate gifts and food during the holidays.

Regional board membership is comprised of community leaders and professionals with an interest in protecting vulnerable older adults and includes attorneys, banking professionals, volunteers, small business owners, and others who work in other areas of elder care. The board provides support for the APS caseworker in four significant ways, by:

- 1) providing and staffing of emergency resource rooms;
- 2) fundraising to support APS clients and programs;

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<sup>2</sup> Texas is divided into 11 regions, 4 of which are combined: Region 1 (Panhandle/Lubbock), Region 2/9 (Midland/Odessa/Wichita Falls), Region 3 (Dallas/Ft. Worth), Region 4/5 (East Texas - Texarkana-Beaumont), Region 6 (Houston/Galveston), Region 7 (Austin/Waco), Region 8 (San Antonio/Laredo), Region 10 (El Paso), Region 11 (Rio Grande Valley/McAllen/Brownsville)

<sup>3</sup> Texas Senate Bill 6 was written by Gabrielle Edwards, a legal representative for El Paso County.

- 3) raising public awareness regarding older adult abuse and self-neglect; and
- 4) showing support and appreciation for APS staff.

One important way boards support APS staff and clients is through “Resource rooms,” which are usually housed in APS offices but run and stocked by the boards. Collected items include medical equipment, diapers, clothing, and other necessities required by APS case workers for client needs. Sixty-five resource rooms exist around the state. For unusual client needs, caseworkers can approach the CIS and fill out a request form. The CIS then submits the request form to the board for consideration.

**Major Aspect of Project**

Boards stock 65 “resource rooms” around the state with items needed by APS clients, including medical equipment, clothing and other necessities.

APS volunteer boards may either serve one county or several, depending upon their location. Board certifications vary by region. For example, one regional board, Silver Ribbon Community Partners, located in McAllen, Texas, is certified as a United Way Agency and supports a full-time staff person. This board’s activities include providing presentations to agencies and banks regarding the prevention of financial exploitation, writing grants for financial assistance to APS clients, providing training in self-advocacy for elderly clients, and utilizing interns from local colleges. Silver Ribbon Community Partners was created in 1996 by community partners and joined the state board effort in 2006. Because of its innovative practice approach, Silver Ribbon Community Partners is considered a model, or gold standard, for other regional boards, according to Rachel Duer, the Community Engagement Program Specialist for Texas APS.

***State APS Volunteer Board***

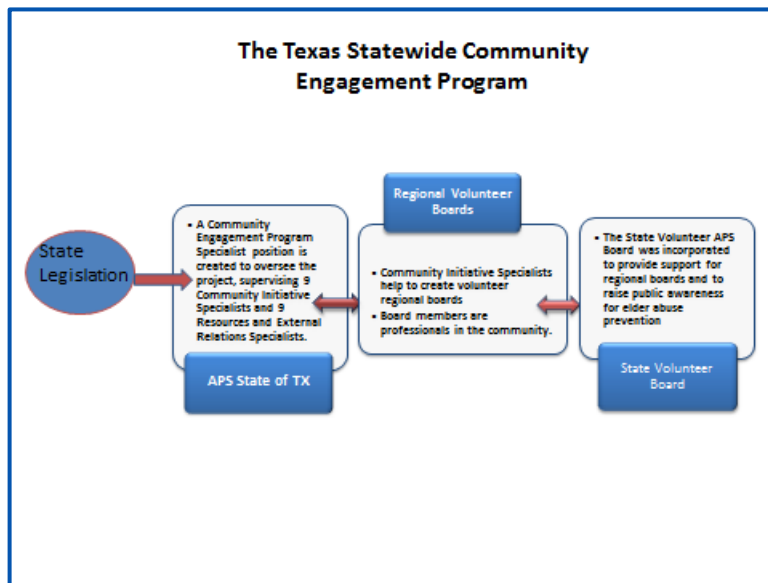
In 2007, Texas Partners for APS was incorporated as a non-profit with the intent to provide support for regional boards as well as to engage in fundraising and public awareness for elder abuse prevention at a statewide level. In addition, it was designed to reinforce the work of the regional boards, to collaborate with universities, and to work with law-makers in order to lobby for APS. Leaders in the state envisioned a level of support for APS that was equivalent to the support provided to CPS.

One of the first initiatives of the state volunteer board was to create an “Award of Excellence” for regional boards. To qualify, regional boards are required to fulfill several basic functions including fund-raising, grant-writing, community service, and developing and stocking a resource room. Regional boards receiving the award are honored at the annual state APS conference. Regional boards that are not fully developed have the opportunity to

apply for an “Honorable Mention”, an award that acknowledges their specific accomplishments.

One of the state volunteer board’s current initiatives is to help launch more APS volunteer boards in locales that do not have a board, by helping them to obtain non-profit status and/or to establish a resource room. Another initiative is to promote legislative advocacy, partnering with other state-wide organizations such as the Silver Haired Legislators and Gray Panthers in order to lobby for APS. Additionally, the state board is able to provide funds for caseworkers to attend the annual National Adult Protective Service Association (NAPSA) Conference (an expense not covered by the state) as well as to meet unique client needs.

State board membership is often culled from successful regional boards across the state. Up to two representatives from a region can serve on the state board. Initial terms were staggered at one, two and three year terms. Currently, every board member has a three-year term with a six-year maximum. Board meetings, held quarterly, are open meetings with votes confined to members only.



### Key Stakeholders

Texas State Adult Protective Services:

- Rachel Wilson Duer**, APS Community Engagement Program Specialist
- Community Initiative Specialists
- Resources and External Relations Specialists

### Twenty Regional APS Volunteer Boards and Three Coalitions



State Volunteer Board, **Michael Melson**, President

## **Budget**

The APS Volunteer Regional Boards and Coalitions are self-funded and their budgets can range from \$1,000 per annum to tens of thousands of dollars, contingent upon their fundraising and grant-writing efforts.

The state of Texas, through its APS budget, funds the Community Engagement Program Specialist, nine Community Initiative Specialist positions and nine Resource and External Relations Specialists.<sup>4</sup> An average of \$30,000 is allocated annually from state APS funds for public awareness campaigns which promote the work of the regional boards.<sup>5</sup>

The state level Texas Partners for APS is funded by regional boards and private donations.

## **Successes and Challenges**

### ***Challenges and successes for the community engagement specialists (CISs and RERSs)***

*The challenge of hiring the right fit for a CIS and RERS.* Within APS, the CIS and RERS positions are seen as promotion opportunities for caseworkers, who are often considered for their experiences in casework. It is important to hire CIS and RERS who have macro-level skills which include effective presentation and communication skills.

*The challenge of organizational resistance.* At the beginning of the community engagement effort, community agencies that attended the initial roundtable often did not understand the function of APS. They thought APS provided full wrap-around services and were unaware of state-imposed limitations and requirements. Clarifying the APS role as one of emergency intervention brought understanding and helped to reveal the gaps in services, such as the need for interim housing, food, and financial assistance. The new model has helped community agencies as well as the general public to understand that while APS will provide emergency interventions for a vulnerable older adult, it is ultimately up to the community to provide other necessary supports.

Additionally, initial efforts of the CIS and RERS staff to bridge gaps between APS and the community were met with great resistance. They worked diligently to be seen as a resource for APS supervisors and case workers. Once the program became operational, APS units

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<sup>4</sup> The Community Initiative Specialists and the Resource and External Relations Specialists are paid staff positions by the APS program but include additional components to their positions. The amount of time a CIS worker spends on board support correlates with how many boards are in their region. Some CIS's have one board and others have five, so staff time will differ from region to region.

<sup>5</sup> Some regional boards support the public awareness budget by purchasing promotional items for their regions, but APS does not rely on the regional boards to provide promotional materials.

experienced increased support and the community engagement staff positions were accepted by the communities in which they operated. APS case workers were able to focus on case investigations, while the community engagement staff focused on advocacy, developing community resources, supporting regional boards, and fundraising.

*The challenge of keeping volunteers motivated.* The CIS staff had to develop experience and skills for working with a volunteer entity. Unable to give direct orders, they had to learn how to keep volunteers focused on supporting APS.

*The challenge of managing ongoing background checks.* Managing a volunteer data base that required constant upgrades for background checks was daunting. The state of Texas contracted out the task of managing background checks and its subsequent paperwork.

*The challenge of confidentiality.* In order to protect client confidentiality, APS created different tiers of volunteers. Those with access to the data base system are carefully vetted.

*The challenge of state mandates.* The CIS and RERS staff has to be thoroughly trained in state policies due to their unique position in the system. The CIS works with volunteer boards but has to follow state policies and procedures. For example, state employees cannot be board members or help in board business. This boundary can be hard to maintain, for example, when a CIS worker is asked by a board member to make copies of an event flyer, or when a volunteer board is floundering and a CIS is tempted to step in. Technically, both of these activities would violate state mandates that prohibit state employees from helping with board business.

### ***Challenges and successes for the volunteer APS regional boards***

*The challenge of forming a volunteer board.* Initially, the CIS staff invited key community leaders to a presentation on the concept of an APS volunteer board. Participants were asked if they were interested in spearheading the effort. The development of board membership emerged from these initial volunteers. Because of this approach, it was challenging to avoid having the board dominated by one agency. Over time, however, board membership has become more diversified.

*Success.* Today, APS volunteer boards are so well known that people regularly request membership on the board.

*The challenge of setting board direction.* Volunteer boards will often hold a retreat to identify their vision and mission and to identify their goals for the next term. The “Award of

***Midland’s Regional Board’s motto:***

*“What have you done for a front-line case worker today?”*



Excellence” presented by Texas Partners for APS also helps regional boards to stay on track with their mission.

*Success for the volunteer boards* is a daily occurrence. Boards are able to make purchases and to provide supplies for APS clients that the state cannot. Stories of these gifts are shared regularly by case workers with the volunteer boards.

### ***Challenges and successes for the state APS volunteer board***

*The challenge of operating in a large state.* Determining common state-wide goals and objectives in a large state is difficult. Travel creates challenges. Teleconferences are held as needed and initial goals have been set to realistic levels.

*The challenge of meeting overall APS needs.* The gaps between the needs of clients and services that are available to meet those needs are challenging. For example, the lack of certified in-home placements for older adults is a pressing problem. Fundraising is a priority, but it is difficult to garner support from local boards that are focused on regional priorities. It takes time to grow a state-wide APS perspective.

*Success.* The “Award of Excellence” has served to motivate, encourage, and provide recognition for regional volunteer boards. Additionally, the state board has been instrumental in helping regional boards to attain their non-profit certification.

### **Project Outcomes**

Currently Texas APS has a statewide APS Board, 20 local APS Volunteer Boards and three local Coalitions. These Boards and Coalitions are supported by nine Community Initiative Specialists and nine Resource and External Relation Specialists. Efforts to develop more volunteer boards throughout Texas, particularly in larger regions, continue.

### **Key Take Home Messages**

*“Your volunteers will tell you what they want to do and what they are capable of doing. You have to be able to listen and come to common agreement.” Rachel Duer*

*“Know your state. What happens in one region will not fly in the other. Know your population, know your community and what their positive and negatives are and build on those.” Rachel Duer*

*When building your state board, “Try to select people that have come from regions that have qualified for the award of excellence or find boards that are doing really well and try to pull in their productive board members”. Michael Melson*

## Current Status of Project

The 20 APS Volunteer Boards and three volunteer coalitions meet regularly based on their charter.

Texas Partners for APS meets quarterly with their annual meeting taking place during the APS Statewide Conference.

## For More Information

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