

ShareCare

Your Life. Your Home. Our Help.

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June 2, 2021

To: Leelanau County Board of Commissioners

From: Julie Tarr, Executive Director
ShareCare

Don Frerichs, Chair
ShareCare Board of Directors

Re: Restructuring of Leelanau County Senior Services

Leelanau County Senior Services (LCSS) is central for providing services to all Leelanau County seniors in need. LCSS fulfills its responsibilities by: 1) informing and educating our seniors about what is available to them should they need assistance; 2) identifying those seniors that may need help, realizing many who do are reluctant to ask; and 3) initiating appropriate referrals to one of the many service agencies available, acting as the triage agent.

LCSS is like the hub of a bicycle wheel and all the service agencies are the many spokes, (40-50 or more). They are the “boots on the ground” making sure our seniors are cared for. The hub works best when supported by strong spokes. A system like this, when working in a coordinated and collaborative manner, helps to: 1) eliminate duplication of services, which saves money; and 2) avoid gaps in services, which ensures all our services are available to all our seniors. It would seem the present organizational structure of LCSS with its responsibilities of informing, identifying, and initiating should continue to work effectively, especially if a more collaborative work environment and a consensus model for decision-making is developed. (Aging Well in Leelanau is an informal group working on just that).

LCSS has proposed to “restructure” its department seemingly to include some “in house” services rather than referring out all of its requests. This would seemingly be disruptive to the “wheel” concept mentioned above, conflicting with the goals of avoiding duplication and gaps. This restructuring decision was apparently initiated without any discussion or thought about the impact it would have on some of the “spokes”....the service agencies helping our County seniors; ShareCare of Leelanau is one of those.

ShareCare dates back to 1995, founded as a membership organization. However, over the past 2 years ShareCare has been transitioning to be open and available to all County seniors in need, and expanding its reach in areas of the County less aware of our services. The support of the County government has made this transition possible as membership dues were eliminated and replaced by a minimal annual fee of \$75 that can be waived if a financial hardship exists. In time, ShareCare hopes to eliminate even this fee, but is not yet in a financial position to implement this change.

The County supported this transition by funding ShareCare in a 3-year-contract for care coordination, volunteer and transportation services. Although we are only half-way through the agreement, ShareCare's Executive Director was notified 1 day prior to the Senior Services Committee meeting that the restructuring plan would impact ShareCare's contract. Reducing the County's financial support during this transitional period will obviously strain ShareCare's budget and ability to reach its goals. Here's why.

Volunteers are the "backbone" of the ShareCare organization; without them the organization would cease to exist. Building a strong volunteer base in all regions of the County has been a top priority during the transition. ShareCare's motto is "neighbors helping neighbors" and the goal is to have local neighbors being the volunteers in each region. Trust, confidence and even friendship develop from a friendly, neighborly approach. Developing and maintaining a strong volunteer base is essential, and ShareCare's volunteer manager has that responsibility. It is time consuming. It is not an easy task. The restructuring plan proposed by LCSS includes a fifty percent reduction in its support of the volunteer manager. The Board of Commissioners should reevaluate this reduction. Recruiting, training and managing volunteers is essential to volunteer retention. In the last two years, the added value to our community from ShareCare volunteer hours was \$129,000, and will continue to grow as ShareCare expands services. Without a strong volunteer program, the County would need to buy some of these services in the private market, for example, paying for a ride to a medical appointment.

ShareCare and LCSS presently share the services of a Care Coordinator (a registered nurse), who is an employee of ShareCare. It seems her time is divided for the most part based on which office (agency) she is at on that particular day, focusing on that office only. It would improve her effectiveness if daily concerns and issues that arise in each location are dealt with timely and appropriately every day; this can easily be done by phone and/or email. Rather than continuing to share the present Care Coordinator, LCSS plans to have its own full time. This too is problematic for ShareCare for two reasons: 1) it seems to be creating less coordination and collaboration between the agencies when just the opposite is needed, and 2) ShareCare would need to pay for its own Care Coordinator, a cost we aren't budgeted for without revenue received from the County.

In discussions with April Missias, Director of LCSS, the possibility of having the Care Coordinator based at the Government Center yet still be employed by both LCSS and ShareCare was mentioned. This would have several benefits: 1) it would improve collaborative efforts, 2) it would put “care coordination” with the hub agency where it belongs, and, 3) it would allow ShareCare” to access the services of the Care Coordinator.

The current position works 31.5 hours a week and LCSS reimburses ShareCare for approximately 14 hours a week. If more time is needed an additional 3.5 hours could be added to her schedule. Most importantly though, the Care Coordinator should be working for each Leelanau senior in need regardless of where her/his desk is. Currently, there are many seniors being served by both agencies, and we can continue to support them collaboratively. The restructuring plan as proposed does not lead us in this direction.

I’m sure we can all agree that it’s our seniors in need that are the important ones here; so let’s look at it from their perspective and come up with an organizational structure that works best for them, not just LCSS, ShareCare, or any of the other service agencies. We recommend that the restructure plan as proposed be deferred until adjustments are made that work for everyone involved.