



 **ESWA**

Elder Services Of Worcester Area



2025



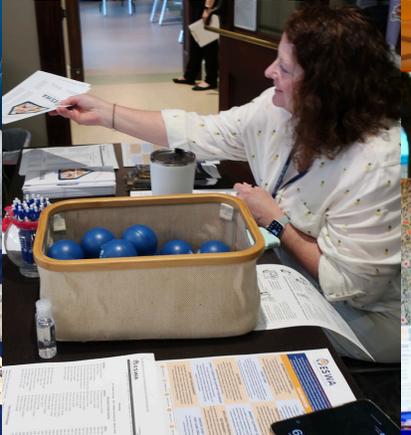
ANNUAL



REPORT



LIVING OUR VALUES





A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As Elder Services of Worcester Area, Inc. (ESWA) enters its 51st year, we remain deeply committed to our mission: empowering older adults and individuals with disabilities to live independently with dignity and respect. Fiscal Year 2025 has been a year of both challenge and progress, reflecting the increasing complexity of aging services and the enduring resilience of our organization.

Our Mission

TO PROVIDE ELIGIBLE CLIENTS WITH A RANGE OF SERVICES WHICH WILL ENHANCE THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE AND ALLOW THEM TO LIVE AS INDEPENDENTLY AS POSSIBLE IN DIGNITY AND RESPECT. ANY SERVICES WHICH CAN FURTHER THESE ENDS MAY BE PROVIDED DIRECTLY, BY CONTRACT OR BY REFERRALS.

We bid farewell to six long-serving staff members and welcomed new leadership with fresh perspectives. Despite budgetary constraints and the implementation of the Enhanced Community Options Program (ECOP) maximum allowance, ESWA continued to adapt and innovate.

We launched Version 2 of our Health-Related Social Needs (HRSN) initiative, supported by an Innovation Grant. The Blue Cross Transitions in Care program expanded to five additional Aging Services Access Points (ASAPs), and our Benefit Support Specialist contract was extended through the fiscal year. Additionally, Behavioral Health Outreach for Aging Populations (BHOAP) funding enabled us to host wellness events tailored to the growing number of older adults experiencing homelessness. These efforts ensured that their unique needs were met with targeted outreach and compassionate support.

We were also honored to receive approval from the Commonwealth Corporation’s Workforce Training Fund, allowing us to invest in staff development and capacity building.

I extend my sincere appreciation to our dedicated staff, generous funders, and valued partners. Your unwavering support enables us to meet the evolving needs of our community with integrity, compassion, and excellence.

Our Values

Supporting Others Through Teamwork

...

Serving with Purpose

...

Practicing Honesty

With gratitude,
Lisa Kippax
Executive Director

Elder Services of Worcester Area, Inc.

Executive Committee

RAYMOND MANTYLA - PRESIDENT
AT LARGE

ELLEN GANLEY - VICE PRESIDENT
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GRACE SLIWOSKI - SECRETARY
AT LARGE

KEVIN JOHNSON - TREASURER
RUTLAND

ARLETTE LYNCH - ASSISTANT TREASURER
WORCESTER

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LEAH MARONEY - WORCESTER

MARYBETH O'DAY - AT LARGE

WILLIAM O'NEIL - AT LARGE

BARBARA PASZUK - AT LARGE

NANA SARKWA - AUBURN

REV. CLYDE TALLEY - WORCESTER

HEATHER TRUDELL - GRAFTON

ROBERT VAYO - AUBURN





LIVING OUR VALUES

Through Their Work



PRACTICING HONESTY

- Speak truthfully and respectfully, even when difficult.
- Acknowledge mistakes and take responsibility without shifting blame.
- Share information transparently and proactively.
- Base decisions on what is right, even when it's harder than the convenient path. Give and receive feedback constructively to strengthen trust.



**“HONESTY IS TELLING THE TRUTH
TO OURSELVES AND OTHERS.
INTEGRITY IS LIVING THAT TRUTH.”
-KENNETH H. BLANCHARD**

THE STORY OF MATT TORREY, HOME CARE CARE MANAGER

With over 12 years of dedication to Elder Services of Worcester Area (ESWA), Matthew (Matt) Torrey's journey is rooted in practicing with care, honesty, and passion.

Connected by an invisible string, Matt found himself unintentionally following in his father's footsteps by becoming a Home Care Care Manager after encouragement from his friend to pursue the role. His father worked in the aging services field alongside former Executive Director, Lou Swan in the 1970s. Matt stated, "The more I investigated, the more I realized how involved I was already with this community... I guess it's in my blood."

Though his connection was not anticipated, his devotion to his role has deepened over the years. He quickly learned that aging is universal and values the person-centered approach deeply. This approach has shaped his interpersonal relationships, including how he interacts with his own family. He noted that he practices boundaries and respect in everyday life, influenced by HIPAA and ethical standards. "As humans, we are all aging individuals. So by doing my best to serve this community and help foster the person-centered approach we use at ESWA, I'm also learning about myself."

The pinnacle of this was what seems like a simple note but displays the tangible impact Matt has had on the community. When responding to a consumer emergency, he found a note from the Rutland Fire Department addressed specifically to him. He noted how proud he felt that local agencies recognize and trust him, showing his deep connection to the community. "I've been in this one role in one area, serving this one area for so long that the senior centers, the fire departments—they know me."

Though Matt's role has stayed the same in title, he has experienced an evolution in how he continues to receive new opportunities to grow in the care of his consumers and externally as well. Matt serves on the Worcester Council on Elder Affairs, a position he is very passionate about and can add a unique perspective because of the work he does with the aging population every day.

Matt describes ESWA's culture with the utmost compliment, "respectful." He shares, "From the day I started here until this moment, I have never felt anything less than respected, listened to, and prepared." He further elaborated that staff needs are always met to be able to serve the community and carry out ESWA's mission of providing comprehensive support to older adults in the Worcester Area.

To further exemplify how impactful he views the mission, Matt notes, “The mission of ESWA is to make sure that all people are heard. Not just when it’s convenient... but truly heard and given a safe place to be heard from.” A powerful statement that truly captures Matt’s fervor for the population ESWA serves.

Because of this commitment to upholding the standards of helping ESWA’s consumers, Matt’s pledge to the core value, “Practicing Honesty,” is rooted in how he conducts his role as a Home Care Care Manager. “Honesty is your integrity—who you are, how you present yourself, how you treat others and care for yourself,” he shares, “To practice honesty is to practice ethics such as HIPAA, or to practice good communication and to work on bettering ourselves.”

Though this core value is at the core of Matt’s work and ESWA’s commitment to consumers, Matt truly resonates with the core value, “Serving With Purpose.” “Serving with purpose means to balance actions and efforts with a clear sense of direction, intention, and meaning.”

Though Matt has already had a profound impact on ESWA and the community, he hopes to leave a legacy as a liaison who set a good example and helped others to feel empowered to help others. “If I do what I can to be an honest and true liaison for the community we serve... then that would be a good legacy to leave.”



“HONESTY IS YOUR INTEGRITY—WHO YOU ARE, HOW YOU PRESENT YOURSELF, HOW YOU TREAT OTHERS AND CARE FOR YOURSELF”



SUPPORTING OTHERS THROUGH

TEAMWORK

- Offer help, encouragement, and support without needing to be asked.
- Actively listen and seek to understand others' ideas and experiences.
- Recognize and celebrate team achievements regularly. Communicate openly, clearly, and respectfully.
- Honor commitments and hold each other accountable with respect and candor.



“THE TRUTH IS THAT TEAMWORK IS AT THE HEART OF GREAT ACHIEVEMENT.”

-JOHN C. MAXWELL

THE STORY OF KARA HUNTOON, COMMUNITY OPTIONS SUPERVISOR

Empathy, perseverance, and support—three traits that not only define Kara Huntoon’s leadership, but also the heart of her journey at Elder Services of Worcester Area (ESWA). Kara joined ESWA in 2022 as an Options Counselor, drawn to the field of social services during a deeply personal time in her life. As a caregiver for her father, she found herself naturally aligned with the mission of helping others navigate complex systems with compassion and dignity.

Her path to ESWA was not traditional—it was intentional. Kara set a personal goal to earn her Psychology degree before her children entered college, a milestone she proudly reached at age 43. Before that, she built a successful career in sales, working with major brands like Live Nation and in corporate hospitality. But the fast-paced, demanding nature of that world left little room for family life. She longed for a career that offered flexibility, meaning, and the chance to be more present with her loved ones. That longing led her to social services—a field where her natural empathy and communication skills could truly shine.

Reflecting on how her past experiences shaped her approach, Kara shares, “... I feel like even though that was sales and it was entertainment ... it taught me how to relate to people, which working as an options counselor, I pulled from that all the time. See, people as they are, where they are.”

One of Kara’s most profound experiences at ESWA involved working with a consumer whose life was transformed through trust and time. When they first met, he lacked the confidence to even fill out housing applications, weighed down by low self-worth. But Kara didn’t give up. She worked with him consistently, helping him access services and mental health support. Eventually, he became a Home Care Consumer.

She recalls the impact of that journey:

“...walking away from him and knowing that he was a completely different man than the one that I found on day one, and that in order to get to that final day, he had to trust me.”

Now, as a Community Options Supervisor, Kara carries those lessons with her. Though she was initially hesitant to leave direct service work, she’s found deep fulfillment in leading a team. Her leadership style is grounded in humility and support, as she explains:

“I always say I work for my employees. If I’m doing my job right, they feel supported by me, you know? And they feel like I’m working just as hard for them as they’re working for me.”

Kara sees ESWA's culture as a reflection of its values—especially “Support Others Through Teamwork.” She describes the organization as one where people feel uplifted, connected, and never alone. Weekly check-ins and open communication are central to her approach. She puts it simply, “...the more people working towards the same goal, the easier and quicker it is to get there.”

As a former yoga instructor, Kara brings a holistic perspective to leadership. She uses the metaphor, “support creates release,” meaning that when people feel supported, they can do their best work.

This belief is deeply tied to her commitment to ESWA's mission of empowering independence and strengthening the community. While “Support Others Through Teamwork” reflects her leadership style, the value that speaks most to her heart is “Serving With Purpose.” She explained that purpose gives meaning to your work and without it you are “just punching a clock.”

Purpose, she believes, leads to authenticity—which she sees as foundational to being both supportive and effective.

Kara's story is a testament to the idea that it is never too late to start over—and that every challenge carries the potential for growth. She hopes to leave a legacy of impact, not just through the services she has helped deliver, but through the confidence and passion she has instilled in others.

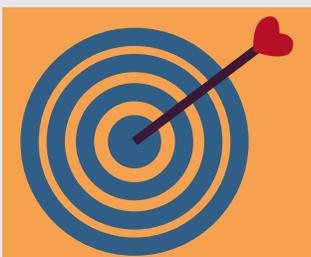


“I ALWAYS SAY I WORK FOR MY EMPLOYEES. IF I'M DOING MY JOB RIGHT, THEY FEEL SUPPORTED BY ME”



SERVING WITH PURPOSE

- Stay connected to the "why" behind your role and our broader mission.
- Prioritize actions that directly create value for those we serve.
- Embrace continuous improvement to enhance service quality.
- Set goals that reflect intention and impact—not just task completion.
- Align personal development goals with organizational priorities.



**“SERVICE TO OTHERS LEADS TO
GREATNESS.”**
-JIM ROHN

ASHLEY GIBBONS' JOURNEY OF SERVICE AND GROWTH

From the moment she stepped into her first consumer's home as an Intern Home Care Care Manager, Ashley Gibbons knew the work of Elder Services of Worcester Area (ESWA) was different. It wasn't just about delivering services—it was about showing up, listening deeply, and being the first face of hope for someone navigating a life-changing diagnosis. That moment, one of her proudest, became a thread woven through every role she's held at ESWA.

Ashley began her journey during her senior year at Worcester State University, majoring in Psychology. After hearing about ESWA from her husband's aunt, a recent retiree of the organization, she took a chance on an internship that would shape her career—and her purpose. Today, she's a model of what it means to live ESWA's mission and make a lasting impact on those we serve.

Her path has been one of growth and service: from Intern Home Care Care Manager to Home Care Care Manager, Community Choices Care Manager, Home Care Supervisor, SCO Supervisor, and Quality Assurance Specialist. Along the way, she earned her Master's in Counseling Psychology and worked as a mental health clinician at a local outpatient drug and alcohol treatment facility. Reflecting on a moment that deeply connected her to the work, Ashley shared:

“I went out to an older adult's home—she had a recent diagnosis of cancer and was having a hard time getting things done around the house ... I did an opening assessment with her, and she had never heard of us. She was in her early 60s, and this was her first introduction to Elder Services. Her family was trying to help as much as they could, but she needed support in the home. She was so thankful and appreciative of the services and how much they helped her. That moment is so memorable for me, and I'm proud of it. To be able to start her off with services, meet her needs, and see the impact over time—it always sticks out in my mind.”

Now, as Director of Business Development and Quality Improvement, Ashley still carries that same sense of purpose. Whether she's expanding programs, enhancing impact, or shaping strategy, her mission remains clear: to serve with intention, compassion, and a commitment to helping people stay where they feel most at home.

When asked to describe ESWA's culture in one word, Ashley offered two: Family and Caring.

“Family was the first one that popped into my head. That's part of the reason I've always stayed here. I have a degree in Counseling Psychology and did that work for five years, but there was something about the culture—the people I worked with and the work we do—that always brought me back. It felt like family.

The other word is caring. That's what comes to mind when I think of Elder Services.

We're all so caring and just want the best outcome for the people we serve."

Ashley also expressed deep gratitude for ESWA's support throughout her personal journey—from grad school to motherhood to career growth:

"Elder Services was flexible when I was going to grad school—they let me go part-time. When I had my son, they let me work per diem so I could be home more. They even let me try remote work. That flexibility has always helped me stay here. ESWA values its employees and meets them where they are, which has made all the difference."

Tying in with the core value that resonates with her most—Serving With Purpose—

Ashley hopes to leave a legacy of longevity and leadership:

"I hope to leave a legacy of helping us remain at the table—expanding the business in ways that keep us at the forefront of community services. I want to help our business grow and meet the needs of the community, whatever those needs may be."

Ashley's story is a testament to what it means to serve with purpose—not just in title, but in every interaction, decision, and initiative she's led. Her journey reflects the heart of ESWA: a place where compassion meets strategy, where personal growth is nurtured, and where the mission to help people remain in their homes is lived every day. Through her leadership, dedication, and unwavering commitment to community, Ashley continues to shape a legacy that ensures Elder Services remains not only at the table—but leading it.



**“I HOPE TO LEAVE A
LEGACY OF HELPING US
REMAIN AT THE TABLE”**



FISCAL YEAR 2025 AWARDS

Top 100 Women Led Business for 2024

The Women's Edge, in collaboration with Boston Globe Magazine, annually honors the women leaders who drive our economies with the Top 100 Women-Led Businesses Awards. ESWA has been honored to receive this award three consecutive years in a row!

Crisis Intervention Training Presenter of the Year

This was awarded to ESWA Crisis Worker, Lisa Kapaczewski and was presented by The Central MA CIT-TTAC team operated by Open Sky Community Services in conjunction with the Worcester Police Department and Department of Mental Health. It is presented to the person/and or people that have dedicated themselves and their life to crisis intervention and the essential trainings of the CIT Model.

John A Hartford Business Innovation Awardee

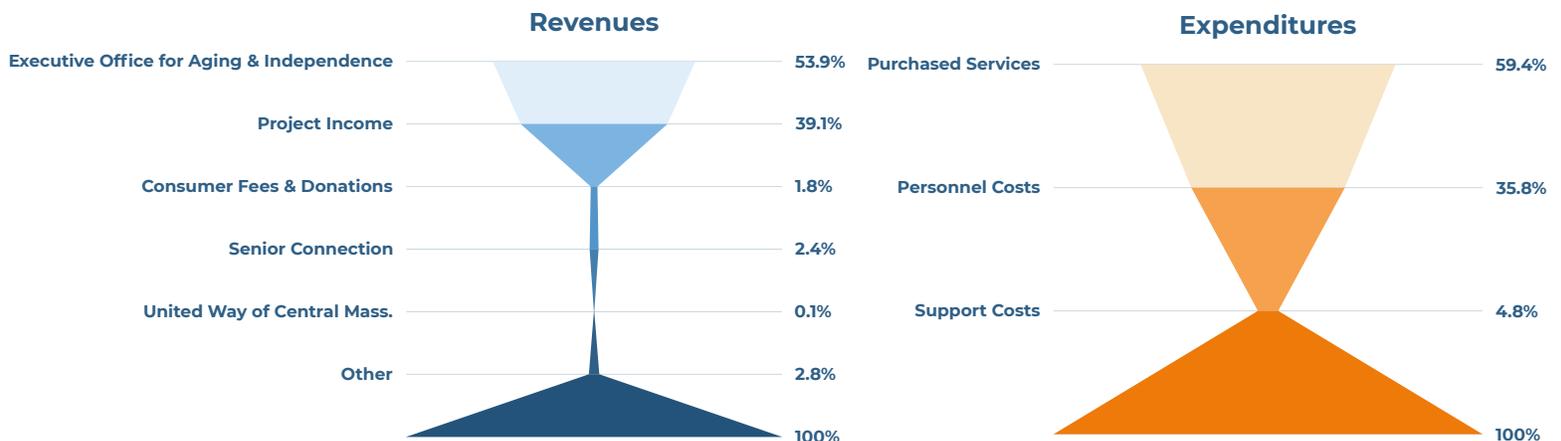
This award was presented by the John A. Hartford Foundation and USAging during the USAging 50th Annual Conference and Tradeshow. It recognizes innovative strategies for working with healthcare and expanding services for older adults, caregivers, and people with disabilities.

FINANCIAL WELLNESS

FISCAL YEAR 2025 REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

	FY 25	FY 24	FY 23
Revenues			
Executive Office of Aging & Independence	26,019,937	23,427,735	19,743,107
Consumer Fees & Donations	860,292	842,614	798,956
Project Income	18,864,716	17,473,816	14,975,159
Senior Connection	1,146,264	1,370,720	1,404,434
United Way of Central Mass.	51,500	48,250	49,000
Other	1,340,916	1,056,401	959,183
	\$48,283,625	\$44,219,536	\$37,929,839
Expenditures			
Purchased Services	28,695,015	25,846,627	21,816,824
Personnel Costs	17,294,862	16,273,513	14,094,155
Support Costs	2,293,748	2,099,396	2,018,860
	\$48,283,625	\$44,219,536	\$37,929,839

FISCAL YEAR 2025 REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES BREAKDOWN BY PERCENTAGE



WITH GRATITUDE

FY25 GIVING SUMMARY

DONATIONS, FUNDS, AND GRANTS

Blackbaud Giving Fund by its agent, YourCause, Chartwells, Christ Lutheran Church, Fidelity Charitable Donor Advised Fund, Fidelity Charitable Grant, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Katharine C. Pierce Trust, PayPal Giving Fund, United Way of Central Massachusetts, United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, Victory Bar & Cigar Golf Tournament, Warren Alpert Foundation

IN MEMORY DONATIONS

In memory of Teresa Froio, In memory of Therese Gosselin, In memory of Richard Jolicoeur, In memory of Geraldine Keyes, In memory of Pauline Wambach

STORE DONATION PROGRAMS

Shaw's Give Back Where it Counts, Big Y Community Bag Program, Stop & Shop Bloomin' For Good



OUR SERVICES



INFORMATION & REFERRAL

For many people, a phone call, or an email to ESWA is their introduction to the complex network of long-term services and supports. Certified Community Resource Specialists are available to answer questions, offer current resources, and help individuals access services.

HOME CARE

Care Managers conduct home visits to assess eligibility for community-based services through our state funded programs, public benefits, and community resources. Successful independent living at home is possible. By providing individualized care ESWA is able to prevent or postpone one's need for institutionalization.

State Home Care; Community Choices; Consumer Directed Care; Enhanced Community Options; Medicaid Frail Elder Waiver and Spousal Waiver

NUTRITION

Addresses a number of issues faced by today's older adults, including poor diets, health problems, food insecurity, and loneliness. Whether an individual visits one of our 16 dining centers & lunch clubs, or is a recipient of Meals on Wheels, they will receive a nutritious tasty meal with a smile.

FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM

Through outreach activities, assessments, educational programs, support groups, stipends, and Memory Café, our Caregiver Specialist provides family caregivers with the foundation and ongoing support to be successful.

MONEY MANAGEMENT

Bonded Bill Payer Volunteers help individuals develop a budget, write checks, balance their checkbook, and negotiate with creditors. ESWA also serves as Social Security Representative Payee for those older adults who are unable to manage their finances.

OPTIONS COUNSELING

Provides a "No Wrong Door Approach" to anyone in need of long-term services and supports, regardless of age. Options Counselors empower individuals to make informed decisions about their long term supports and help them easily access appropriate public and private services.

PERSONAL CARE MANAGEMENT

Functional Skills Trainers and Nurses foster independence in eligible individuals with disabilities who receive MassHealth. The PCM Program enables individuals to maintain control over their personal care needs by hiring and training their own Personal Care Attendants (PCA).

BENEFIT SUPPORT SPECIALIST

In an effort by MassHealth to assist individuals in maintaining or obtaining health care benefits, the Benefit Support Specialist is a Certified Application Counselor who assists individuals with initial and renewal MassHealth and SNAP applications.

WELLNESS PROGRAM AT COLONY RETIREMENT HOMES

In partnership with Colony Retirement Home, the Wellness Program is an enhanced supportive services housing model that facilitates aging in place by helping residents proactively address their social and health care needs.

SENIOR CARE OPTIONS & ONE CARE ORGANIZATIONS

Our specialized team provides support by coordinating an enrollee's vital long-term community-based services.

CLINICAL ASSESSMENT ELIGIBILITY

Team of nurses screen individuals for clinical eligibility for the following Medicaid Services: nursing home placement, Adult Day Health and Frail Elder Waivers. Our nurses are also involved in discharge planning from nursing facilities.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH OUTREACH FOR AGING POPULATIONS

Provides short term mental health services directly in consumers' homes. The BHOAP program has expanded to include a bi-lingual Spanish speaking clinician and a Behavioral Health Care Manager.

TRANSITIONS IN CARE

Personal health coaching to help manage the transition from the hospital back to home; connecting members with health care support and resources in the community. During the 30-day program, members receive: one in-home visit, one week post discharge and three follow up phone calls once a week following the home visit from a TIC Coach.

WORCESTER LGBTQIA+ ELDER NETWORK AND RAINBOW LUNCH/SUPPER CLUB

Access to education, support, resources and social opportunities for LGBTQ+ older adults and their caregivers; additionally ongoing Rainbow Lunch and Supper gatherings offer the benefit of nutritious meals and socialization in a safe welcoming environment.

HOSPITAL TO HOME

ESWA is partnering with UMass Memorial Medical Center to provide a Home and Community Based Liaison within the hospital system to assist with discharge planning. The Liaison makes referrals for home and community-based services with the goal of the patient returning home after their hospital stay and preventing the need for skilled nursing facility placement.

ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Designated by the state to receive and investigate reports of elder abuse and neglect including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; neglect, self-neglect and financial exploitation as defined by the state's criminal code.

SHINE

Serving Health Information Needs of Everyone is a health insurance assistance program that provides free health insurance information and counseling to Massachusetts residents with Medicare.

ACCOUNTABLE CARE ORGANIZATIONS & MANAGED CARE ORGANIZATIONS (ACO/MCO)

MassHealth Long Term Services and Supports: ESWA is a community partner with a local community organization providing long term services and support coordinators to eligible ACO/MCO members. MassHealth Health Related Social Needs (HRSN) Services: ESWA is an HRSN provider providing nutrition flex services to eligible ACO members.

MEDICARE ADVANTAGE PLANS

ESWA provides supplemental benefits in the form of home and community-based services to individuals enrolled in eligible Medicare Advantage Plans.

COMMUNITY TRANSITION LIAISON PROGRAM

The CTLP team engages with residents of nursing facilities to understand if they are interested in returning to the community. The CTLP team aids in the coordination of discharge planning and will assist the residents in mitigating issues that may impact their ability to successfully transfer to the community.

TECH CONNECT

Providing eligible individuals with in-person tutoring to support the recipient's device learning needs. Further support can be provided to qualifying individuals such as free devices and data plans. Access to technology allows recipients to conduct tele-health visits with medical and social service providers, while social visits with family and friends help decrease social isolation.

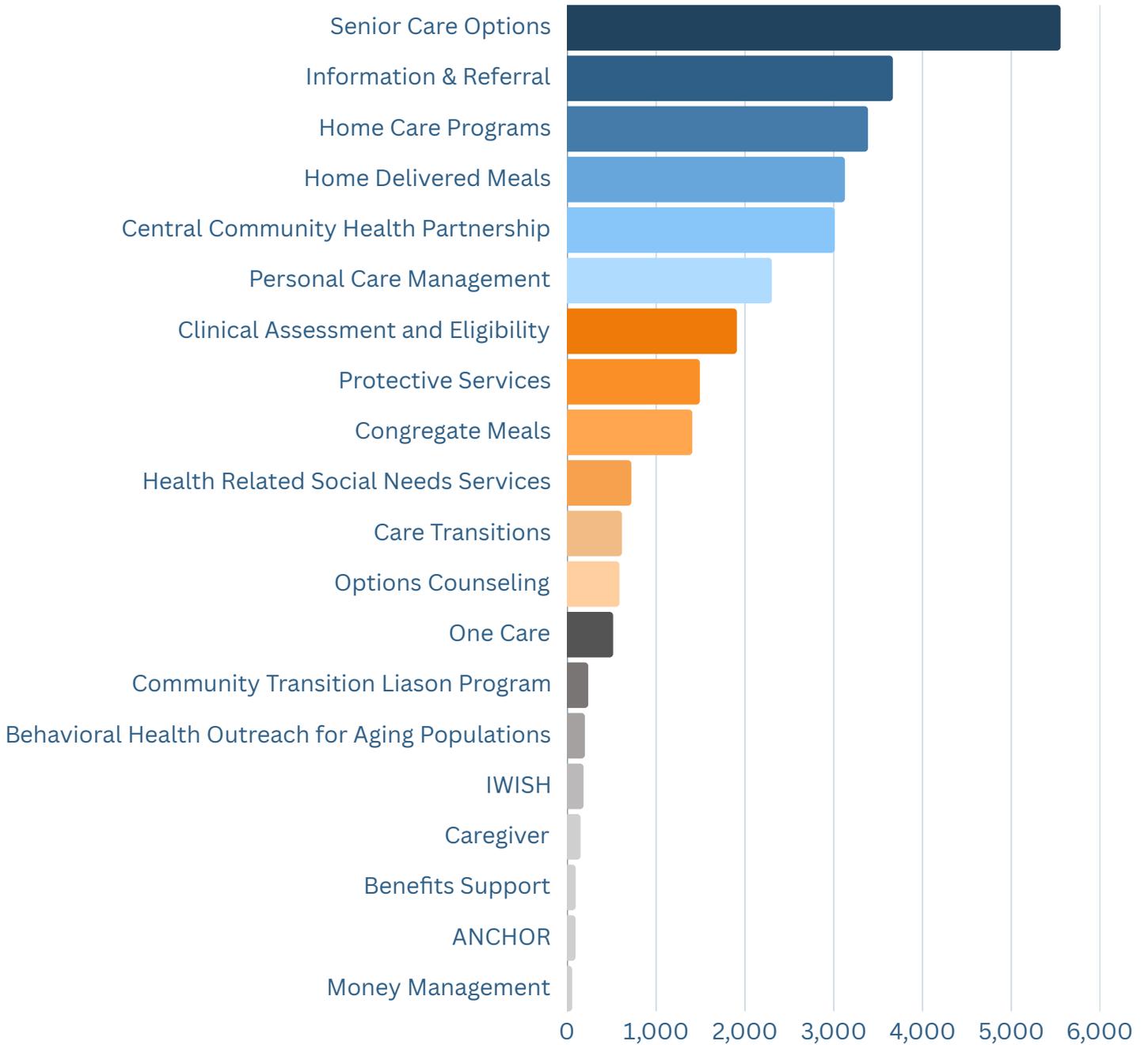


Mass Options: www.massoptions.org 1-800-243-4636

ESWA Funding Statement

The agency and its programs receive funds administered through the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs; and federal financial support under the Older Americans Act provided by Senior Connection. Other funders include the United Way of Central Massachusetts, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, local Councils on Aging & governments, participant donations, grants, and individual support. ESWA also contracts with EOHHHS, Senior Care Organizations, One Care Organizations, Accountable Care Organizations and other health insurance providers.

At A Glance Consumer By Program



29,294 INDIVIDUALS
SERVED IN FISCAL YEAR 2025

17,282 UNDUPLICATED CONSUMERS
SERVED IN FISCAL YEAR 2025

Contracted Vendor List

7 Hills Adult Day Health

Abby Homecare Solutions

Able Home Accessibility

Acclaim Home Health Care, Inc.

Ace Medical Services, LLC

Advanced Home Care

Annex Transit, LLC

Apple Home Care

Associated Home Care

Aveanna Healthcare (EPIC Health)

BAYADA Home Health Care

Be Safer at Home, Inc

Bug Bully Pest Control

Catholic Charities

Center for Living and Working

Central Massachusetts
Housing Alliance

Elara Caring / Medical Resources Home
Health Corp.

Elderwood Home Care / Careproviders
of Blackstone Valley, LLC

Family Services of Central MA

Footcare by Nurses LLC

Guardian Angel Senior Services

Independence Health Care Corp.

Language Bank

Lifeline Systems, Inc.

Living Well Adult Day Health

Mass Associattion for the
Blind and Visually Impaired

MedMinder System, Inc

MedScope America Corporation

Omama Services Inc. d/b/a
Omama Home Healthcare

Premier Home Health

Red Cab

Royal Comfort Home Care

Saint Francis Adult Day Health

Sarah Care Adult Day Health

Silva's Property Solutions, LLC

Specialty Home Care Services, Inc.

Sweet Grapes

Tempus Unlimited, Inc.

VNA Care Advantage

Worcester Adult Day Care Center

Yellow Cab

Contracted Services

Service	Amount of Time Devoted To Consumers Per Service
Adult Day Health / In-Person	16,404 days
Heavy Chore	7,577 Hours
Companion	3,704 Hours
Consumer Directed Care	158,540 Hours
Adaptive Housing	383 Units
Home Delivered Meals	279,466 Meals
Home Delivery of Prepackaged Medication	114 Deliveries
Home Health Services	47,838 Hours
Homemaker/Personal Care	285,639 Hours
Med Dispenser	1,735 Months
PERS (Emergency Response)	35,198 Months
Skilled Nursing	3,508 Visits
Supportive Home Care Aide	4,395 Hours
Assistive Technology / Tech Connect	72 Units
Translation	67 Calls or Visits
Transportation	35,959 Rides

880,599 TOTAL UNITS
SERVED IN FISCAL YEAR 2025

16 UNIQUE SERVICES
FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025

A close-up photograph of two hands, one from an older person and one from a younger person, gently cupping a small globe of dark soil. A vibrant green leaf and a small twig are tucked into the soil. The background is softly blurred, showing more hands in the distance, suggesting a community or group setting. The overall mood is one of care, growth, and shared responsibility.

LIVING OUR VALUES

Through Their Voices

SHERYL WILSON'S JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE

After decades of helping others rebuild their lives, Sheryl Wilson found herself navigating her own journey of recovery—one fall, one setback, and one hard-won victory at a time.

Born and raised in Minnesota, Sheryl moved to Massachusetts in 1975 for love. Her early life in Minnesota was filled with trailblazing accomplishments, defying gender barriers of the time. While in high school, she became a small airplane pilot after joining Civil Air Patrol—an official auxiliary of the United States Air Force established during World War II to utilize civilian aviation resources for national defense. She rose to the rank of Captain, served as a drill team commander, and spent summer encampment training at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois. Due to her achievements, she was qualified to enlist in the Air Force with the rank of Second Lieutenant. However, she chose not to enlist, since women in the Air Force could not be pilots until 1976. Instead, she pursued Psychology at the University of Minnesota, earning a PhD in Clinical Psychology.

Her career in physical medicine and rehabilitation was driven by a passion for helping others. In recent years, Sheryl's own health challenges—including Guillain-Barré Syndrome, atrial fibrillation, and multiple falls—forced her to confront the other side of care. “I had a PhD in psychology and worked in hospitals with rehab teams... now I've experienced both sides—providing care and receiving it,” she reflects.

After a fall in her third-floor walk-up left her unable to safely navigate stairs, Sheryl entered a housing lottery she never expected to win. “I'd been on waitlists for years,” she said. “But I won one of the few subsidized apartments in a newly constructed 62+ community. It's on the ground floor and very accessible.”

When her previous insurance used AI to deny coverage for the rehabilitation she needed to safely return home, Sheryl paid privately until she won her appeal. “I figured I have to use my savings if I ever want to get back home,” she said. She later switched to Blue Cross, which referred her to Elder Services of Worcester Area's Care Transitions program. Through ESWA, she received wellness checks, help finding in-network specialists, emotional support, and guidance navigating complex health systems. “It made me feel like they really cared,” she said. “Asking, ‘Do I need anything?’ That was very nice.”

Even while managing her own health, Sheryl also serves as healthcare proxy and power of attorney for her cousin, whose life she saved by requesting a wellness check after days of silence. “She had fallen and had been on the floor for five days without food or water,” Sheryl said. “Now I handle all her finances and oversee her medical care. I had to learn about real estate to sell her condo so she would have the funds to move into Assisted Living. Now she is happy in her new apartment home and enjoying activities with many new friends.”

For Sheryl, Elder Services of Worcester Area has been more than a resource—it's been a lifeline. “They've helped me feel informed, cared for, and not alone,” she says. “I've recommended Blue Cross and Elder Services to others because they've truly made a difference in my life—especially when I needed it most.”



**“I HAD A PH.D. IN PSYCHOLOGY
AND WORKED IN HOSPITALS
WITH REHAB TEAMS... NOW I’VE
EXPERIENCED BOTH SIDES—
PROVIDING CARE AND
RECEIVING IT”**

JOHN HAMILTON'S STORY OF RENEWAL

From corporate success to community service, John Hamilton's life is a testament to resilience—and the power of finding purpose in unexpected places. A Scottish immigrant, John pursued his education at Worcester State University before building a career in retail management with Reebok International, and eventually working in time management and training with Franklin Covey.

But life shifted dramatically when his father was diagnosed with serious health conditions. John returned to Worcester, taking on flexible jobs to accommodate his caregiving responsibilities. He worked at Walmart and eventually in beer distribution—roles that offered adaptability but not the permanence he sought. Then came the pandemic, disrupting operations and forcing John to reevaluate everything.

In the midst of global uncertainty, John turned to something deeply rooted in family tradition: stonemasonry and monument restoration. It was grounding work, but as his personal life unraveled—his relationship ended, his health declined, and he could no longer perform the physical labor—he found himself at a crossroads. “I wasn't sure where I was going to go. What am I going to do?” he recalls. With a touch of humor, he explains that normally people experience one of three big changes in life: “a change in relationship, a change in career, and a change in residence.”

In a moment of reconnection, John found refuge at Saint Francis & Therese Catholic Worker, thanks to the owners Scott and Claire. It wasn't just a place to stay—it was a place to grow. “There was a woman from Ecuador, a guy from India, I was from Scotland, another guy from Morocco... it was constantly different cultures coming and going.” The environment, though structured, offered him a sense of spiritual and emotional renewal. “Even if it was just something simple like cleaning the bathroom... I felt like I could make a daily difference.”

Still, the longing for a space of his own—a place of stability and privacy—remained. A visit to the Worcester Public Library led him to Elder Services of Worcester Area, where he connected with the Options Counseling program. With the help of his counselor, John navigated housing applications and was simply awaiting an opening, on extensive waiting lists.

Just as he was settling into this new chapter, life threw another curveball: prostate cancer. While undergoing treatment, he was finally accepted into his new housing opportunity, and after moving into his new home, ESWA coordinated with Fresh Start to help furnish his apartment. “I previously left everything—the car, the house, the furniture. And now I'm sitting back in my own place, with help through Fresh Start, and I feel like I can breathe again.”

Today, John volunteers with WCUW 91.3fm CommUNITY Radio, the Unknown Undertakers, Worcester Green Corps, "ipickupworcesterlitterverywell", and is an avid E-Bike advocate with MassBike. He continues to support The Catholic Worker and remains a passionate advocate for ESWA, offering heartfelt advice to others: “Trust me. Depending on your circumstances, they can steer you in the right direction,” and “All the Best,” as he always likes to end a conversation—just like his Dad.



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SONDRA PADOW'S STORY OF RECOVERY WITH MEALS ON WHEELS

A proud Southern Belle from Richmond, Virginia, Sondra came to Boston to further her education. After earning three degrees from Boston University, she dedicated the next fifty years to a career as a rehabilitation counselor and case manager—working in a psychiatric hospital, a sheltered workshop, insurance rehabilitation, and private practice. Her clients included children and adults with severe physical disabilities or emotional challenges, and later in her career, she expanded her work to include older adults. Sondra's commitment to older adults led her to the Board of Directors at Elder Services of the Worcester Area (ESWA), where she served for seven years, attending monthly meetings and learning firsthand about the organization's impactful work. She never expected that one day she would benefit personally from its services.

Following major knee replacement surgery, she spent three days in the hospital and two weeks in a rehabilitation facility before returning home with Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) services. Recovery was difficult: pain persisted despite medication, and basic tasks like cooking or driving were out of reach due to exhaustion and limited mobility.

“Standing to prepare a meal would not have been physically possible,” she explained. Although she had prepared and frozen meals before surgery, “my needs for protein for healing were higher than I anticipated.” That's when Meals on Wheels from Elder Services of the Worcester Area became a vital part of her healing journey.

Each day, a warm and nourishing meal arrived at her door, delivered by a Meals on Wheels driver whose presence brought comfort and connection. The consistency and care behind each delivery became a meaningful part of her recovery.

“Their meals have been tasty and nutritious, delivered to my door in a timely manner by a friendly volunteer. It has been such a blessing to know that a main meal is coming...”

When she mentioned to the program coordinator that she was beginning outpatient physical therapy, she was encouraged to continue receiving meals to conserve her energy for healing rather than shopping and cooking.

Now, Sondra is gradually getting her life back. She has returned to her Tai Chi classes, is looking forward to the Shir Joy Chorus resuming rehearsals, and can often be found in the YMCA pool, attending WISE (Worcester Institute for Senior Education) Zoom classes, or walking her dog, Bella. At home, she enjoys playing with her cat, Benjamin, reading, watching NCIS, and staying active in her community.

She continues to serve on committees at WISE and in her religious congregation, attends two meditation groups each week, and is still participating in formal physical therapy. Life is busy—and full of gratitude. Having once helped guide Elder Services of the Worcester Area as a board member, Sondra now experiences its mission from a new perspective—as a recipient of its care. Her journey reflects the heart of ESWA: empowering older adults to live with dignity, independence, and connection, whether they are leading the way or receiving support along the path.

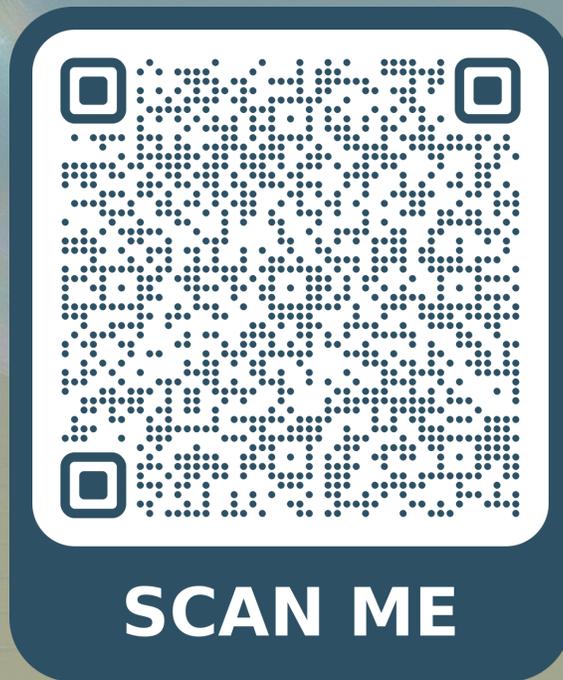


**“IT HAS BEEN SUCH A
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