

Surrey Services for Seniors

Barbara Fentress 23 January 2013

Executive Summary

In 2011, the Main Line Health System transferred ownership of three community-based aging-services programs to Surrey. Surrey then entered into a service contract with the Delaware County Office of Services for the Aging (COSA) to operate these three senior programs in Delaware County that were in jeopardy of closing: The Havertown Senior Center, and the Hometown Senior Center in Media and Chore Connection, which is a volunteer program assisting low-income older adults throughout Delaware County. Following the merger, Surrey engaged staff, older adults and volunteers to create an integrated organizational culture that has culminated in common operational procedures, upgraded information technology, improved client communication and shared data management tools. One of the most important reinforcing lessons toward creating a well-integrated internal culture is the knowledge that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Surrey worked with community partners and other external stakeholders to strengthen the acquisition and build support for the transfer of ownership.

Framing the Issue

By sheer force of numbers, the aging Baby Boom generation – the largest generation in history – is transforming our current beliefs and attitudes about aging by commanding a dramatic shift in focus, support, and respect for people as they age. Faced with this pending need for a more readily-accessible, wider array of community-based options for services for older adults who want to remain in the community, Surrey's board and management team began to explore possibilities presented by mergers and acquisitions. They weighed several strategies to fulfill long-term plans for growth, improve quality of service and expand access to a range of home and community-based services for seniors at various stages of the aging process. Surrey's philosophy when partnering with new organizations is that a merger can help both agencies grow their brands and values of their services as the programs become integrated into the expanded Surrey model. Surrey sought professional advice to identify potential agencies with which to merge in an effort to have the greatest impact on Surrey's expanding mission, its geographic focus and building on the skills and assets of all agencies involved.

This proactive approach that has proven particularly successful for Surrey is supported by experienced professionals in the field. In its 2009 report, the Bridgespan Group suggested that mergers and acquisitions, when used with strong rather than weak organizations, when used in a moment of calm rather than

desperation, and when used where they have the greatest strategic potential rather than where the pain is sharpest, have the ability to create important structural changes that will contribute to a stronger, healthier nonprofit sector. In his 2000 article, *Nonprofit Mergers: Is Your Organization Ready for the Road?* David La Piana, an expert in non-profit mergers and acquisitions, noted that organizations that are good candidates for successful mergers are those that know what they want to accomplish, are clear on their mission, understand and agree upon their strategic challenges, have a strong board/management relationship, are not in crisis, have a history of successful risk taking and are growth-oriented.

Expected Social Impact

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It has been documented by The Bridgespan Group, David La Piana and others that mergers and acquisitions, when successfully planned and executed, have the potential to improve the quality and efficiency of existing services, increase funding, build new staff skills and expand the geographic focus of services. Core operational and programmatic improvements resulting from Surrey's recent merger have supported this tenet. Successes in creating a merged organizational culture, an integrated financial and data management system and an upgraded technology base have supported significant gains in

program management and client outcomes.

Case Study

The integration plan following the successful negotiation of the merger focused on four core operational areas: human resources, financial, information technology and program management.

Human Resources: Recognizing that staff is an organization's greatest asset, Surrey invested significant time and resources to create a common organizational culture and brand across all sites. A new organizational chart recognizes both global initiatives and site-specific program areas and has strengthened peer and supervisory relationships. A self-assessment survey for all staff guided development of specific training modules for internal and external tasks. A well-educated workforce, however, is not enough to create a unified team. Senior staff members are required to regularly visit and work on-site at other locations to promote Surrey's culture, provide coaching and reinforce the global programs. Surrey encourages teamwork by informal shared meals and monthly joint meetings for all staff. A collective willingness to learn from each other and help one another grow has created a cohesive staff focused on a shared vision.

Financial: The Director of Finance worked with staff at each site to develop common financial policies and procedures, provide training on the overall budget

process, and implement simple tools to track and monitor budget projections and actual results. Surrey used its experience and success in managing cash flow from a previous expansion to a new site as the basis for implementation of flow charts that document cash management processes at all new sites. Surrey also completed a detailed vendor analysis that identified providers of goods and services at all locations, reviewed invoice approval processes, and ultimately maximized efficiency.

Information Technology: Surrey integrated numerous program areas by implementing a common database that tracks membership, participation and volunteer involvement across all sites. Following analysis of several systems, Surrey implemented My Senior Center (MSC), a program already in use by the three Delaware County programs, throughout the organization. MSC is an "off-the-shelf" web-based system in use by over 600 senior centers nationwide. This software retains data off-site, backs up data daily, requires a minimal investment in equipment and is flexible enough to work through any organizational change, including addition of locations or programs. Surrey enacted face-to-face, full-day training and on-line tutorials to educate all staff members who in turn have trained the many volunteers in their respective program areas to effectively use the system to enter data and create dynamic and responsive reports. Surrey also made a number of core information technology upgrades,

including implementation of a wide area network, a new website and an inventory of all computers, servers, databases and networks.

Programmatic: Program managers from each site meet monthly to share information about successful and evidence-based programs, recommend external instructors or guest speakers, review pricing and coordinate activity calendars so that clients are able to enjoy access to special programs across all sites. This led to the merger of three newsletters into one large-format newsletter mailed to each client's home. Within weeks clients from each site were visiting other sites, and this integration continued as clients from mixed sites participated in focus groups as part of Surrey's strategic planning process. Today, client affiliation with one specific site is dissolving as more clients travel between sites to participate in a wide choice of programming.

Partnership Model

The transfer of management for the two centers and volunteer program from Main Line Health to Surrey was made possible through the visionary support of the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania (now United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey), Delaware County Office for Services for the Aging and The Pew Charitable Trusts. The United Way saw the potential strength in this merger and through its Strategic Partnership grant program, funded the coordination of the

merger. OMG Center for Collaborative Learning provided additional funding to complete the existing merger and develop a roadmap for consideration of future mergers/acquisitions. COSA, Pew and United Way have continued funding of these vital community-based aging-service programs.

Sources

Sources

Alex Cortez, William Foster and Katie Smith Milway. "Bringing Mergers and Acquisitions to the Nonprofit Mainstream." *Philanthropy* Spring 2009.

La Piana, David. "Nonprofit Mergers: Is Your Organization Ready for the Road?" *The Nonprofit Mergers Workbook: The Leader's Guide to Considering, Negotiating, and Executing a Merger* Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 2000.

Author Bio

Barbara J. Fentress of West Chester was appointed as President and Executive Director of Surrey in July 2009, succeeding Jeanne La Rouche of Wayne who founded the organization in 1981. She has greatly enjoyed the shift from the corporate world to the nonprofit world, and looks forward to continuing to apply her skills and experiences to making a difference in the social service setting.

Surrey Services for Seniors Bio

Surrey Services for Seniors (Surrey) was established in 1981 with a mission to help older adults live in their homes with independence and dignity, and continue as active members of the community. Starting with a few core services over 30 years ago, Surrey has worked with seniors in various situations, and with various needs to develop, refine and create the broad complement of home and community-based services offered today. Surrey is accredited by the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations and the National Institute for Senior Centers for its commitment to standards in accountability, governance, management, programming and operations. Surrey's recent strategic growth has been led by Barbara Fentress, who was appointed President and Chief Executive Officer of Surrey in July 2009. Previously Barbara held the position of Chief Financial Officer for Surrey beginning in November 2005. Prior to this she served for 25 years in executive and management positions for software development, internet and legal firms. Barbara Fentress holds an MBA from Villanova University.