



# *Network in Aging of Western New York, Inc.*

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Est. 1981

# Network in Aging of Western New York, Inc.

## Fact Sheet

### *What is the Network in Aging?*

In Western New York, professionals working with and for older adults are fortunate to have an organization whose mission is to help them to do their jobs better. The Network in Aging of Western New York is a unique organization that brings together individuals and organizations involved in aging and long-term care.

### *Our Mission*

The Network's mission is to help our members enhance their efforts to improve the quality of life for older persons and their families by providing them with opportunities for resource exchange, professional development, and stimulation of interdisciplinary collaboration.

### *History*

The Network was founded in 1981 by a group of people committed to improving the quality of life for older persons in Western New York.

### *Where is the Network located?*

The Network in Aging's office is located on the Main Street Campus of the University at Buffalo in Kimball Tower. The Network has been hosted by UB since its inception in 1981. Much of the work of the Network, including most committee meetings, is done at sites convenient to the members. JoAnn Lewandowski, the Network's Coordinator, works out of Room 105 of the Kimball Tower office.

### *Who are our members?*

Network in Aging members are from diverse backgrounds and include educators, health and social service professionals, bankers, educators, attorneys, and many other community leaders. Members are brought together through the Network to exchange information, to learn about services available for their clients, to develop their knowledge of aging services, to develop in their professional roles and to foster collaboration for the betterment of life for older adults and their families.

### *Membership*

The Network in Aging currently has nearly 350 members, including individual members and those people who are members through sponsorship by their employers.

### *Funding*

The Network in Aging is funded by dues from individuals and 80 sponsoring organizations.

### *Services for Members*

The Network in Aging produces a "Calendar of Events in Aging" that is distributed through its quarterly newsletter, provides several affordable educational opportunities each year, holds a yearly Town Hall Meeting on Aging and offers opportunities for networking and resource exchange. Visit the Network's website at [www.NetworkInAging.com](http://www.NetworkInAging.com) for a list of current events.



Est. 1981

# Network in Aging of Western New York, Inc.

## The History – 1981-2009

### The Concept:

The concept of a network in aging stemmed from a year-long planning process begun in 1979-1980 by the Division of Geriatrics/ Gerontology, State University of New York at Buffalo, which, in conjunction with the University of Rochester, received funding with a grant from the Administration on Aging. This one-year planning grant was to create a Long Term Care Gerontology Center. As part of the planning efforts, a needs assessment of service providers and educational institutions was conducted. Certain needs appeared repeatedly in these assessments, among them the need for the restructuring of educational programs and for closer collaboration between educators, and service agencies providing care for older people.

### The First Conference:

After initial planning the fall of 1979, a conference on Geriatric Education was held on January 18, 1980. The purpose of this conference was to *establish communication* with community service providers and educators from other institutions attempting to prepare students for work in the field of aging, and to *identify some of their most important needs*. Over 100 representatives of community agencies both private and public, long term care institutions, educational institutions and citizens groups attended it.

During this year of planning funds, Seymour Sarason, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, Yale University, was hired as a consultant. According to the theory of *resource exchange* advanced by Dr. Sarason and colleagues, much is accomplished by determining how groups can match or barter their assets to meet the needs of each other without reliance on external dollars, *"to exchange resources in mutually beneficial ways without finances being a prerequisite for discussion or the basis for exchange."*

Although at the end of this year of planning and development the grant application for the Long Term Care Gerontology Center did not receive ongoing funding, a small enthusiastic group of community and university leaders agreed to continue development of a resource exchange network. A temporary Planning Committee was appointed co-chaired by Evan Calkins, MD and Robert Illig, MSW.

The development of a community/university based network provided a forum for communication that, at that time was non-existent. Ideas shared by people who do not usually come into contact with each other and multidisciplinary strategies were worked out to cope with problems. In practice, the resource exchange theory means that resources are donated or bartered so that each individual contributes toward the overall project and all benefit from its success.

It was generally agreed that the objectives could be achieved through the establishment of a network organization, with a structure representing the constituencies involved, a governing board and modest staff and budget. The Division of Geriatrics/Gerontology, State University of New York at Buffalo, continued in a sponsoring role, providing staff, support and space at the Buffalo VA Medical Center.

## **The Network Is Born:**

In March 1981, the Network in Aging of WNY, Inc. was chartered in New York State as a tax-exempt, not-for-profit corporation. The three signatures on the articles of incorporation were Evan Calkins, Robert Illig and Maryanne Bolles. The Network was also classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 not-for-profit educational corporation.

Evan Calkins, MD, was elected first President. According to the by-laws, the Network would "*serve as a cooperative framework among educational institutions and service providers (institutions and people) who are engaged in the preparation for and provision of health and social services support to the elderly of Western New York*".

## **The Network's Initial Priorities:**

For the new Network, three priorities were established.

*First, the enlistment of a broad base of membership support was essential for success.*

*The second task was to gather and communicate information to the membership about activities in their field.* The **Calendar of Events in Aging** was started and soon became a monthly publication listing meetings, conferences, training programs, hearings and events in the region. It continues to function as a central clearing-house for educational information in the field of aging both in print and online.

*The need for a variety of educational programs was the third priority.* Numerous topics were suggested for professional, public and patient educational. During the early years, community forums focused on the following topics: family support systems, alternatives in long-term care, effects of current economic policies on service delivery, the 1981 White House Conference on Aging, the use of consultants in nursing homes and home health care.

During this phase, the Network was located in makeshift space donated by the Buffalo VA Hospital and survived on limited membership dues and indirect funding from a grant. These modest funds provided for rudimentary coordination of the printing and mailing of Calendar of Events, Directory of Expertise and half-time salary of the Coordinator, Jan Duffey. Programming was accomplished largely through resource exchanges and volunteer efforts.

In March 1982, the Network celebrated its first anniversary with the **Careers in Aging Fair and Symposium**. A significant organizational achievement, the Fair represented the largest cooperative effort in WNY to interpret the needs of older and disabled persons and to provide educational and career opportunities in this area. Over 70 organizations exhibited and provided information about training programs, services and job opportunities. The two-day event attracted 5,000 people to the Buffalo Convention Center.

In 1983, a core group of the Network applied for and received funding for a Geriatric Education Center, through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This major, pivotal grant established the WNY Geriatric Education Center. Its mission was to improve geriatric education for health and allied health professionals and to train faculty.

The Geriatric Education Center turned to the Network in Aging to initiate community based geriatric continuing education for practicing health and allied health professionals, based on the resource exchange approach. The added funding from the GEC helped expand and upgrade the products of the Network, subsidized the salaries for a full-time Director, and part-time secretary and increased the number of educational programs offered. With the award of this grant, the Dean of the Medical School made available a small building, Beck Hall, as permanent space for the Geriatric Education Center and the Network in Aging.

Evan Calkins, MD became Director of the Geriatric Education Center and Kirsten Milbrath, MSW, Director, Services to seniors for the Town of Amherst, was chosen as the next Network in Aging President.

Under Kirsten Milbrath's leadership, and that of the next President, Clifford Whitman, MSW, Commissioner of Erie County Senior Services, many training programs forums and seminars were held.

During this same period, the WNY Geriatric Education Center developed many training programs and research projects in geriatrics.

In early 1988, Michael Maloney, Executive Director of Bristol Home, was elected as next President.

That summer, the Network received a grant from the State Office for Aging, through Erie County Senior Services, to plan a major conference on senior housing for the fall of that same year.

### **Strategic Planning:**

After such a period of enormous growth and change, and with the leadership of the Network stable again, Michael Maloney initiated a process of Strategic Planning. This occurred during eight meetings from April to September 1989. The Mission Statement, Goals and Strategies were developed, and later approved by the Board at the October 1989 Annual Membership Meeting. The two top priority goals were *recruitment of new members and ensuring financial independence*.

Following Strategic Planning, a fund-raising development group was hired to analyze the financial structure of the Network and to recommend fund-raising strategies for the long term.

The result of these efforts was the receipt of a State Grant-In-Aid through the New York State Office for Aging (SOFA) over the period of 1989-1991. In addition, we received grants from the Nicholas Patterson Perpetual Fund, Peo Foundation, Buffalo Foundation, Margaret Wendt Foundation and several private individual donations; the Network was able to purchase a complete Macintosh computer system, which greatly improved the daily operation of Network business.

The transition of the presidency from Mike Maloney to Gloria Olmsted ushered in the implementation of the newly adopted Strategic Plan, restoring Network activities to meet member's needs and provide relevant educational seminars and conferences. Increased attention was directed towards member services including a new Directory of Expertise and the Network newsletter. Co-sponsorship of workshops and programs with member organizations and the Geriatric Education Center enhanced the Network's ability to reach a wider provider and consumer community.

## **Reorganization in the 1990's**

Despite stable funding provided by modest grants and membership fees, Network finances continued to be of concern. Beginning in 1993, President Robert Meiss led the Network through a reorganization process. The New York State Office for the Aging grant had expired and a staff resignation left the Network to be managed by volunteer members. In April, JoAnn Lewandowski was hired as a part-time Administrative Assistant, providing the needed support to continuation of the Newsletter and committee and Board functions. Network by-laws were revised to reflect current membership needs and demographics.

# Network Survives with University Support

Links forged with the State University of New York at Buffalo through the Geriatric Education Center provided substantial support - office space, equipment, supplies, etc. However, the Board faced serious future shortfalls due to a series of events. As the new President in 1995, Mary Ellen Walsh was faced with the challenge of responding to a post-audit problem with the New York State Office for the Aging grant. Reports covering several years had not been sent to the State Office for Aging as required. This had the potential of returning funds already expended. After much "detective" work, and with the help of previous Board members and JoAnn Lewandowski, the necessary information and documentation was gathered and successfully transmitted, resulting in a final, albeit small, amount of money forwarded to the Network as a balance on the grant.

The next crisis to be met was finding new quarters for the Network office. The Geriatric Education Center notified the Network that they would no longer be able to offer the space and services of Beck Hall, due to their expanding programs and staffing needs. An agreement, which continues to the present, was made with the Center for Assistive Technology at the State University of New York at Buffalo located in Kimball Tower on the Main Street South Campus. After moving and settling in, the Network resumed its program presentations with focus on fund raising strategies and health care issues.

## Re-Evaluating Mission

By 1998, the Board was ready to re-evaluate its mission and held a retreat, including past Board members. This resulted in a revised Mission Statement that reflected the changing needs of members. The core of the original purpose of the Network, however, remained at the center - *"To help our members enhance their efforts to improve the quality of life for older persons and their families by providing them with opportunities for resource exchange, professional development and stimulation of interdisciplinary collaboration."*

During his presidency, Charles Battaglia, Jr. led the Network through 1999 and 2000. Important issues such as managed care and ethical issues of older persons, caregivers, and service providers were addressed in workshops and educational seminars. Advocacy with legislative leaders was re-emphasized as the Network realized its role as a representative voice on important changes in laws and funding policies. The first Network in Aging Town Hall Meeting on Aging issues was held during this time period. During this time the Network introduced its website [www.NetworkInAging.com](http://www.NetworkInAging.com)

As the 2001 President, Bruce Reinoso, Esq. had the responsibility of leading the Network into its twentieth year. During his presidency, the Network co-sponsored an Elder Law Fair; its Second Annual Town Hall Meeting on Aging Issues and hosted an informational seminar on handling complex behavior issues, and held their 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting focused on the "Challenges of Volunteerism in Aging Services."

Beverly Kubala was elected Network President in 2002 and served in this capacity until November 2006. During her presidency, the Network continued its focus on providing quality, affordable, educational opportunities for its members, including programs on organizational change, incapacity and decision making in the elderly and spirituality in aging services. She also sought to broaden the Network's membership to include individuals in banking, financial planning and law.

Laura Mondello became Network President in November 2006. During her tenure, the Network in Aging continued its focus on membership growth, reaching a first of 80 sponsor members. The Network also co-sponsored a successful seminar on culture change with the Western New York Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, which helped lead to funding for the Western New York Alliance for Person Centered

Care. In addition, the Network's "Network with the Network" events offered members an opportunity to learn more about the Network's sponsoring organizations and offered social and networking opportunities.

Robert Wills was elected Network President in November 2008.

If it is true that the past is prelude to the future, then the next 30 years will be filled with opportunities for Western New York providers of services, educational and health agencies, and others with the aging community's interests at their center to truly "network" and benefit from the concept of Resource Exchange envisioned in the early 1980's.