

# THE SERVICE NETWORK

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It's funny where life takes us, while not a gerontology major, I found my passion in the field of aging.

When I graduated with my MSW, with an emphasis on policy and research, the job market was not very promising. I landed in Morris County's Department of Human Services, then transferred to their Department on Aging. When the Union County Division on Aging's Executive Director Phil Perlman caught wind that I was working in Morris County but living in Union County, he recruited me to join the Union County team. Phil obtained a grant on Elder Abuse and Neglect and I became the coordinator for the program in the absence of an adult protective services program in the county. It was a project that had to be developed with the community and through this position I met many providers, community leaders, crime prevention officers, and had the good fortune to travel to Elder Abuse conferences throughout the country as the issue was finally being recognized. That was 35 years ago.

I held different positions at the Division on Aging so the job never seemed boring. As Project Director I handled the SSBG/Title XX grant back when these funds were not part of the Area Plan Contract. For over a year I assisted the county with their Employee Assistance Program while it was in transition, encouraged by Phil Perlman to use the opportunity to utilize my LCSW; Aging by day, EAP by night.

In time, I became the Assistant Executive Director and I further learned how connected the Aging Network was; the dedicated service providers, 20 additional county Offices on Aging, and state AAA administration and leadership, as well as the strong network of Area Agencies on Aging and the National Association of AAA's for whom advocacy on behalf of older adults and caregivers was powerful and rewarding.

I had the privilege to serve on the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging's Board of Directors for 13 years, also serving on the Executive Committee as Treasurer, as well as serving on the New Jersey Association of Area Agencies on Aging's Executive Board as Treasurer. As a result, I have met many professional colleagues who in time became personal friends. I am grateful that the County of Union's leadership supported my interests and commitment to advocacy on behalf of older adults and caregivers.

I have loved working these past 35 years and feel privileged to have had the opportunity to serve as the Executive Director for 18 of them. I am not sure how those years flew by so quickly. As I close this chapter of my career I have many to thank; past Directors' Phil Perlman and Susan Chasoff; amazing mentors who taught me the value of the Older Americans' Act and how it literally secures people's independence and dignity. They taught me the value of N4A (USAgging) and NJ4A and how there is strength in numbers; the county who supported the efforts of the Division as well as the needs of the older population in this county; the Human Services Department directors' leadership, present and past, who understood what we did and allowed the Division to flourish; the service provider network who work as a team and seem to share my passion; the Advisory Council on Aging who were a great sounding board and contributed to my overall knowledge of the needs of older adults. To all, a heartfelt thank you.

But, at the end of the day, my heroes are my staff. They have worked tirelessly and with such commitment and dedication. They have gained my respect and I hope I earned theirs.

As I pass the baton I know this Division will thrive. My best to all of you and if we pass each other again, I will consider it a gift.



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