Did you ever wonder how community health needs and services are determined or how gaps in services are detected? The answer to this is, “Ask the residents for their input!” In 2012, four hospitals, eight health departments, Mercer County Human Services, and 30 non-profits all banded together to form the Greater Mercer Public Health Partnership (GMPHP). To truly understand the health needs of our residents, every three years the GMPHP conducts focus

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ASSESSING MERCER COUNTY’S HEALTH

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

groups, written surveys, and/or telephone surveys. This data is collected, analyzed, and posted on the hospital and GMPHP websites. Many organizations use the data to justify the need for new programs or grants that will address these issues. The organizations also network together to create joint ventures.

What were the priorities and concerns the residents shared in 2018? The easiest answer is to look at the diagram below that highlights the main concerns described in a 289-page document. As you study the different health issues people are facing, most of them relate back to weight and lifestyle.

The importance of maintaining a healthy weight is a significant factor in many preventable diseases and disabilities. In addition to lowering the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and high blood pressure, it can also lower the risk of several different cancers.

Once the issues were known, the GMPHP membership gathered together last fall to do a “root cause” analysis of the problems, and then reviewed the evidence-based programs around the country that had successfully improved people’s health. We now have a plan of action that four groups are working on. You will see an increase in nutrition

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education at the senior nutrition centers; increased health programs at the Trenton Free Public Library; increase in walking audits to make streets safer; increased opportunities for safe disposal of unused medication; increased dental screening; increased breast feeding education; and increased Narcan education to name a few initiatives.

The major concerns identified by the GMPHP can be even more concerning to the disability population. Studies show that almost 40% of people with disabilities struggle with obesity compared to 26% of those without (CDC.gov, 2018). “In the United States, 54 million people experience some form of a disability, of which roughly 9% (a total of 4.7 million adults) have both a substance use disorder and a co-existing disability” (Addiction Center, 2019). Mental health struggles, which can be a disability unto themselves, are common among those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and those with physical disabilities can struggle with mental health as they try to look for work, deal with physical health, access transportation, and other normal parts of life (Kohner, 2018).

If you or a loved one struggle with these or other issues I encourage you to call The Progressive Center for Independent Living. There are many resources locally such as the disability programs at the Hamilton YMCA, county addiction services, options through the NJ DDD programs, support groups, and many others which can help people with disabilities lead healthy and happy lives. We are here to work with you and your supporters to develop goals, identify barriers, and implement strategies to address these and other issues affecting our community. We can be reached at: 3635 Quakerbridge Rd Suite #40, Hamilton, NJ 08619, (609) 581-4500 ext 121, or 1220 State Highway 31 Ste #14, Lebanon, NJ 08833, (908) 782-1055, www.pcil.org, info@pcil.org, or facebook.com/progressivecenternj

References:
At first glance when I read that obesity is the highest rated concern, I paused thinking quietly, “Really?” Yet after immersing myself in better understanding the GMPHP process of data collection and people surveyed, it became clear that it is indeed a factor that contributes to many conditions that affect older adults, those living with disabilities, and their caregivers.

Upon further review and research one learns that many of the leading chronic health conditions of the older adult population – heart disease, stroke, dementia/Alzheimer’s disease, diabetes, chronic obstructive lung disease (COPD) – all may be the residual effects of obesity. Lifestyle changes can help to improve the debilitating effects of some of the aforementioned conditions. With a focus on healthy, active aging practices, older adults can participate in community-based programming to help control their weight, eat healthier foods, and exercise (even moderately). For a third year in a row, access to physical health and wellness activities is the top need expressed on the Mercer County Office on Aging Needs Assessment.

Another group of hidden vulnerable people whose health care concerns have been identified in the GMPHP is caregivers. Identifying as a caregiver is taken personally but effects of whatever the caregiver’s relationship is with a person needing help are apparent and can lead to some of the concerns and health conditions listed above. Caregiving duties, if not supported, can lead to self-neglect.

Most compelling within the aging and caregiving population are those who, due to stress, injury, illness or circumstance, resort to the use of substances to help cope, manage or self-medicate. Many of these substances have been life-long habits that now are further affecting one’s longevity. Many have been living with mental health issues that have never been addressed. It is essential these situations be met with a stigma free approach and assistance is offered to this population.

For more information about how the Office on Aging can assist, call 609-989-6661 or email us at adrc@mercercounty.org
MEET NEW STAFF

Anne
My name is Ann Freund and I have recently joined the staff at PCIL. Some of you may already know me from Life Choices Unlimited or Special Olympics. I will be working as a Transition Specialist searching for jobs for youth after graduation through PCIL’s Gateway Program. In my spare time I volunteer with my daughter as a kitten foster mom.

Lisa
Hello, This is Lisa Marie Duran. I am a DDD support coordinator here at PCIL. I received my Bachelor’s from Stockton University in Pomona, NJ. I have been working in the social service field for several years and have always enjoyed working to help enrich the lives of others! I really look forward to working for PCIL and with individuals in the community!

Lorraine
Hello! My name is Lorraine Dingle. I am a newly hired part-time transitional Mentor Coordinator for the RAMP program at PCIL. I received my Bachelor’s degree in Speech Pathology and Education from Long Island University- C.W. Post. I am also currently a 5th Grade teacher in the Hamilton Township School District. I especially love working with the youth population. I enjoy supporting them in discovering their potential, facing and conquering challenges, and reaching their goals! Being able to connect mentors with mentees will be an amazing journey! In my spare time, I enjoy reading, dancing, and listening to great jazz music.

Shmar
My name is Shmar Mills and I am the new Transition Specialist / RAMP Instructor here at PCIL as of June 2019. My professional background and life experience is extensive within Mental Health. I graduated from Mercer County Vocational for Business Technology/Computer Operations. I am a proud mother of 2 children (a son 17 years old & a daughter 9 years old). We enjoy travelling, cooking and family game nights. I have a motto that helps me through life that I would like to share as I embark my new chapter with PCIL, “Only our thoughts can limit our disabilities, so STAY POSITIVE and strive to be the best YOU”. I love what I do and look forward to meeting each and every one of you.
Summer weather has finally arrived following a rainy winter and spring and the Community Connections Recreation Program continues to bring you a wide variety of fun activities!

In April, we took a trip to see “Return to the Forbidden Planet”, an imaginative combination of Shakespeare and 1950’s B-movies featuring robots, a love story, and a classic rock & roll sound track. We were pleased to welcome back professional cartoonist Ken Wilkie for a fun and educational workshop on imparting action to your figure drawings. The Spring wrapped up with a trip to see the Trenton Thunder play the Reading Fighting Phillies. Our trip to see the Thunder was on Bat Boy Tommy Smith Bobble Head Day. Not only did we see an awesome response with a large number of PCIL participants, but the entire community came out in droves to support Tommy. Mercer County Freeholders honored him with a presentation before the game and the pride we could all see in Tommy made it truly a special occasion!

Please remember that the goal of our program is not only to offer an opportunity to meet new people and enjoy various activities, it is also to educate people living with disabilities about the wide variety of recreational activities that exist in their communities. Nothing makes me prouder than to see someone and hear about how they had a great time going back to a location after going with us through the Community Connection program.

If you, a loved one, or a friend wants to get involved as a participant or volunteer please contact us. The more we work together, the more successful we will all be, and the more we’ll get to know the communities we share. As the year continues we’ll have lots of great events to look forward to so keep your eyes peeled for those yellow flyers!

Summer Recreation Events:
Annual Picnic and Pontoon Boat Rides
The PCIL Softball Game and Cookout
Live music performances
Art workshops
And more!

Participant enjoying Ken Wilkie’s animation workshop.
RECREATION CORNER

PCIL consumers enjoy several activities throughout the Spring!
His title may be the longest in state government, but his staff is the smallest. Paul Aronsohn, the New Jersey Ombudsman for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities and Their Families has an office with one employee – himself.

Aronsohn occupies a year-old position in state government that has a bi-partisan pedigree. Established through a law passed by a Democratic-controlled legislature, it was signed by Republican Gov. Chris Christie. Gov. Phil Murphy appointed Aronsohn as the first ombudsman in April 2018.

“The governor appointed me because he wanted someone who spoke the same language [as families do], with urgency,” said Aronsohn, a 53-year-old former mayor of Ridgewood. He says he learned that language at home as the younger brother of a woman with disabilities.

There he saw his mother care for his sister, whose degenerative and ultimately terminal disability was never completely diagnosed. And through that, he said, he came to understand the struggle parents and siblings face to meet the constant and complex needs of their loved ones.

Explaining the Job

As the first ombudsman, Aronsohn has spent a lot of time explaining his role. “My job is to help people with disabilities and their families who are often overwhelmed or unable to speak for themselves, navigate the system,” he said. He also wants to help those with disabilities have a stronger voice in policy discussions about improvements needed and to use his unique vantage to offer recommendations to Murphy and state officials.

Aronsohn’s profile is broad: it crosses several state departments, from Human Services and Health to Education and Transportation. And it extends to the local and county levels, as well as non-profit and for-profit programs and services. The office is located in the Treasury Department but reports directly to the governor. It encompasses the entire lifespan of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, childhood to old age.

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For the full article please visit:
Transportation is often a struggle for people who live with disabilities. The Access Link service provided by New Jersey Transit for those who are prevented from accessing their fixed-route options allows thousands of New Jerseyans to get to work, the grocery store, church, and many other locations, increasing their independence and improving their quality of life.

For those who rely on this service waiting on hold to schedule their rides and having to bring exact change has been a frustrating part of accessing the service. Now, thanks to those of you who provide feedback, and the hard work of the folks at New Jersey Transit, they have launched “Access Link Online”. This new online option allows customers to log in and accomplish all of the following: check the status of and cancel upcoming rides, view your past rides, request a ride, view and change your customer account information (addresses, contact information) and use our electronic fare option EZ-Wallet. EZ-Wallet is the electronic payment option for Access Link customers. You can pre-pay for your rides, add money to your account, track payment history and see the amount of past fare concerns, all online. EZ-Wallet is available for all current Access Link customers. You must use a valid credit, debit or pre-paid gift card to establish a payment pro-file. (At this time you cannot use American Express)

With the successful launch of this new mechanism for interfacing with Access Link thousands of customers will be able to remotely manage their transportation needs and costs from anywhere on computers, tablets, or smart phones. They are not the only ones to benefit however. With online access and payment management now a reality, those who use this system will not be calling New Jersey Transit, leaving more time for those who do not have the ability to use the new online options.

For more information about Access Link Online, or to learn how to apply for Access Link service please visit: www.njtransit.com and use the Accessibility link at the top of the page or call 800-955-ADA1 (2321) and choose option #1.
There are several reasons why I am grateful for the ADA. The ADA has helped me succeed academically as a Global Studies major at Mercer County Community College and Rider University. I finished my associate’s degree in Global Studies at Mercer County Community College with high honors and as a member of Phi Theta Kappa. I have made the dean’s list three times at Rider University. I attribute my successes in large part to the ADA and I hope my success continues during the fall 2019 semester at Rider University so that way I can finish my bachelor’s degree in Global Studies at Rider University by December of this year.

The ADA has also inspired me to get involved with a lot of admirable disability rights causes, activities, and events. Some of the most memorable are World Autism Awareness Day and Rider University’s Stomp Out Stigma event; these annual events are relatable to me since I am an autistic person who struggles with anxiety and depression. The ADA has not only helped me get involved with volunteering at PCIL, it also helped me become a general member of Rider University’s disability club since the fall 2018 semester. The ADA has inspired me to get involved because it helped me develop empathy for people who went through similar difficulties, or even worse difficulties than I did. I have been inspired to become an advocate for disability rights because I want to help people with disabilities have an opportunity to succeed in the real world and live a better life so they can have an easier time dealing with their disabilities than I did. Without the ADA, I probably would not have heard of all of these admirable causes, activities, and events let alone participated in them. I was pleased to see George H. W. Bush, signer of the ADA, become the first president to celebrate his 94th birthday last year on June 12th 2018. This meant a lot to me, and it really helped me recover from both the Barbara Bush and Anthony Bourdain tragedies last year and my gratefulness for President Bush’s signing of this historic civil rights act has helped me get through a lot of other tough times as well.

This is why I am grateful for the Americans with Disabilities Act. It has helped me succeed academically and inspired me to get involved in disability rights causes. I personally feel the ADA has saved my life many times as of writing this article. I look forward to having more opportunities to honor the admirable achievements of George H. W. Bush and other great Americans as well as other great people in both American history and world history in the near future.
WE’VE MOVED OUR MERCER OFFICE

By Scott Elliott, Executive Director, PCIL

Hello everyone, we need to let you know that we have moved our Mercer County office. It is with great pride that we report we’ve out-grown our existing office. This growth is an indication that we are making a positive impact in our community through the quality of services we provide. Whether Independent Living Supports & Services, Support Coordination, Pre-Employment & Transition, or the other services we offer, we continue to see growth and the addition of new members to the team!

Our new office is located at 3635 Quakerbridge Road, Suite 40, Hamilton, NJ 08619 in the University 1 plaza, just north of our prior office. We are the back unit on the southern side of the plaza next to the Center for Non-Profits.

The new location will feature many amenities for both staff and clients including multiple private meeting rooms, computers and communication technology access for clients, and a large conference center for peer group meetings, volunteer workers, and important meetings with a wide variety of stakeholders. We would like to take a moment and thank all of our supporters for helping us be able to better serve our community. If you have any questions about our new facility, or need directions, please feel free to contact us!
Independence and community integration are the pillars that any Center for Independent Living is built upon. These things can only happen if the community has an understanding of the fact that people living with disabilities are no different than anyone else. Perhaps the best way to bring about this level of awareness and understanding is begin by teaching our children about the challenges people with disabilities face and the fact that we all face challenges in our lives, something that demonstrates our differences really don’t make us that different!

I am proud to report that we were able to do exactly that this year by providing disability awareness and sensitivity (DAST) presentations to almost 600 students at Alexander and Yardville Heights elementary schools. The presentations feature a question and answer session for the children followed by activities that give a first-hand experience of what it might be like to live with a disability. The true measure of success is feedback and the following are some experts from the children who attended these presentations:

“The things I most enjoyed was the activities that teaches us how to communicate and see how it is like in my own shoes.”

“If someone has a disability, that doesn’t make them different from me.”

“I learned that people with disabilities aren’t disabled to all things.”

“I learned that you should not judge someone with a disability.”

“I like how they let you ride in the wheelchair; it lets you see someone’s perspective.”

“People with disabilities are still the same as other people.”

“Seeing Mr. Scott’s care because I loved to learn how he could drive with a wheelchair!”

“I learned that everyone is different, even if they’re twins.”

“I learned that everyone is different and some people don’t get the things we do.”

“I learned that there are visible and invisible disabilities!”

“I learned that people with disabilities try real hard.”

There are too many other quotes to list here but hearing the children’s tone of kindness and understanding makes me proud to have been a part of affecting this change to our culture and community.
DAST TRAINING A SUCCESS
Over 600 Alexander & Yardville Heights Elementary School Students learned about disability awareness and participated in hands on sensitivity presentations.
OLDER AMERICANS ACT (OAA) – ARE YOU READY FOR REAUTHORIZATION?

By Eileen E. Doremus, Executive Director, Mercer County Office on Aging/ADRC

Older Americans Act (OAA) – Are You Ready for Reauthorization?

If not, let’s get you there by starting with a basic understanding of the OAA and why this matters anyway!

The Basics

The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) reminds us that we can all agree on a “near universal opinion” that those 60 and over want to maintain their independence and live safely and securely in the community of their choice or wherever home may be. Fifty-four years ago, the OAA became law to connect older adults and their caregivers to making this desire become the reality it is today. The OAA supports programs and services such as meals, in-
OLDER AMERICANS ACT (OAA) – ARE YOU READY FOR REAUTHORIZATION?

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home help, transportation, home modifications, and legal services. Family caregivers give more care to family members than any other type of care and the financial cost of that care is often times out of pocket expenses. Sheer exhaustion from the routines of caregiving can be alleviated through OAA programs like adult day care, respite and caregiver assistance. The OAA encourages us to look ahead and realize that every day 10,000 people are turning 60 and want to age in place. The need for cost-effective programs must be in place to allow for freedom of choice and dignity as one ages. Lastly, the OAA safeguards those who are more frail and vulnerable to physical, mental, and emotional abuse. Financial exploitation is becoming too common an occurrence from those we think will guide us and handle our affairs. Elder abuse is being addressed through the identification of signs of abuse and offering preventive measure to eradicate its occurrence whether it occurs on one’s home or a residential care setting.

Getting Involved – Share your Story/Reach out to learn more and contact your legislators.

To further assist your outreach and advocacy efforts, n4a has prepared an OAA Reauthorization Toolkit for advocates. Check out www.n4a.org/OAA where you can find:

• social media messages and images;
• a one-pager fact sheet about the Act;
• n4a’s recommendations for Reauthorization (and any future official positions that n4a will take on reauthorization as the process continues);
• templates that can be used to write a letter to the editor to local news outlets, grassroots outreach and your own advocacy messages to federal legislators;
• background on the Act, including a timeline of milestones in the OAA’s history; and
• OAA talking points and congressional visit tips!
THE PRESENT DAY PROBLEM OF ELDER ABUSE

By Eileen E. Doremus,
Executive Director, Mercer County Office on Aging/ADRC

On June 14th, the College of New Jersey in Mercer County was the site of the 2019 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. Residents of all ages from throughout New Jersey came together to observe, listen and learn from government officials and agencies who exist to safeguard the well-being of older adults.

Sadly, too many older adults have fallen for what was called the “invisible” problem of financial exploitation. All too often, due to unscrupulous practices, older adults fall prey to scams. But more upsetting is when one trusts their own relatives, friends or family members and become victims of horrendous crimes – many becoming financially drained and or physically abused by the very people with whom they have placed their trust.

Attendees heard stories of financial and physical abuse, both of which can be “hidden” as the sufferers are scared to report the abuse. Due to cognitive/memory changes that can include dementia or Alzheimer’s disease, age-related impairments, isolation from the general public and fear of retribution increase some likelihood to succumb to abusive tactics.

What is being done?
Exposure events such as this one bring to light the concerns of abuse. Agencies that deal with this concern are arming the public with awareness campaigns and presentations aimed at key gatekeepers of older adult services. This includes law enforcement, hospitals, other health care professionals, and financial institutions, all of which are positioned to see the signs of abuse.

The New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs distributed a handout entitled “Identifying Elder Abuse in the Home.” It

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THE PRESENT DAY PROBLEM OF ELDER ABUSE

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explains who regulates the health care service firms such as companion services, health care or personal care services who deliver care in one’s home. Listed are the various partners they work with in enforcing the regulations and define the types of abuse as well as offer warning signs of elder abuse. To view this document on line visit: https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/hcservice/Pages/default.aspx

Additionally, the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs invites you to view their Anti-Fraud Toolkit by calling 800-242-5846 or going to www.FightingFraud.NJ.org.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services also have an informational publication entitled Protecting Yourself & Medicare from Fraud. The booklet explains: how to protect yourself and Medicare from fraud, how to identify and report billing errors and concerns, what to do if you suspect Medicare fraud and how to protect your personal information. Visit www.Medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) to get the most current information.

Even what may have been proposed to you from what you think are reputable financial institutions, it pays to look a bit deeper to make sure you are protecting you and your family’s finances. The New Jersey Bureau of Securities (Bureau) is charged with protecting investors from investment fraud, and regulating the securities industries in New Jersey. Always ask questions about those who sell financial materials and then verify that they are legitimate. Go to the Bureau’s website www.NJSecurities.gov to get more specific information.
More attention needs to focus on America’s caregivers. Even though most do not self-identify as such, they are the unpaid workforce that cares for children, for aging parents, for those living with disabilities, for adults with cognitive changes such as dementia/Alzheimer’s disease, and for those living with lifelong chronic conditions, and they deserve a spotlight appearance. Two 2018 articles containing results of studies supported by the Administration of Community Living and performed by Westat bring to life specific findings. One article offers insight into short and long-term caregiving, the other describes a comparison of those who are caring for people with Alzheimer’s and related disorders (ADRD) and those caring for someone without ADRD. *

**Key Differences between Short and Long Term Caregivers**

- Long term caregivers were generally older than short term caregivers. 58% percent of long term caregivers were age 65 or older compared to 51% of short term caregivers.
- Short term caregivers were more likely to have part-time or full-time employment.
- The care recipients of long term caregivers were more likely to be diagnosed with ADRD in comparison with short term caregivers.
- Short term caregivers were less likely to report daily caregiving intensity of 80% or higher in comparison to long-term caregivers.
- On average, self-reported physical health and mental health scores were higher (i.e., better) for short term caregivers than long term caregivers.
- Among the subset of caregivers who were AAA clients, long term caregivers were more likely to use NFCSP respite care in the past 6 months.
SPOTLIGHT ON CAREGIVING

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Key Differences between ADRD and Non-ADRD Caregivers

• ADRD caregivers were generally older than non-ADRD caregivers, with mean ages of 67 and 64, respectively.

• ADRD caregivers, on average, were more highly educated than non-ADRD caregivers.

• ADRD caregivers were more likely to experience a care recipient resisting aid, hitting or biting, and wandering or getting lost compared to non-ADRD caregivers.

• ADRD caregivers were more likely to report daily caregiving intensity of 80% or higher in comparison to non-ADRD caregivers.

• ADRD caregivers were more likely to report that caregiving is emotionally very difficult compared to non-ADRD caregivers.

• Although ADRD caregivers reported more paid caregiving support than non-ADRD caregivers, they reported receiving less caregiving support from family and friends.

*The importance of these studies is directly related to the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) ability to offer supportive programs for caregivers through the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP). Some of the caregivers interviewed for these studies were recipients of their programs and services.
A CALL TO OLDER ADULTS – MERCER COUNTY NEEDS YOUR INPUT!

Much Ado about Mercer County:

Over 60,000 people in Mercer County are over the age of 60! Changes occur from year to year as Mercer County’s population ages. The Office on Aging/ Aging and Disability Resource Connection is responsible to keep abreast of the changes and create/support a plan to assist resident’s ability to adapt.

Do your part to help! Go to http://www.mercercounty.org/departments/human-services/aging-disability-resource-connection/office-on-aging/20-questions. You will find 20 Questions that help us get a snapshot of the needs in the community. You can fill the form out on line, print it out and mail, or call our office to help us help you fill it out. Or feel free to send us an email with your thoughts!

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