

The Council of State Governments

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2010 INNOVATIONS AWARDS

Deadline: March 1, 2010

ID# 10-S-01AL

State: Alabama

Program Category: Health & Human Services

1. Program Name: Collins Life Center and Safe Shelter - Guin, Alabama

2. Administering Agency: Alabama Department of Senior Services

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9. Two sentence description of the program.

The Senior Life Center and Shelter addressed the needs and limitations of senior citizens and dementia patients who are often neglected when compared to other populations being evacuated or supported during natural disasters. The project developed a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)–approved safety plan and a trained volunteer team is on call to help staff the shelter when the surrounding counties are under tornado warnings.

10. How long has this program been operational?

The Guin Safe Center and Shelter opened its doors April of 2008.

11. Why was the program created? What problems or issues were it designed to address?

The Safe Center and Shelter was created in response to needs identified for the elderly and special populations after hurricanes and tornados ravaged the state. The Safe Center and Shelter gave this special population a safe place they could go to regain a sense of normalcy and reconnect with friends.

All Safe Centers in the State of Alabama were designed with similar architecture for easy recognition.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

The Safe Center and Shelter combines a senior center that will be used daily for seniors to congregate and eat meals while providing a place of respite for elders in the event of a disaster. It features an all purpose room for senior related events as well as community functions. It has a computer room familiarizing seniors with the world of the internet.

The Safe Center concept was developed in response to needs identified for senior citizens before and after storms.

The building is designed according to FEMA standards to withstand hurricane and tornado force winds, floods and other hazardous conditions.

The Safe Center is a wise use of public resources because it serves the dual purpose of a place for daily senior activities and a place of respite after disasters.

The new 3,000 square feet center will provide nearly triple the space of the former senior center.

Trained staff and volunteers operate the Safe Center which is stocked with appropriate supplies and shelf-stable meals.

The center has full showering and laundry facilities in the event seniors need to stay for an extended period of time.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

Post Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts revealed the frailty of Alabamians in preparing much less coping with disasters.

As a result of the state's failure to recognize the inabilities of seniors and those with special needs, the Alabama Department of Senior Services accepted the challenge to address this issue and circumvent these scenarios in the future.

Irene Collins, Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Senior Services, stated "This center is the accomplishment of many agencies working together for the good of the people and the state."

14. What was the program's start up cost?

Governor Bob Riley awarded a \$250,000 CDBG to build the Guin Safe Center.

FEMA awarded a \$350,253 grant.

Local matching funds of \$406,246 were pledged for this project.

Total Project – \$1,006,499

15. What are the programs annual operational costs?

The center average approximately \$20,000 per year in operational cost.

16. How is the program funded?

The Guin Safe Center and Shelter is funded through the City of Guin and the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or Regulations?

No.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

The Safe Center is equipped with generator power and extra wall outlets that can be used to operate light medical equipment such as portable oxygen machines. The center has a set aside area for seniors in the early stages of Alzheimer disease or dementia.

19. To the best of your knowledge did this program originate in your state?

Yes. The Safe Center and Shelter concept is the vision of Mrs. Irene Collins, Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Senior Services, developed through a partnership between the U.S. Administration on Aging, the Alabama Emergency Management Agency, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, and the City of Guin, Alabama.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states?

No. The uniqueness of this project is that it was created and developed for senior citizens.

21. Has the program been fully implemented?

Yes. Effective April 21, 2008 the State of Alabama opened the doors to the nations first "Safe Center and Shelter designed especially for Senior Citizens" in Guin, Alabama. Since then other centers have been completed across Alabama.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem(s) or issue(s).

The safe center concept has allowed our local municipalities an opportunity to maximize resources by creating a dual-purpose facility that is specialized to accommodate older adults in the case of a disaster or emergency, but is used on a daily basis for everyday activities. By combining these two purposes into one facility municipalities are able to reach out to multiple funding sources to serve their aging population better than ever.

The relief that the seniors have expressed by knowing there is a facility near by where they can retreat to if needed provides a peace of mind that cannot be measured.

Filling a gap: The safe center concept has filled a niche that will become more crucial than ever as the Baby Boomers age and America has more seniors than youth. In a tough economy and changing demographics, the safe center concept exemplifies the ability to provide a needed service with limited state funds.

Proven Replicability: To date, ten other safe centers have been either completed or are in the process of being built across Alabama.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

In the initial planning stages, all of the safe centers would have a blue colored roof to serve as an easily recognizable commonality that seniors could find regardless of where they were in the state. Through the actual building process though, this plan was changed to have similar FEMA-approved architecture, but allow municipalities flexibility in design specifics, such as the option of selecting the roof color.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

While the annual operating cost is average for similar facilities, the initial building cost may be an obstacle. Although the dual-purpose safe center concept allows municipalities to reach out to multiple funding sources, including FEMA and community grants, the supplementation of local funds may prohibit some facilities from being built.

ATTACHMENTS:

A: Photo of groundbreaking for the nation's first Safe Center in Guin, Ala.

B: Photo of ribbon cutting for the Safe Center in Guin, Ala.

C: Design plans for the exterior and interior

D: Preliminary budget costs for safe centers prototypes

E: Press release from Governor's Office on safe center opening