

Advocacy Leadership for Positive Aging (ALPA) Program Evaluation

January 2016

Evaluation Summary

Advocacy Leadership for Positive Aging or “ALPA”, a program of the Life Planning Network (LPN), has been successfully implemented three times to date. With a six-session curriculum developed by experts in the field of aging, LPN piloted ALPA in two locations in 2014: in Minneapolis, Minnesota, hosted by LifeSprk, a private-pay home health organization; and in the Washington DC area, hosted by [Quantum](#), a public housing management organization. In Minneapolis, participants included the CEO and management-level employees of [LifeSprk](#), an innovative in-home care provider. In the DC area, participants were resident service coordinators or managers for 15 low-income housing properties managed by Quantum, a for-profit residential management firm. At both sites, the program was coordinated and facilitated by two experienced group leaders, all volunteering their time to implement and test the program.

In 2015, the first paid implementation of ALPA took place in Yarmouth, Massachusetts, the residence of one of the curriculum developers who volunteered to co-facilitate the program as one element in the Town of Yarmouth’s process for becoming an Age Friendly Community (AFC) within the World Health Organization’s AFC Network. Participants represented public, private, and non-profit organizations that provide services to Yarmouth residents. The Town of Yarmouth contributed space, materials, and the time of a Senior Center staff member serving as the administrative coordinator for the program. Funding from a Tufts Health Foundation AFC grant reimbursed LPN for evaluation, website maintenance, and administrative support.

While ALPA’s implementation in each location reflected unique characteristics, facilitators in all of the locations successfully emphasized the program’s core values and encouraged participants to see themselves as advocacy leaders and adopt a client-centered empowerment approach. The [ALPA diagram](#) illustrates the sequence of core program activities. Although the participating service providers were serving a broad age span of older adults who were facing a broad range of issues in diverse life situations, they all gained research-based knowledge about possibilities, challenges, and practices related to positive, self-empowered aging; assessed their own attitudes and skills related to advocacy leadership; discovered new resources; tried out life planning tools; and carried out fieldwork projects to apply their learning.

Overview. ALPA’s evaluation data show that over the course of the three program implementations, 40 senior service providers and managers completed training in the ALPA curriculum and initiated individual or group fieldwork projects. Extensive feedback from participants and coordinators indicate that in their view, all the training programs were well-

implemented. Participants and coordinators reported in all locations that exposure to the ALPA curriculum and the experience of working together as a group had a profound impact on how they view and carry out their work.

Retention and attendance: All ALPA implementations demonstrated high rates of retention and attendance. Initially, 16 participants were enrolled in Minneapolis, 15 in the DC-area, and 13 in Yarmouth. Retention in the Minneapolis program was 94%, with 15 out of 16 of those originally enrolled earning certificates of completion. In the DC-area, 93% of the enrollees, 14 of 15, earned a certificate of completion. In Yarmouth, 13 participants enrolled and 11 completed (two dropped after the first session, one because of a work schedule change), for a completion rate of 85%. Attendance rates at the sessions in all locations were also high. In Minneapolis attendance averaged 12.5 per session. In the DC-area, attendance averaged 13.5. In Yarmouth, attendance averaged 10.6..

Implementation of the curriculum: In the Minneapolis pilot, participants indicated they wanted more time for class discussion, so the curriculum outline was modified early on to free up more time for discussion in future implementations. Feedback from coordinators showed that group cohesion increased in the first group as implementation progressed, and cohesion was consistently high for the second group, beginning with the first session. In Yarmouth, coordinators rated group cohesion fairly high at the beginning and higher at the end of the program. Participants assigned a general rating for each session, using a 5 point scale, with 5 for “excellent.” Average ratings ranged from 4.0 to 4.8 in the Minneapolis implementation. In the DC-area, average participant ratings ranged from 4.1 to 4.5. In Yarmouth, session ratings averaged from 4.1 to 4.7.

All these ratings indicated participants were quite satisfied with the sessions, in spite of a few challenges that came up from time to time, including length of videos, ability to hear, room too hot, too little time between sessions, etc. Most participants in all groups also reported spending significant amounts of time completing homework for the sessions (averaging from 2 to almost 4 hours per session prior to the first four sessions). Comments generally indicated that they felt the time spent reading and preparing was useful and time well-spent. In Yarmouth, the first four sessions were held weekly rather than monthly. Yarmouth participants and coordinators alike agreed that more time, at least two weeks, is required between sessions 1, 2, 3 and 4 to allow participants sufficient time for homework and preparation. In Yarmouth, as in the other communities, participants regularly noted that they especially appreciated the opportunity to interact with their peers in the field of elder services. Yarmouth participants, for instance, identified ALPA’s “high points” at the end of the program as: “Sharing personal stories and experiences;” “Listening to results of hard work and potential for program growth within

our community;” “Hearing about everybody’s programs;” “Collaboration, networking;” and “Meeting and interacting with participants’ creativity. . .”

Fieldwork Projects. Participants in both groups planned and initiated significant, challenging fieldwork projects. Some involved collaboration between two or more of the participants.

In Minneapolis, participant fieldwork projects included:

- Ethics committee for the organization (3-member team) and role definitions for the management team (the 14 participants)
- Mini-ALPA program (5 classes) for service providers
- Directory of local area resources available to service providers and their clients
- Multimedia community display by older adult clients
- Policy for volunteers
- Facilitation tools
- Personal renewal -- stress reduction, wellness regime, building on strengths
- Developing cross-company/location teamwork

In the DC-area, projects included:

- Educational program supporting well-being, focusing on health, finance, family & friends to be completed in phases
- Bulk buying program whereby residents share costs and savings and thus bridge the gap at month's end for essentials
- Educational program to improve lives of resident stroke survivors
- Residential community strengthening project via a wellness exercise program that also promotes engagement
- Walking program to enhance health benefits and community engagement
- Program to increase resource awareness and assist with use of resources
- Home health care resources book
- Comprehensive "Senior Services" resource manual for all Quantum homes with directions for use and follow up
- Site-wide evacuation plan
- Resource directory and establishing relationships with key local organizations
- Assessment of seniors’ experience accessing and navigating through senior social services

Yarmouth projects included:

- Wellness Club programs for underserved Portuguese and Spanish-speaking residents of Yarmouth, Hyannis, and Barnstable
- Implementation of the Wanderers Program to quickly return memory-impaired elders to their homes and families
- Improved and expanded communication among providers to promote all programs that support positive, active aging and improved quality of life within Yarmouth, an age-friendly community
- Promotion of the Mature Workers Program
- Interagency collaboration to promote bicycle riding for seniors
- Survey research through local agencies that explores the impact of domestic and sexual abuse early in life on self-advocacy in later life

Outcomes: How are people better off? Responses to evaluation questions showed that most participants in all three implementations believed they greatly benefited from ALPA. In the Minneapolis group, self-ratings of confidence about advocacy leadership skills increased from the first session to later sessions. In the Washington, DC-area group, participants consistently rated their confidence in being an advocacy leader as high. In the Yarmouth group, although participants consistently rated their confidence high, they rated their confidence slightly higher at the last session compared to the first.

At the end of the pilot in Minneapolis, essentially all participants said they could very effectively or fairly effectively advocate for themselves and for others. They overwhelmingly agreed that ALPA helped them help clients advocate for themselves. They reported ALPA helped them feel a greater sense of meaning and purpose, identify and use new resources to work with clients, integrate advocacy for positive aging into their work, and use coaching skills when they work with clients. As noted above, ALPA helped strengthen their client-centered approach. Participants also reported that ALPA provided a very important professional development opportunity. It allowed them to reflect deeply on their work, set new professional development goals, and receive peer support and peer coaching.

Similarly, participants in the DC-area program said they could very effectively advocate for themselves and others, as well as help clients advocate for themselves. Participants believed they gained knowledge and skills. Everyone learned to set goals. The overwhelming majority also learned to identify and use resources to manage personal challenges, advocate for self-determination, and identify personal strengths and needs. They gained a greater understanding of positive aging. These participants said ALPA enabled them to identify and use new resources, gave them a greater sense of meaning, taught them to use coaching skills with

clients, and helped integrate effective advocacy for positive aging into their work. Participants learned new skills through their own and others' fieldwork projects. They also said ALPA facilitated their growth, as well as the development of expanded and supportive professional networks. Finally, a theme running throughout their comments is that they felt inspired to work in ways that honor and strengthen the capabilities of their senior clients.

Yarmouth participants reported at the end of the program that they could very effectively advocate for themselves and for others. They said they gained a new understanding of the challenges and opportunities of positive aging. All agreed they learned to identify personal strengths and needs, set goals, and identify and use resources to manage personal challenges. They all agreed they gained knowledge to help them advocate for self-determination and self-sufficiency. Yarmouth participants also reported that they anticipated ALPA would help them feel a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their work, use new resources to strengthen their work with clients, integrate effective advocacy into their work, and use coaching skills to help clients advocate for themselves. These participants, like others in Minneapolis and the DC-area, highly valued the time spent interacting with their peers and the group leaders around these key concepts. They appreciated that the ALPA experience helped them "know we are not alone in this work." From the perspective of the coordinators and facilitators, this ALPA implementation helped Yarmouth's senior services community move from one "where no one knows what anyone else is doing" to one where people from different public and non-profit organizations collaborate to support positive aging.

Overview of ALPA's Evaluation Process

Prior to implementation, ALPA's developers emphasized the importance of getting regular, useful feedback from participants. Thus the evaluation plan designed by ALPA's evaluation specialist includes an emphasis on collecting formative data which can be used to make course corrections and strengthen the program. ALPA materials used for evaluation included:

- A feedback form designed specifically to generate input on the curriculum of each session was collected from participants at the end of each session.
- A coordinator's form, also geared to the content of each session, was collected from all coordinators and facilitators.
- Coordinator forms collected information on attendance, group cohesion, any environmental issues present (room too hot, cold, etc.), and how facilitators and coordinators carried out each individual activity in the curriculum.
- The forms asked coordinators and facilitators to comment on how individual curriculum activities were received, and provided suggestions for making each session more useful in the future.

- End of series evaluation forms were designed for both participants and coordinators/facilitators to offer comprehensive evaluation.

For all implementations, participation was high throughout the evaluation process. Feedback forms were completed by most of those who attended each session. All coordinators completed all requested coordinator forms.

In addition to use of the evaluation forms described above, ALPA's developers and coordinators maintained close contact as the curriculum was delivered, via email and phone. Suggestions for strengthening the program's curriculum and implementation were requested and reviewed in great detail. As shown in the section that follows, learnings have been integrated as curriculum revisions and used for planning.

Evaluation and Curriculum Revisions

Based on evaluation feedback from the two pilot programs, ALPA's curriculum developers revised the Sample Participants Curriculum and the Coordinators folder of materials for guiding the program. Major changes included:

1. Expert video presentations were shifted to homework assignments rather than viewed during face-to-face meetings, since participant feedback indicated more meeting time was needed for discussion of ALPA's material and its key concepts.
2. To clarify each meeting's activities, organize discussion, and highlight key concepts, the ALPA team prepared new PowerPoint presentations so coordinators could review the agenda with participants at the beginning of each session.
3. Program developers strengthened participants' professional development, on the one hand, and their organizations' development, on the other. The curriculum now includes an emphasis on encouraging participants to consider how they can add to their knowledge and skills within the context of a personal plan for professional development. They also are encouraged to consider how they can strengthen their organization's operations and outcomes. Some of the fieldwork topics listed above illustrate this point.
4. Coordinators added a new emphasis on ensuring that participants understand what is expected of them throughout the program, including development and implementation of a fieldwork project designed to tap into the unique interests and skills and goals of each participant.
5. The Yarmouth implementation showed that the ALPA program is adaptable for use by different categories of host organizations. In the pilots, all of the participants were employees accountable to one host employer organization. In Yarmouth, the community-based program deliberately mixed employees and volunteers from a

variety of public, private and non-profit organizations to cultivate a shared sense of advocacy leadership for self-empowered residents in an age-friendly community. Given the experience so far, LPN might consider other categories of host organizations as well, e.g. professional associations, within the context of encouraging broad use of the ALPA curriculum. Consistent evaluation will be critical to provide informed guidance for expansion, however.

When new host organizations use the ALPA curriculum, they will be required to incorporate use of the evaluation materials, with oversight from ALPA's evaluation specialist. The Life Planning Network is committed to making ongoing curriculum revisions based on feedback from each use of the program.

ALPA Coordinators Affirm ALPA's Value

- *"The learning will allow our Life Care Managers to be stronger advocates for our clients. The theory behind the model informed them at a deeper level. . . "*
- *"The opportunity to learn about asset-based leadership (was one of the most important attributes). When working with our clients, we tend to go back to our nursing/medical needs model for identifying gaps or deficits. Learning how to work from a place of strength . . . was very powerful."*
- *"ALPA opens up so many opportunities to impact the community as a whole."*
- *"Our participants gained a shift in attitude to appreciate the value and potential for positive aging, and a shift in focus to become advocacy leaders for positive aging."*

Participants Report a Strengthened Client-Centered Approach

Participants in all locations emphasized that ALPA strengthened their use of a client-centered approach:

- *"It's not 'always about me' when I meet with clients and their families. I am listening more and asking more questions." (Minneapolis participant at Session 6)*
- *"I led a group of seniors with a presentation on 'Let your life shine.' It was successful because I listened to their stories and heard how they wanted to be more helpful and more active." (Minneapolis participant, Session 6)*
- *"Nothing about me without me." (Guiding principle emphasized by DC-area participant focus group, Session 5)*
- *"Empower residents to build relationships. Build bridges." (Guiding principle identified by DC-area focus group, Session 5)*
- *"ALPA has driven me personally at age 56 to start a plan NOW to age positively. I will pass it on to friends and family as well as the public." (Yarmouth participant, Session 5)*
- *"Although we promote empowerment counseling at my agency, the course has reaffirmed self-advocacy for and with older clients." (Yarmouth participant, Session 5)*