

Sonya Sterbenz Barsness MSG

Sonya Barsness Consulting LLC

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Sonya is a Masters-prepared Gerontologist with 20 years of experience in aging, primarily in dementia care and long-term care. As a consultant she works with organizations to support elders, particularly elders with dementia, in living with meaning and purpose, regardless of cognitive or functional challenges, or where they live. Her work is grounded in a person-centered philosophy that honors the unique needs, preferences, and goals of elders through core values of choice, dignity, respect, self-determination, relationship, and purposeful living. Sonya utilizes an array of skills in education, research, policy, and practice to work with organizations that provide services to elders, advocate for elders, or provide education to those interacting with elders. She has extensive collaborative relationships with organizations at the federal, state, and local levels.

Consulting Overview (Sonya Barsness Consulting LLC)

- Areas of gerontological expertise include dementia care, person-centered care, and long-term services and supports.
- Gerontological consulting skills include person-centered/culture change assessment and planning, community and professional education, curriculum development, training, program development and evaluation, project management, proposal writing, report writing, advocacy, policy analysis, survey research, focus groups, and general research activities.
- Recent clients have included the Pioneer Network, CMS, CCAL, Rutgers University, State of New Hampshire, Health Care Excel, Georgia Healthcare Association, Quality Insights, In The Moment, Denise Boudreau Scott Consulting, Planetree, 1199 Education Fund, Trinitas Regional Medical Center, Share the Care, VHQC, CCAL, Virginia Commonwealth University Department of Gerontology, the Virginia Association for Home Care and Hospice, Washington DC Office on Aging, the Alzheimer's Association Southeastern Virginia, and various long-term care communities.

Consulting Accomplishments (Sonya Barsness Consulting LLC)

Rutgers University, www.rutgers.edu, 2014-present

- Serve as project consultant to CMP-funded New Jersey Department of Health Initiative "More than Meds"
- Consults with 2-3 nursing homes in New Jersey to improve quality of care and life for people with dementia, reduce the use of antipsychotic medications, and implement person-centered care.

VHQC, www.vhqc.org, 2013 – present

- Serve as subject matter expert on dementia care and person-centered care for the 10th Scope of Work.
- Developed consumer brochure for the CMS Partnership to Improve Dementia Care.
- Co-developed *Process Assessment: Reducing Atypical Antipsychotic Medications*, a tool for Learning Network nursing homes to use in evaluating their progress in reducing unnecessary antipsychotic medications.
- Developed and presented webinar on CMS' Hand in Hand training program.

Pioneer Network, www.pioneernetwork.net, 2008 to present

- Provide ongoing consulting services to premier culture change organization in long-term care.
- Provide research and evaluation support for Phase II of the National Learning Collaborative.

- Co-developed curriculum for Hand in Hand, CMS' national nursing home training program on dementia care and the prevention of abuse, a key product of CMS' Partnership to Improve Dementia Care.
- Served as Project Director and Evaluator for national consumer education project.
- Conducted survey research with state culture change coalitions on various topics including activities of state coalitions, relationships with state survey agencies, and consumer outreach.
- Have served on National Life Safety Code Task Force, National Food and Dining Clinical Standards Task Force, CMS TEP on National Initiative to Improve Behavioral Health & Reduce the Use of Antipsychotic Medications in Nursing Home Residents, CEAL Person-Centered Assisted Living Initiative, and Always PC Initiative Steering Committee.

Virginia Commonwealth University Department of Gerontology, 2009 - present

- Teach graduate level and professional education programs.
- Co-developed Virginia Department of Social Services curriculum for direct care workers in assisted living communities and statewide dissemination plan.
- Coordinated development of telephone support program with adult day service provider, including co-developing curriculum for training student volunteers.

CCAL Advancing Person-Centered Living, www.ccal.org, 2013-2014

- Co-principal investigator for Virginia state-funded research project "Promoting Change and Action in Person-Centered Care Practices Using a Multi-Media Approach"
- Served as project consultant on Retirement Research Foundation funded project to conduct survey with people impacted by dementia on "care" priorities, as well as building the Dementia Action Alliance, a national grassroots network to support people living fully with dementia.
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Planetree, www.planetree.org, 2008 - 2013

- Provided organizational assessment in health systems implementing the person-centered Planetree model. This includes multi-level systems, Veteran's Affairs Health Systems, and stand-alone assisted living and nursing home communities. Organizational assessment includes focus groups, interviews, policy and data analysis, and recommendations to leadership.
- Served as a continuing care consultant with dementia expertise.

Alzheimer's Association Southeastern Virginia Chapter, 2009 -2011

- Secured funding for, piloted, replicated, and evaluated community-based early stage dementia education and support program.

Virginia Association for Home Care and Hospice, 2007 -2010

- Analyzed regulatory and legislative home care policy.
- Conducted survey research on home care workforce challenges and transitions between hospital and home care.

Education

Master of Science, Gerontology (Psychogeriatric Concentration)

Medical College of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia

Bachelor of Science, Psychology (Gerontology and Biology minors)

James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia

Academic Affiliations

Adjunct Faculty, Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Gerontology, 2009-present

Adjunct Faculty, Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences, 2006

Previous Experience

Senior Resource Alliance (The Area Agency on Aging of Central Florida), Orlando, Florida

March 2005 - April 2007

Project Director, Aging Readiness Partnership

- Managed private grant to promote aging readiness at two major Orlando health systems.
- Conducted focus groups with previously hospitalized elders regarding their hospital experiences and shared this with healthcare stakeholders to encourage eldercare improvement.
- Directed exploratory research with discharge planning staff to identify elder discharge challenges.
- Analyzed customer satisfaction data for 65+ subsets to better understand elder patient perspective.
- Managed initiative to offer aging sensitivity training to various hospital staff types and levels.
- Built relationships with hospital administration and staff to gain support for an increased elder care focus.

Program Planner

- Planned and evaluated implementation of the first Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) pilot in Florida.
- Designed, administered, and analyzed environmental scan of elder services in three-county area.
- Identified outcome measures for long-term care system redesign project; collected and analyzed data to support these measures.
- Managed development of new website to serve as centralized portal for elder information and local services.

Orange County Office on Aging, Orlando, Florida

Project Coordinator, February 2003 - June 2004

- Developed, collected, and analyzed asset maps of local elder service providers, utilizing the framework of the 2003 AdvantAge Initiative.
- Presented educational outreach on aging topics to community, professional, and county organizations.
- Researched and monitored public policy issues in aging, including public guardianship, long term care, and home- and community-based services.
- Developed and coordinated "Senior Academies" for four Orange County Community Centers.
- Facilitated collective relationships through a 30-member consortium of organizations in aging whose primary goal was to foster collaboration.
- Engaged county in local aging issues as a member of the Florida Pioneer Network steering committee, Lifelong Learning Collaborative, Orange County TRIAD, Central Florida Partnership for Health Disparities, and Senior Resource Alliance Advocacy Committee.

Alzheimer's Association Central and North Florida Chapter, Orlando, Florida

Program Coordinator, January 2002 - February 2003

- Coordinated, conducted, and evaluated support and education programs for individuals in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease and their families.
- Coordinated public policy activities of the five area offices and monitored local, state, and national advocacy efforts.
- Presented topics related to Alzheimer's disease to professional and non-professional audiences.
- As state certified trainer, provided continuous education on Alzheimer's disease to staff at various long-term care communities.

Adventist Care Center Courtland, Orlando, Florida

Alzheimer's Consultant, 2002 - 2003

- Developed dementia program in new Alzheimer's unit at skilled nursing facility.
- Recruited, interviewed, trained, and coached staff in person-centered dementia care practices.
- Established protocols for admission and care of patients with dementia.
- Served as information resource for dementia care facility-wide.

American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA), Washington, DC

August 1999 - August 2001

Research Associate, Institute for the Future of Aging Services (IFAS)

- Developed and managed administration of survey on the recruitment and retention of front line workers in California's not-for-profit long term care facilities.
- Supported ASPE Technical Expert Panel Meetings on frontline long-term care workers.
- Assisted in grant proposal applications to pursue IFAS research priorities.

Policy Associate, Advocacy Division

- Managed and analyzed national and state public policy issues in assisted living, continuing care, and community-based services.
- Produced policy updates and technical assistance materials for AAHSA membership communications.
- Developed educational sessions for AAHSA annual meetings and policy conferences.
- Presented policy updates at external professional and consumer conferences.
- Coordinated development, administration, and analysis of 2000 AAHSA Membership Continuum Survey.
- Collaborated with AHCA, HUD, Assisted Living Workgroup, NCOA, AARP, CTAA, Generations United, AOA, and Title XX Coalition through common policy agendas and joint projects.

Sunrise Assisted Living, Reston, Virginia

Director, Alzheimer's Program, February 1999 - July 1999

- Initiated dementia program in new community including environmental design, activity programming, assessment, and recruitment of residents.
- Hired, trained, and supervised a staff of ten.
- Coordinated internal and external professional support for care management of residents.
- Provided family support and served as an information/referral source regarding dementia.

Virginia Center on Aging, Richmond, Virginia

Research Assistant, September 1997 - November 1998

- Collected research and compiled literature reviews for four senior staff.

- Areas of research included geriatric alcoholism and alcoholism education, older adult learning, developmental disabilities and aging, elder abuse, and cost-effectiveness of caregiver education.
- Collected, organized, and analyzed data for evaluations of the Virginia Geriatric Education Center telecourses.
- Assisted in the planning and administration of the Alzheimer's disease and Related Disorders Award Fund (ARDRAF).

Hampton Roads Neuropsychology, Virginia Beach, Virginia

Neuropsychological Test Technician, March 1996 - July 1997

- Administered neuropsychological testing to cognitively impaired older adults and brain-injured individuals on an inpatient and outpatient basis.
- Assisted neuropsychologist with office management and patient coordination.

Virginia Beach Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center, Virginia Beach, Virginia

Assistant Director of Social Services, July 1995 - March 1996

- Responsible for advocacy, support, and crisis intervention for 240 geriatric and brain-injured residents and their families.
- Trained direct care staff on aging issues and stress management.
- Created and facilitated support group for family and friends of brain-injured residents.