

Publicity and Outreach Strategies

Q&A: Andrea Gary, Kira Houge, and Alexandra Kruse of Florida

With its mild winters and sunny beaches, Florida is a state that many people come to call home in their later years. To serve its 3.3 million Medicare beneficiaries, the Florida SHIP program has evolved from a predominately volunteer-based state infrastructure to a staff of 12 full-time professionals who support 40 volunteer coordinators, 11 local liaisons, and more than 400 volunteers.

Andrea Gary is the Outreach and Publicity Coordinator for Florida's SHIP program, Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders ([SHINE](#)). She joined the SHIP network in June 2006 with a background in marketing and is pursuing her master's degree in integrated marketing communications. Though Kira Houge is fairly new to SHINE, she brings a wealth of public relations skills and nonprofit experience. Alexandra Kruse, SHINE's Statewide Director of nearly one year, also joined the conversation to share more information about the support the state office provides, as well as to highlight the outcomes of a dedicated outreach and publicity strategy.

In this Q&A, Andrea, Kira, and Alexandra talked with HAP about Florida's investment in state-level support for local SHIP outreach and publicity activities. If you have additional questions about publicity and outreach activities that could further promote your SHIP, please contact Andrea at garya@elderaffairs.org.

What are the goals of the state level outreach and publicity team?

Our ultimate goal is to ensure that SHINE's marketing messages and educational materials are cohesive across our eleven local programs. We aim to continuously connect with the local liaisons and volunteers in the community, so we can translate what we learn into timely training and outreach materials to support their efforts. We also strive to bring attention to the SHINE program and recruit volunteers through the media. We create press releases, enrollment and education event [media advisories](#), radio and print advertisements, and [public service announcements](#) (PSAs). The local liaisons use these tools to connect with local media and further their outreach efforts.

Another part of our role is to coordinate the public education component of SHINE. Local liaisons, volunteer coordinators, and trained volunteers deliver presentations in their regions on topics that range from Medicare 101 to a general presentation about SHINE. Our team at the state level creates the presentations and the corresponding [talking points](#), and as often as necessary, we offer presentation skills trainings for volunteers.

How does promotional work at the state level trickle down to the local level?

At the state level, we support the work of the local liaisons and volunteers. At our annual meeting, we offer communications and marketing training for liaisons and volunteers. We also create and distribute program fact sheets and talking points on hot topics, volunteer recruitment, and enrollment issues. The liaisons and volunteers use these materials to reach out to local media when there are free publicity programs, such as the senior announcements sections in the paper. Additionally, ads and PSAs are placed in various media statewide for program awareness and volunteer recruitment throughout the year, which generates client contacts and potential volunteers for the local SHINE programs.

Since our SHIP is housed in the State Unit on Aging, program liaisons are also in a great position to work with the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to include SHINE in the agency's promotional activities. For example, because of the relationship the SHINE liaison has with other programs' staff, if the agency or another program is participating in an outreach activity, they will include SHINE materials and invite along SHINE volunteers.

We also conduct conference calls every two months so all the liaisons and any available volunteer coordinators can share best practices, describe potential new partners and local resources, and refine messages that should be emphasized throughout the state.

What results have you seen from these investments?

One result is the influx of new volunteers. We recently trained over 100 volunteers throughout the state who are preparing to begin counseling beneficiaries. In addition, last grant year our National Performance Report (NPR) Data showed that through marketing efforts we indirectly connected with over 37 million citizens. In that same year, SHINE counselors provided direct one-on-one counseling to over 38,200 clients, many of whom reported hearing about SHINE through our radio or TV ads.

What marketing advice do you have for other SHIPs?

In our contract with the AAAs (which host local SHINE programs), we describe outreach and marketing as a necessary investment and a priority. This understanding has made SHINE and agency collaboration around promotional opportunities very successful. A small SHIP program with just a few staff members can get the same benefit by leveraging their outreach and working with the agency's communications or marketing professionals to support SHIP outreach efforts. For example, here at the Department of Elder Affairs, our communications staff is able to provide a directory of statewide publicity opportunities, some of which are free. Your state's SHIP host agency may have similar resources. A local SHIP person could locate that directory and make sure that your SHIP is taking advantage of available and appropriate opportunities.

Our liaisons, with the support of their agency and our volunteers, keep their eyes open for opportunities to disseminate free PSAs or print ads. In addition, because we have

developed relationships with producers at local radio stations across the state, it is not uncommon for a SHINE liaison or volunteer to be invited on air as a guest.

We will admit that it is not easy to get the word out about the program, but in the end, the “try, try again” mantra holds true—outreach is a long-term investment. Our investment of support at the state level has combined with the incredible dedication of the local liaisons and volunteers to increase public awareness of the SHINE program in the aging network and to ultimately help us serve more Medicare beneficiaries.

Want to learn more? You can now listen online to HAP’s conference calls. The call on [*Everyday Communications Strategies*](#) features some basic communications planning concepts and outreach and promotional ideas suggested by SHIP colleagues.