



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

Deadline for Nominations Extended to March 30, 2015

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Outreach Services for At-Risk Citizens

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Scituate, Massachusetts

Jurisdiction population(s): 18,886

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: December Year: 2013

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Patricia A. Vinchesi

Title: Town Administrator Jurisdiction: Scituate, MA

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact: Jennifer Keefe

Title: Public Health Jurisdiction: Scituate, MA
Director

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**Outreach Services for At-Risk Citizens
Serving the Needs of the Most Vulnerable in the Community
Scituate, Massachusetts**

Founded in 1636, the Town of Scituate, Massachusetts lies along the eastern coastline of Massachusetts between Boston and Plymouth. The geographic location of the Town, with its coastal infrastructure and north facing harbor make it especially vulnerable to devastating storms, particularly during winter months. Indeed, the Town has had eight severe storms in the past five years and has declared more States of Emergency than any other community in the Commonwealth. Flooding, extended power outages, storm over wash and debris coupled with high winds regularly impact the Town, its infrastructure and residences. During one such storm on December 26, 2013 the Town opened its emergency storm shelter at the local high school. With more than 200 residents utilizing the shelter over four days, Town officials and volunteers became aware of multiple medical, social, and mental health concerns among shelter residents, particularly those who were elderly. These concerns extended well beyond the scope of the specific storm. Although the Town maintains extensive lists of residents needing chronic care monitoring or wellness checks during emergency events, almost all of the shelter's guests were previously unknown to town officials. This revelation, of dozens of citizens with no safety net during an emergency situation, lead the Town Administrator to wonder what other needs were being unmet for residents. The Town was already aware of known limitations in the areas of public transportation, local jobs, affordable housing presenting a myriad of hardships. But haunted by the sight of so many residents without a support network during a state of emergency compelled the Town Administrator to look at how the Town could help these residents on an ongoing basis. However, it was December and the annual budget was already prepared and set for review. In an unprecedented move the Town Administrator contacted town officials, told

them she was amending her budget recommendations, reworked the numbers and carved out funding a new position for a licensed clinical social worker to specifically assist the at risk and vulnerable individuals and families in the community. This was a big leap of faith as no community of such a moderate size had such a municipal position. In December 2013 the Town hired its first Manager of Social Services at a cost of \$50,000 annually. Over the past 15 months the position has become a vital and integral part of town services, *discovering many more needs than anticipated* and working across all departments to provide counseling services.

Under the umbrella of Scituate's Council on Aging, the Social Services Manager works closely with its Outreach Coordinator. At the conclusion of the first year, the combined effort of the Social Services Manager and Outreach Coordinator resulted in services provided to 536 residents in Scituate, many of whom had not been previously identified or received assistance. Approximately 80% of those assisted in the first year were over the age of 60; however, the largest growing segments of the population requesting the assistance of the Social Services Manager were between 45-60. The rise in service utilization for this age bracket is likely a direct result of the ongoing awareness of the position in the community whose priority focus is to seek out individuals that do not normally seek services, are home-bound and/or have strong feelings of pride and independence. Services rendered are varied and range from crisis intervention to housing assistance, supportive counseling, mental health and substance abuse referral, case management and advocacy. These are uniquely distinct from other typically provided social services such as fuel and financial assistance, health insurance application assistance and legal referrals.

In addition to direct clinical work, most surprising has been that the role has evolved to include community organizing and planning in collaboration with other existing Town entities.

With data obtained from the 2013 emergency shelters operations, Scituate Police, the Health Department and key informants in the community, an additional need to develop community relationships and program/protocol development to address gaps in mental health care and other social services was developed. To support this initiative, a “Social Service” Police Officer was appointed to work in conjunction with the Social Services Manager to address gaps in services observed by police. This collaboration resulted in police officer training around mental health issues, development of new police protocols and collaboration with our local emergency department to enhance communication during a mental health crisis. Further, police officers have become one of the primary referral sources of new clients for the Social Services Manager. In addition, the role has accelerated the Town’s effort to work towards a comprehensive and informed response to hoarding. Scituate’s Hoarding Response Team, facilitated by the Director of Public Health and Social Services Manager, is a monthly, interdisciplinary meeting with a stated mission of achieving, “a comprehensive, informed response to hoarding and related needs in the community by developing a multi-disciplinary protocol and providing resources, education, and consultation.” Initially, the team educated itself about hoarding as a mental illness and current best practices, hosting experts in the field, Members of the team traveled to trainings and events throughout the year and developed the mission statement and goals for the community. The Social Services Manager led the effort to secure grant funding to develop ongoing collaborations with hoarding-informed service providers. Next in line is to implement community outreach, peer support groups, and education. The Town has now become a leader state-wide in hoarding issues. With a staff LSW who is readily available to provide direction on new approaches for dealing with hoarding as a mental condition the Town is ahead of the curve.

Next, the role has also allowed the Town to respond to regional data on suicide. In 2014, the Social Services Manager participated in the founding of the Marshfield-Scituate Suicide Prevention Coalition. An early accomplishment of the Coalition was to provide a regional mental health referral service--personalized telephone assistance and support to navigate the mental health care system. Callers receive guidance about treatment options, providers, and insurance coverage in order to access appropriate mental health care. To date, this new service has successfully connected 70 individuals with mental health providers. The Coalition also received state funding to train members in a community-based suicide prevention program to help identify and aid individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. As a certified trainer, Scituate's Social Services Manager provided initial training to community members that will continue on an ongoing basis.

The Town of Scituate has worked diligently in a collaborative effort with other town departments and volunteers to formalize and refine emergency preparedness and response procedures. Storm shelters incorporate all aspects of health and safety before, during, and after a storm. As a result changes have been made and now along with volunteers and nurses include a mental health clinician, a police detail and paramedic availability around the clock during shelter operations. The Town regularly reviews operations both pre- and post- storm to provide the most effective and safest operation possible during such emergencies. The Social Services Manager provides critical information around caregiving that the Town did not previously possess. Her work with isolated seniors to assist in developing safety plans during emergencies has been nothing short of astonishing. Her work with other local non-profits during three more horrendous storms the past eight months help coordinate national disaster relief work crews that travelled to Scituate to assist more than 80 needy residents. The position has also addressed

significant gaps in state and federal services, and the Manager has facilitated collaboration between municipal and non-municipal groups in the community for providing both financial and non-financial resources for clients. Examples range from a wheelchair-bound resident having his banister fixed to regain access to part of his home, emergency funds procured for a homeless veteran; and utilities paid to keep the lights on for a resident recently laid off.

There have been some challenges as well. Addressing ethical and legal dilemmas associated with a clinical social worker's statutes on confidentiality were an initial hurdle. It is a clinical social worker's responsibility to maintain a client's confidentiality and right to self-determination above all else. However, this guiding principle can sometimes conflict with the needs of other municipal entities, such as the Board of Health or the Police Department. Additionally, assessing needs of a "high risk" population can be challenging, since this cohort typically does not respond to surveys or other types of large scale data collection. Instead, the Town has relied on qualitative data from day-to-day work with clients to identify community needs, particularly among at risk members.

In just over a year since the position was created, the Town has been able to identify unmet needs, determine the availability or lack of services within existing systems, and implement creative and novel approaches to meet the basic needs. While we endeavor to serve as a model for smaller towns as opposed to larger urban areas, new needs continue to be identified and executive support, effort and cooperation is key. This role, initially developed because of observations made during a storm shelter operation, has provided the Town with a greater understanding of the previously unidentified needs of the most at risk members of the community and has created a remarkable collaboration among town departments, non-profits and our most vulnerable residents.