

# **Preventive Aging Centers, Inc.**

## **Overview**

### **Introduction**

In 1992, along with Grace Powers Monaco, a Washington, DC, Federal Judge and one of the organizers of the Candlelighters Association, Tim Cassidy organized Preventive Aging Centers, Inc. (PAC), a non-profit provider of health care services and Intergenerational Programs. Tim was relatively new to the nursing home business at that time when he realized that reimbursement under Medicaid screens was far insufficient for activities. He sought to provide an extensive activities program that engaged residents and embraced the mind, body and soul. It seemed so inappropriate that a nursing home with 220 beds would only have two activities personnel eligible for reimbursement under the New Jersey Medicaid system.

This background was part of the stimulus of organizing PAC. To address extended activities programs, we felt it was important to get the community involved and increase the number of volunteers at our facility. Long before Tim became a born-again Christian, he understood the principal that if you give to the community, the community will give back to you. Therefore, we rolled out a program where we sponsored and provided health care screenings and programs within several senior centers and senior housing projects in our area. This eventually grew to six locations, including the senior center in a converted old school in our small city. Programs included, but were not limited to, range of motion screenings, tai chi classes, exercise classes, pharmaceutical interaction screenings, podiatry screenings and cardiac screenings that included free, single lead, EKG testing thanks to the sponsorship of our X-ray vendor.

### **Healthcare Screenings**

From its inception over a period of eight years through 2000, PAC conducted monthly health screenings at many senior centers, including osteoporosis, cholesterol analysis, pharmaceutical interaction, range of motion assessment and dozens more. Many tests were conducted under the direction of physicians and other health care professionals. Some programs were co-sponsored with local communities, such as “Heart Days” where free EKG’s were provided, and many seniors were referred to their physicians to address immediate concerns. These screenings and more can be organized for providers today.

### **Lifelong Learning and Educating Seniors**

Dozens of different educational programs were conducted as PAC established a network of dedicated area professionals and local and national organizations to provide educational seminars on age-related topics. Many of these programs were typical of hospitals, and to a degree, other social service providers, but unique in that PAC sponsored these programs based on donations and fees from long-term care providers and senior housing operators, in combination with in-kind staffing contributions and senior volunteerism.

### **Intergenerational Programs**

As PAC evolved, Intergenerational Programs became an increasing focus, enabling

seniors to share their talents and knowledge with younger generations and establish lasting relationships, including children and their parents, with long-term care “Foster Grandparents.” Over 20 programs evolved from chess and game clubs, to tutoring, to mentoring, with different age groups and varied groups of seniors. Intergenerational Programs and activities have many benefits:

- Personal growth
- Improve personal and family relationships
- Clarify values
- Understand and appreciate diversity
- Become better supporters and leaders
- Learn specific skills
- Have fun
- Augment or replace grandparents and/or grandchildren

At our peak, we offered 18 different Intergenerational Programs at our facilities and within the community in seven locations. Chess and game clubs with teenagers/seniors evolved into mentoring programs. As parents got more and more involved, we saw an increase in volunteerism that helped expand some of our activities in the nursing home, but struggled to get those with dementia and Alzheimer’s to participate in activities until the Preschool Senior Companion Program was created.

### **Preschool Senior Companion Program**

We had a team meeting in late 1993 that included the activities director, the program coordinator, the part-time program coordinator, marketing headed by Tim’s friend, Dave (who Tim brought into the nursing home business in 1992 and has been there ever since) and a grant writer who was also part of our team. As the conversation focused on what we could do for the dementia patients to match them up from an intergenerational standpoint, Tim thought back to his daughter, Katie, who had been coming to the nursing home since she was little and had been involved in some of the programs. As she grew older, she struggled to relate to the Alzheimer’s patients in the facility, much like an adult would not relate. Tim expressed this observation to the team and our grant writer added the clarity, "When children reach the age of reason at 6-7 years old, they think more like adults in many ways and, therefore, have difficulty interacting with patients who do not have their full mental capabilities as they once had in the past." Of course, this is true for so many adults, including residents’ families.

Tim responded, "If that's the case, why don't we develop a program to match younger children, even preschoolers, with seniors?" A couple of team members echoed with an enthusiastic thumbs up and the Preschool Senior Companion Program was established that day. We coordinated with several Head Start centers in the area with knowledge of the additional benefits of them having their own transportation, staff and volunteer parents who could come to our facility and participate. That eventually grew to become 15 different activities between preschoolers and seniors. This allowed us not to incur costs we could not afford under the Medicaid system that was strangling us due to inequity in reimbursement for older facilities that did not have the high percentages of private pay patients. Later we received a grant to pay a modest salary to a wonderful senior named Pauline as the Program Coordinator and Tim matched over 40 nursing

homes with over 60 childcare centers within the next year. Tim continues to receive inquiries to speak and share information put together at that time on how to establish the program and activities that can be conducted. Please see information on the Preschool Senior Companion Program provided separately.

### **Senior Mentoring Program and Senior At Home Assistance Program**

Tim has always been a strong believer in the power of mentoring – a combination of wisdom, life skills, and personal and Christian counseling that seniors can offer our youth. In 2007-2008, his company, Senior Consulting, LLC, completed an extensive study on community foundations across the US and looked at the top 100 foundations to determine what they offered seniors, including intergenerational and youth programs. We were disappointed to discover that less than 20% of the foundations provided grants to senior programs, let alone intergenerational programs. Of course, most supported youth programs. We shared the study results with the executive directors and senior management of these foundations and several later engaged us to provide services like mentoring programs and healthcare services in low income housing developments with ageing in place, frailer seniors.

Collaborating with a local high school, PAC was able to provide teen volunteers under adult supervision to help low income, frail seniors with cleaning, yard work and light painting at their homes. While Tim had been in the nursing home and later in the Assisted Living industries, it was always clear that it is in the best interest of any senior citizen to age in their own home for as long as possible. As Tim has seen as a born-again Christian and member of the Reformed Church of Highland Park ([www.rhighlandpark.com](http://www.rhighlandpark.com)), community interaction for all those in need is part of God's plan for us.

While the Senior Mentoring Program and Senior At Home Assistance Program stand alone as valuable programs, combining them in some cases may allow low or moderate income senior homeowners to provide home cooked meals for a volunteer at their home.

### **Current Goals and Mission**

Mr. Cassidy and his Board never received enumeration and that still remains the case. PAC benefited thousands when fully active, and likely thousands today, as so many programs, particularly the Preschool Senior Companion Program, have endured. Once they are established, they evolve and grow, just like the participants. Moving forward our focus will be to establish more Preschool Senior Program and Senior Mentoring Programs with agencies, facilities, schools and day care centers, and include PAC's mission, experience and programs as part of Christian Youth Services ([www.ChristianYouthServices.org](http://www.ChristianYouthServices.org)).

In addition, Senior Consulting continues to provide support and guidance to help establish Lifelong Learning Programs at projects they develop and remain available to support those programs for owners and operators nationwide.