

South East Senior Housing Initiative: Safe at Home

Issue Area: Housing

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Summary:



Since 1989, Baltimore's greatest ally in providing aging in place housing options has been The South East Senior Housing Initiative (SESHI). This program is a coalition of churches, community groups, health care providers, nonprofit developers, and local government agencies in Baltimore. They are committed to helping older adults remain in their homes and the community through home adaptations, and health and social support services. They have created several programs that mostly revolve around making home improvements to enable aging in place for older adults in the Baltimore area. All of their programs are based on the belief that by expanding upon important service options in their community, they can provide a functional alternative to institutional care and publicly subsidized senior housing. In order to provide alternative housing, SESH I works hand-in-hand with neighborhood residents, community groups, and local public and private sector agencies to explore the needs and preferences of older adults. Over the duration of their life, SESH I has created a videotape displaying how to prepare a home for aging in place, started the citywide Senior Home Modification Program, and designed and built the "Idea House."

The "Idea House", which began in 1990, was their first program as a formal initiative. SESH I retrofitted a row house to illustrate small and large changes that could be done to a home to promote safety, accessibility, and independence. This initial program was quite successful as over 2,500 people came to visit the "Idea House" in its first two years of operation. Like their first program, their most recent program, Safe at Home, has met a huge amount of success. The program was started through a partnership of several organizations including the Baltimore Medical System, Neighborhood Housing Services, John Hopkins School of Public Health, and the Baltimore City Commission on Aging and Retirement Education. The goal of this program is to help seniors remain safely and securely in their own homes and neighborhoods. The program offers free home modifications to older adults above the age of fifty-five who live in Southeast Baltimore and have an income below \$25,000 per year.

The program works through five steps; (1) Doctors, nurses, and senior center staff, social workers or family members, refer clients to the Safe at Home partnership; (2) Eligible clients are screened by the Commission on Aging's intake staff for all appropriate services (e.g. nutrition, transportation, socialization, etc.); (3) SESHI's occupational therapist and/or social worker make an assessment visit to the senior's home. A plan for home modifications and other services is developed, and the plan is shared with the client, caregivers and physician; (4) With the client's approval, Banner Neighborhood Corp. oversees installation of home modifications, and the client is taught the safe uses of the recently installed assistive devices; (5) The service coordinators maintain an on-going supportive relationship with the client, and provide periodic contact and revisits to assess changing needs and conditions. The Safe at Home program is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Local Initiative Funding Partners Program and five other local foundations. SESHI has been successful over the past fifteen years in helping older adults live at home comfortably and securely. Their recent Safe at Home program sets an example for other cities to follow to help low income senior citizens receive free home modifications.

Related Resources:

South East Senior Housing Initiative. <<http://www.seshi.org/>>.