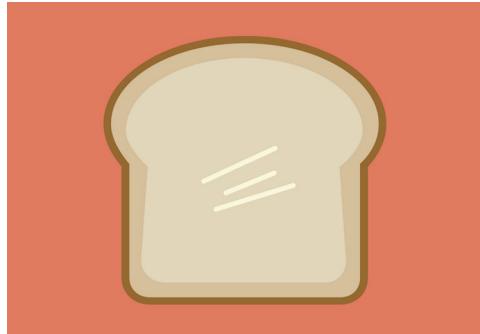


SERVICE COORDINATORS ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY IN AFFORDABLE SENIOR HOUSING



A CASE STUDY PRESENTED BY:

ABOUT AASC

The American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC) is a professional membership association and a national resource for service-enriched housing professionals. AASC's more than 4,000 members assist elderly and disabled residents and families living in affordable housing communities to identify, locate, and acquire the services and supports necessary to become and remain self-sufficient. Established in 1999, AASC provides education, advocacy, best practices, leadership, and networking opportunities for its members.

BACKGROUND

As trusted leaders in the affordable housing communities they serve, service coordinators work proactively to prevent hunger and connect residents to free and reduced-cost healthy foods. They do this by regularly assessing residents' needs and fostering partnerships with resource providers who can help.

Service Coordinators' efforts mean the vulnerable residents they serve have access to nutritious, culturally appropriate meals, which result in improved health and wellness outcomes. They ensure that residents don't have to make the choice between meals and medicine or fresh produce and gas to get to work. This endeavor is even more vital during the period of economic inflation that the nation is experiencing in 2022.

Addressing resident food and nutrition needs has long been a focus for service coordinators, particularly those working in affordable housing for older adults. During the pandemic, this became essential.

“
The need is real, and it is continuous. It's up to all of us to be creative and diligent in finding resources to relieve the struggle that some people face on a daily basis.
— Patty Rogers,
Service Coordinator

A 2020 report from the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University found that during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic just 40 percent of older adults living in affordable housing had access to food and supplies to quarantine for a week. Researchers found that service coordinators immediately worked to address this by ramping up their meal and food support.

Meanwhile, a Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health study of older adults in affordable housing during the pandemic found that nearly all service coordinators facilitated food programs. They organized door-to-door food deliveries, built on-site food pantries with donations, and connected residents to the internet to order groceries and medications online.

Overall, researchers have found that service coordinators promote resiliency among the residents living on the properties they serve, and this was never truer than during the pandemic.

Service Coordinator Patty Rogers serves 417 elderly and disabled residents at Lakewood Apartments in Ohio. She takes a comprehensive approach to combating food insecurity, including partnering with a local grocery store to offer free delivery and food discounts each week to support residents who are unable to shop in person.



46,000+ meals and nutrition programs organized by service coordinators from 2019-2021



1.5+ million times residents participated in meal programs from 2019-2021



Food is one of the most-searched categories in My Community Directory, an online resource service coordinators use to locate free resources and make direct service referrals



FOOD INSECURITY'S IMPACT ON HEALTH

Easy access to nutritious and affordable food is a social determinant of health. Individuals who lack this may experience a range of physical and mental health issues. Some common conditions these individuals report include:

- higher probability of chronic diseases
- more likely to be sick more often
- poor educational performance
- depression
- pregnancy complications
- lower medication adherence

[CITATION](#)

Service Coordinators Prioritize Healthy Meals

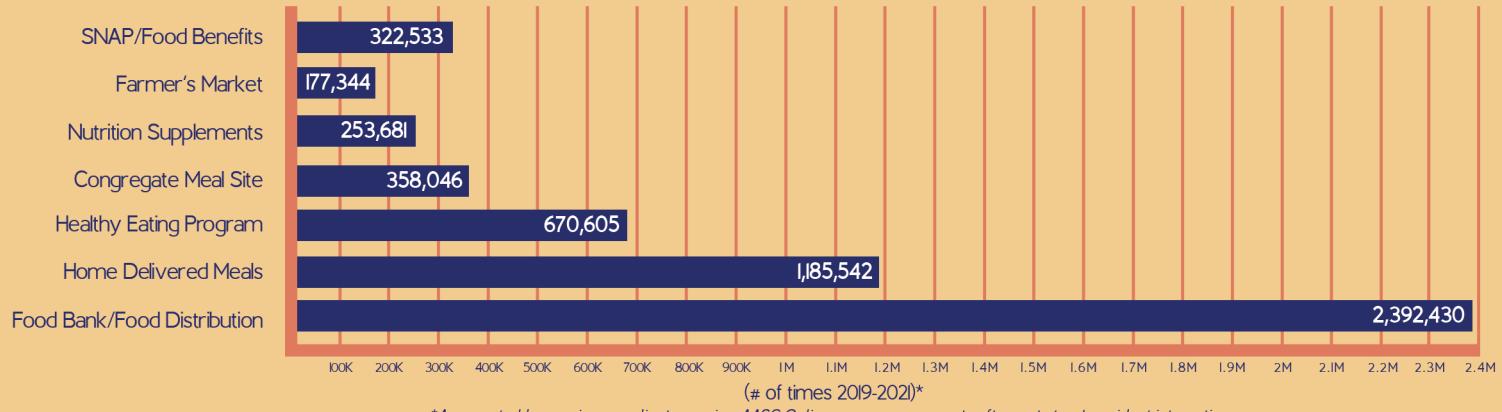
In every affordable housing property they serve, service coordinators are connecting residents to groceries, warm meals and supplemental food boxes. While many residents are eligible for monthly SNAP benefits, those dollars are limited and often don't stretch far enough to cover costs. To fill this gap, service coordinators build connections with local providers and oversee a wide range of food and nutrition programs.

At the Pines of Edgewater, service coordinators lead a complex food provision and meal delivery operation, which includes a partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository to support monthly deliveries of food boxes and fresh produce to more than 100 residents. "If I can get fruits or vegetables here, then I can eat healthier," resident Albert Reed told the food depository. Resident Annie Bennett said, "I need the extra food to make things last the week."

When the food depository was unable to distribute food boxes in a community space during COVID-19, Pines of Edgewater service coordinators, like many other service coordinators across the country, delivered the boxes directly to older adult residents' doors, which spanned 21 buildings over nine city blocks. This gave service coordinators the opportunity to assess residents and be a friendly face during a time of isolation.



Programs and Services Facilitated by Service Coordinators



Building Partnerships to Supply Fresh Foods

Fresh fruits and vegetables can be a luxury for low-income residents when SNAP benefits are limited or their main food sources are delivered in non-perishable commodities boxes. The 107 residents at Ridgeview Village in Olathe, Kansas never go without fresh produce thanks to a partnerships with Harvesters Community Food Network and local farmers as well as a thriving community garden.

"Partnerships with Harvesters and the other community partners we work with were established so that we can work as a team to better our community," Ridgeview Village Service Coordinator Corry Franklin said. "It takes a caring community to make sure that our growing elderly population is served in the proper way and that starts with nutrition."

Corry is also collaborating with local farmers to bring fresh beef, chicken, eggs and produce directly to the property. The farms accept coupons provided by the local Salvation Army that residents can exchange for fresh foods that aren't available at the food pantry or included in delivered food boxes.



HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION PREVENTION

The foundation of service coordination is supporting residents by meeting their basic needs. This often means ensuring those that they serve have access to food that is filling and appropriate for their health and wellness journeys. Meals and nutrition are the top resources to which service coordinators are connecting residents each year. Service coordinators achieve this through partnering with community based providers and facilitating the following resources:

- On-site food pantries
- Congregate meal sites
- Food box deliveries
- Healthy cooking classes
- SNAP enrollment
- Mobile grocery stores
- Home aids who help shop and cook
- Meal delivery services
- Food vouchers
- Farmer's markets
- Community gardens
- Grocery delivery services
- Transportation to stores and meal sites
- Nutrition education



Growing an Interest in Gardening

At Villa San Carlos in Port Charlotte, Florida, residents must look no further for fresh fruits and vegetables than their backyard. Their service coordinator partnered with University of Florida's IFAS Extension Family

Nutrition Program to build a community garden. It serves as the foundation for community gatherings, nutrition programming, and individual exercise in addition to a food source.

Now that the garden is thriving, UF/IFAS continues to lead monthly nutrition classes to highlight the uses for fruits and vegetables they're growing as well as encourage them to make healthier choices.



Teaching the Benefits of Nutrition

Diocesan Housing Services Corporation's properties in New Jersey participate in the SNAP-Ed program, which is geared toward educating low-income affordable housing residents in all states about nutrition. "Our residents love this program. The nutrition educators not only discuss healthy eating habits on a budget, but cook recipes with them as well," Service Coordinator Team Leader Alisa Erdman said.

The increased Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits provided in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have

made a difference for residents, especially as the cost of food has risen in 2022, she said. To supplement these benefits, Diocesan Housing Services Corporation's service coordinators arrange monthly food box deliveries, acquire produce vouchers and apply for low-cost food delivery services.

"Residents are incredibly thankful for (these) programs because without them, they would not have the funds to eat. They would have to choose whether to pay rent and utilities or eat," Alisa said.



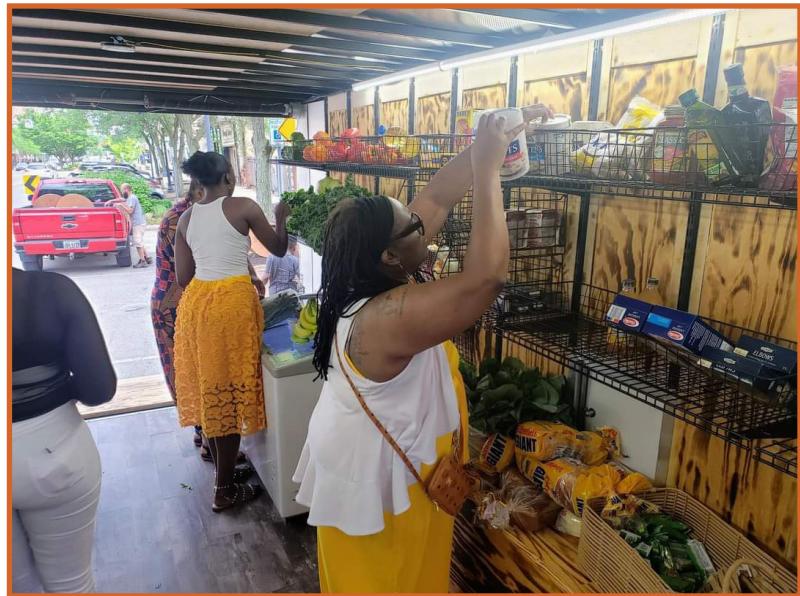
Providing Regular, Hot Meals

Each year, the congregate meal program funded through the Older Americans Act provides warm meals to millions of older adults. Service coordinators facilitate these programs on their properties or organize resident transportation to nearby meal sites. Angela Larios, a service coordinator at Steel Plaza Apartments in California, arranges transportation to a congregate meal site a mile from her property where residents can enjoy a warm lunch that includes fresh fruit, salad and milk each day.

Bringing the Grocery Store to Residents

Many older adults living in affordable senior housing rely on public transportation to reach grocery stores and restaurants. Even when a grocery store is just a mile from the property, it can feel to those residents like they're living in a food desert when they don't have access to transportation. This is the case at International Towers in Youngstown, Ohio, where a loss of transportation created a great need for targeted food and nutrition supports.

Service coordinator Ayanna Walker confronted this need by teaming up with Aisles One and Mahoning County Mobile Market to bring the grocery store to her residents. Aisles One leads cooking demonstrations and serves lunch to residents. The organization also has a wheelchair-accessible mobile store where



residents can shop for food. Meanwhile, the mobile market provides vouchers for free groceries to some residents and shopping outside their front doors.

Reducing Transportation Barriers

When the Muskogee, Oklahoma weekly Farmer's Market changed its hours for the 2022 season, it no longer coincided with the scheduled public bus that took Greenleaf Apartment residents to the market each week.

Service Coordinator Bethany Lewis saw this change as a public health crisis because many of the residents she serves rely on the market's money-saving programs for low-income older adults to access fresh, nutritious food. To address this, she collaborated with the market and local transit leaders to create a new bus route to transport residents of all local affordable housing sites to and from the market for free each Tuesday. "Our community and the Greenleaf residents are all very excited," Bethany said.

Residents of Wedgewood Towers in Tennessee are also receiving free transportation to groceries. Their service

coordinator, Sevara Sawyer, organizes transportation in partnership with a local church to drive residents to a free grocery store twice each month. "The additional food helps prevent food insecurity and the free van service saves on grocery transportation costs," Sevara said.





During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Debra Mardenborough-White, a service coordinator in Ohio, addressed food insecurity by collaborating with the regional Area Agency on Aging and the food bank to ensure Millennia Kingsbury Tower's residents had access to hot meals. In total, 95% of residents regularly signed up to receive hot meals as a result of these efforts.



Meeting Basic Necessities

During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring residents had access to food was a top priority for service coordinators as meal sites and food pantries shut down, lock downs were instituted, and grocery store shelves were picked bare. “I was getting a lot of questions about food and grocery shopping during that time. Residents were really afraid to get out and most didn’t understand or want to use home delivery,” said Pam Taylor, a service coordinator in Arkansas.

Pam began collecting food donations from local organizations and repurposed an old cabinet to build a food pantry in the building’s community room. It’s open 24/7 and residents are able to take what they need or donate items they don’t.

At Hope Heights apartments in Tennessee, the service coordinators maintain a food pantry that residents can access on designated days. The stocked items are provided through donations from the community and range from food to self-care items and toiletries.

Fostering Community Through Food

Service coordinator Lena Smith and the team at Clyde F. Simon Lakeview apartments were able to support residents and the larger community by partnering with two local restaurants to serve a variety of well-balanced meals at the property where she works.

The restaurants received grant funding to provide the free meals as part of New York’s Restaurant Resiliency Program, which supported restaurants that were struggling as a result of COVID-19 shutdowns. Each week for 16 weeks the restaurants provided meals for up to 150 residents. This was an exciting addition to the property’s regular food and nutrition resources, including mobile food bank deliveries, fresh produce truck visits, an on-site food pantry, community gardens, and a congregate meal site.

Reducing Social Isolation



Food can bring people together to celebrate, provide comfort, and learn about other cultures. At Musician's Towers in Ohio, service coordinator Ilana Beyder embraces the power of food to feed residents physically and emotionally. She assists residents who have organized a weekly cooking class where they bring foods and recipes from other countries. She also facilitates a weekly continental breakfast, partners with local organizations to host food-focused events such as pizza and ice cream parties, and seeks donations for holiday meal celebrations. "Many residents come to communicate with each other, so (they are not) isolated or lonely," Beyder said.

Delivering Food Boxes

Ohio-based service coordinator Sharon Parsons is with residents each step of the way to receiving a monthly food box donation from the local food bank. She assists residents with completing and faxing applications, picks up the boxes each month, and distributes them to participating residents. Each box weighs approximately 40 pounds and includes about \$65 worth of food items. While picking up the boxes, Sharon said she "grab(s) as much produce as possible from very large bins," to ensure residents have peppers, cucumbers, sweet corn, and other favorites to supplement the canned and boxed items they receive in the boxes.

In Puerto Rico, Service Coordinator Sylvia Garcia also supports food box deliveries with local canned and dry food. Since the start of the pandemic, her team has been tasked with distributing the boxes. This has become a common practice at many properties because community based

organizations providing food delivery services are following social distancing protocols and have fewer volunteers to drop off food boxes or meals.

