

## **Annual Report, 2009**

June 22, 2009, revised August 4, 2009

The Regional Institute on Aging (RIA) is a virtual research organization designed to serve the citizens of metropolitan Wichita, the adjacent counties, the state of Kansas, and, eventually, the surrounding Midwestern states. Highlights of the second year of operation include continuation of the Gridley Hoover Pilot Research Program, completion of the conference Aging on the Plains, the Work Group on Falls and Falling LinKS, development of research teams, and planning for the gift provided through the estate of Evelyn D. Cassat.

**Gridley Hoover Pilot Research Program:** The RIA, through the generous support of Mr. Curt Gridley and Ms. Tracy Hoover, announced the second Gridley Hoover Pilot Research Program. The program provides investigators with significant short-term funding to collect preliminary data to underpin hypothesis-driven research grant applications (e.g., NIH RO1s). From the 2008-09 competition, the donors selected the following applications for funding: "Promoting Person-Centered Caregiving using Video-taped Biographies of Residents," Louis Medvene PI; "Quality of Life in Older Adults: Impact of Swallowing Disorders," Lyn Goldberg PI; "Kansas Health Care Providers' Knowledge/Attitudes Regarding Falls Prevention," LaDonna S. Hale, PI. The donors, first round awardees (Ballard-Reisch, Meissen, Steinke) and graduate research assistants met in October 2008 to discuss progress on their projects. In late May 2009, the donors, all awardees (Steinke, Meissen, Ballard-Reisch, Medvene, Goldberg, and Hale) and graduate research assistants met to discuss the program, the research progress and its possibilities. The pilot project program will be re-announced for its final funding cycle in the fall of 2009.

**Aging on the Plains:** On September 24-26, 2008, the RIA convened its first major conference with support from Larksfield Place Retirement Community, the Central Plains Geriatric Education Center at the University of Kansas Medical Center, Presbyterian Manors of Mid America, Inc., Envision Inc., Kansas Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (KAHSA), Kansas Department on Aging, Via Christi Senior Services and the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund. The conference addressed the demographic and social components of aging on the plains including obesity and disability, the history of care of older adults in the U.S., the meaning of aging in place, program and service innovations to meet the challenges of an aging population, and the use of technology and preventive self care. The conference had 118 participants: 23 were speakers, 9 were exhibitors and 86 were attendees. Of the attendees, approximately 30% were from community organizations, 30% were from adult care and nursing homes, 30% were university faculty, investigators or students, and 10% were clergy.

The most important outcome of the event was an invitation from the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA) to present a pre-conference session for the November 2009 meeting in Chicago that builds off of "Aging on the Plains." This is a direct and immediate outgrowth of the enthusiastic support of Debra Zehr, President, KAHSA, and discussions with Leslie Knight, regional VP for AAHSA. AAHSA is eager to demonstrate that it can do something about and understands rural issues. Leslie Knight, who is originally from Sioux City, Iowa, is very committed to this plan and has commented that she "sees" the issues

dealt with in "Aging on the Plains" every day in her work in the mid section of the U.S. We will use the same general outline of the conference: Challenges, Tools, Innovations, and Policy.

Planning for the 2009 conference, Aging and Thriving on the Plains, is underway. The vision is to support older adults to successfully age in place in rural and frontier Kansas. The mission is to connect and network with individuals but also with for profit and non-profit organizations; communities; local, county and state government agencies; and universities to recognize older adults and their contributions in building, re-building and maintaining small towns and rural communities. The audience is older Kansans, governmental officials at the local, county and state levels, community leaders, business and professional leaders, aging service and program providers, and university faculty members and investigators. The underlying philosophy of the conference could be framed as follows:

- We recognize that older adults hold a treasure trove of experiences, knowledge and resources that can be brought to bear on issues and challenges in small town and rural America, as well as across the nation.
- We value small town, rural and frontier life and culture. We know that many older adults who reside there plan to remain for the rest of their lives.
- We want to focus on positive messages, talk about towns and communities that are "making it" even though many would expect them to "fail" because of geography, distance, population density, declining infrastructure and tax base, etc. How? Why?
- We are interested in the characteristics of the success stories and how they can be replicated in other towns.

There are several organizations and groups in Kansas focused on the continuation, development, re-development and vibrancy of small towns and rural and frontier communities. The emphasis is often on the economic vitality of the towns, retaining the younger people and growing community leaders.

What is absent is a clear emphasis and recognition of older adults as community members, current and developing leaders. The aims of the conference are to begin to link groups with similar interests and to draw attention to older adults as cross cutting change agents for these organizations and groups. It is hard to imagine a successful small community where people want to live absent the engagement, contributions and wisdom of older community residents. . . . . Work Group on Falls and Falling Less in Kansas: Falling Less in Kansas (Falling LinKS) is a community grounded, evidence-based, falls awareness and prevention research project that involves tailoring a toolkit of falls prevention materials catering to the resources, infrastructure and dissemination preferences of older Kansans in rural and frontier counties. The Falling LinKS toolkit develops tools and materials that are publicly available, adapts and packages them for implementation in health care resource scarce areas. We are using a community based participatory research approach in which rural and frontier community members are actively involved in strategies to develop, implement and disseminate a falls prevention program incorporating the Falling LinKS toolkit.

The Falling LinKS Research Team submitted an application to the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund to launch a project in Harvey County Kansas. The team was awarded an Innovation Grant in November 2008. Work commenced in Harvey County during the winter of

2008-09 with key informant interviews, as well as beginning the toolkit compilation. An application was submitted to the Kansas Health Foundation for a Recognition Grant to extend Falling LinKS to Elk County Kansas (not funded). An application for a National Institutes of Health (NIH) Challenge Grant was also submitted to extend the work to Elk, Chase and Wabaunsee counties. If the NIH application is unsuccessful, the team will submit an Academic Research Enhancement Award, R15, to the NIH in the fall 2009. The members of the Falling LinKS Research Team are Drs. Hale, Bahner, Ballard-Reisch, N. Rogers, M. Rogers, Radebaugh, R. Hanley (Director, Harvey County Department on Aging), K. Kendrick and M. Epps (Envision Inc.). Graduate students from the Elliott School of Communication (A. Amarchiopoli, C. Utah and B. Rozzell) and College of Education (K. Williams) have been instrumental to the success of the project.

#### Development of Research Teams:

In partnership with Dr. Richard Muma, Chair, Department of Public Health Sciences, the Work Group on Health Care Resources in Rural and Frontier Kansas was launched. Invited members include: Drs. Bukonda, Coufal, Hale, Pelkowski, Tate, Ms. Brandes, and Ms. Nyberg. The objectives initially established were:

1. Explore issues in health care workforce deployment in rural and remote Kansas and the implications for the care of older adults.
2. Identify the important national, state and local research questions.
3. Delineate the research interests and capabilities of the work group members.
4. Build a team to plan a research grant application based on questions important to Kansans, and the expertise of WSU investigators with the potential to improve the health and well being of older adults.

This group grew out of a more traditional work force deployment and availability discussion (e.g., PTs, RNs, MDs per 100,000; how to change the ratios/get more health care workers into the mix; recruitment and retention in small town and frontier America). The discussions were focused around aging adults.

After a few meetings it became clear that the issue of most interest is the front line long term care (LTC) work force, particularly in small town and rural Kansas. After speaking with several owners or administrators of nursing homes located in small towns in Kansas, an important issue emerged: the people who work in small town and rural LTC often have many personal problems interfering with their ability to focus and work. Many of the problems center on money management. In some communities, a few services to assist with these difficulties can be found through the churches or local banks. But basically, there is no depth or breadth to the services available, as we all know. It is problematic when the administrator in an LTC facility tries to help a staff member sort out these issues because of the blurring of roles and relationships. Therefore, the Work Group, in cooperation with the WSU Training and Technology Team (Dr Pennie Meyers), is examining the development of educational and training materials in the life management arena: personal financial management, interpersonal relationships, managing conflict at home and on the job, drug and alcohol use, how to access resources both local and state, etc. If an intervention can support front line LTC workers and offer resources for their troubled personal lives, a secondary benefit is likely to be improvement in the care they are able

to provide to the older facility residents and potentially a reduction in turnover. The work group intends to prepare a grant application for the Health Services and Resources Administration, DHHS.

A Work Group on Disasters and Aging is discussing the development of an application in response to an announcement from the National Institutes of Health/National Institute on Aging: NIH Exploratory/Developmental Research Grant on Behavioral and Social Research on Disasters and Aging. The proposed project will explore the characteristics of general media communications about weather related disasters in populations of older adults in rural and frontier areas of Kansas:

- 1) What information about impending or potential disasters do older adults want to receive?
- 2) In what media and format do they prefer to receive disaster information?
- 3) What spokespeople are viewed as most reliable and truthful by older adults? And, the most critical issue:
- 4) What characteristics of disaster or preparedness information are most convincing to older adults, i.e., lead them to take appropriate, timely, protective measures for themselves and their property?

The goal is to submit an application for the October 2009 deadline. Drs. Radebaugh and Ballard-Reisch are leading this effort with two graduate students, A. Amarchioli and C. Utah.

Additionally, discussions are underway with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Office of Health Promotion, Injury Prevention & Disability & Health, about potential collaborative activities in preparedness or disaster planning and older Kansans.

Drs. Lyn Goldberg and Kathy Coufal, Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, launched a Work Group on Dysphagia Rehabilitation built upon the consultation of Dr. Maggie Lee Huckabee, the University of Canterbury, November 15-16, 2008, and with support from the Regional Institute on Aging and the Office of Research Administration. Dr. Goldberg is the leader of this ongoing work group which focuses on the cough reflex in patients at risk for aspiration and involves a number of community practicing speech therapists. The Work Group is designing a research protocol.

Dr. Radebaugh was a member of the leadership team under the direction of the principal investigator, Dr. Zulma Toro-Ramos, Dean, College of Engineering, in preparing an application for the National Institutes of Health to build the faculty in the life span engineering track in the new biomedical engineering program. This application, submitted in May 2009, linked four colleges and numerous departments around three specific emphasis areas in Lifespan Engineering: signal processing, biomechanics and tissue engineering.

Evelyn D. Cassat Estate Gift:

A major gift from the estate of Evelyn D. Cassat will establish new research development programs in aging and support the Carl and Rozina Cassat Professorship in Aging:

Research development workshops may be convened annually by the RIA. The workshops will be led and hosted by WSU RIA, and convened in partnership with programs from the University of Kansas, Kansas State University or local, state or national aging organizations including federal government agencies and community based programs.

Cassat gift funds will be allocated for faculty research development activities. The goal of this competitive program is to provide a menu of research support resources and activities for faculty, all aimed at the development of new highly competitive research grant applications. All components of this program will require a detailed proposal. All proposals will be peer reviewed.

Additionally, Mrs. Cassat's gift supports the Carl and Rozina Cassat Professor in Aging. The Cassat Professor's duties include: serving as Director, Regional Institute on Aging; building integrated multi-disciplinary teams and partnerships with other universities and community based organizations; mentoring faculty and graduate students in conceptualizing and constructing research programs; and planning workshops and conferences to explore new issues in aging research. Dr. Radebaugh was named the first Carl and Rozina Cassat Professor in Aging.

#### Webinars:

Dr. James Rhatigan, who was instrumental in the development of the Regional Institute on Aging, is now working to create a series of webinars in aging. The goals of the series are to highlight the accomplishments and expertise of WSU faculty investigators, enhance the available information base in aging, and create a revenue stream for the Institute. Several webinars are currently under development through the University Conferences and Non-Credit Programs, Continuing Education.