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Council on Aging team ensures area older adults get the support they need to remain independent in their homes

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At Council on Aging (COA), the Area Agency on Aging for Clinton County and the administrator of the county's Elderly Services Program (ESP), a small team of dedicated professionals work behind the scenes to ensure vulnerable older adults in the county have access to the services and support they need to remain safe and independent at home.

COA's Provider Services team demonstrates exceptional commitment to Clinton County older adults by building and managing the provider network that delivers critical services to homebound older adults. Without this network – which includes local businesses and organizations – many older adults would not receive the care they need.

Ken Wilson, COA's vice president of program operations, said: "Our Provider Services team is focused on building positive relationships with businesses in the community that can help us meet the needs of the older adults we serve. Because of the focus on relationship-building, our provider network becomes invested in our mission to help older adults live independently in the community. And, there's the added benefit of helping businesses get established and grow in the community.

In the past, COA has had more than enough providers to deliver the services clients need. But in recent years, worker shortages and the rising cost of goods and services has had a negative impact on the provider network. As a result, it has been difficult (especially in rural areas) to match clients with providers for certain services, especially home care assistance (help with housekeeping, personal care, respite care, etc).

This imbalance in supply and demand – where there are not enough providers to meet the demand coming from older adults – means COA's Provider Services team must work to even the scales.

The team uses a variety of strategies to keep the system in balance. The standard practice is to issue Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to bring new home care companies into the county's provider network. This is a detailed and lengthy process that involves working one-on-one with companies to help them understand the rules and requirements of the program.

A member of the team, COA Business Relations Partner, Monica Schulze, said: "Many of these providers call me frequently – sometimes daily – to ask questions as they are filling out the application. This communication continues during those first couple of months providing services to our clients. But I

Council on Aging is designated by the state of Ohio to serve older adults and people with disabilities within a multi-county region. We are experts at helping people with complex medical and long-term care needs, offering a variety of services via publicly funded programs. **Our mission: Enhance lives by assisting people to remain independent through a range of quality services.**

have a passion for helping providers successfully onboard because I know in the end, our clients are the ones who benefit. I don't want our clients to go without services."

From time to time, an emergency situation arises where the team does not have time to issue an RFP. For example, late last year one of the county's largest home care providers decided to terminate its contract with COA.

At the time of the termination notice, this provider served approximately 80 ESP clients, accounting for 40 percent of homemaking services delivered through the program.

Council on Aging's Provider Services team began the immediate work of helping to transition impacted clients to new providers, and also set out to fill the gap left by the exiting provider.

The team reached out to Clinton County ESP care managers and other organizations in the county seeking recommendations for agencies that might be interested in contracting with COA. This grassroots approach led to three additional organizations joining the county's provider network. Many of the new providers were locally-owned small businesses.

As a result, Clinton County now has six home care assistance providers serving older adults enrolled in the Elderly Services Program. And, every client impacted by the contract termination was successfully transferred to a new provider with minimal service disruption.

At a time when many older adults in southwestern Ohio and across the state are experiencing the effects of the home care workforce shortage, older adults in Clinton County's Elderly Services Program can quickly be matched with a service provider to ensure their needs are met.

Thank you to Council on Aging's Provider Services Team: Business Relations Partners Monica Schulze, LaTricia Long, Natasha Wuebker and Nicole Holts; and Contract Specialist Beverly Montgomery-Clark.

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