



*The Florida Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
Innovation Exchange*

Submission Form

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Date of Submission:	May 17, 2006
Title of Innovation:	Low Vision Support Group
Topic for Submission: (Please choose a topic from the list included in the attached submission guidelines which best describes the innovation you are submitting.)	Topic: Quality of Life
Audience: (Choose one or more, as appropriate.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HUD Housing Communities <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Retirement Communities (CCRC or fee for Service) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assisted Living Facilities <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nursing Homes

1. **Description of Innovation:** Please succinctly describe the innovative program or service, creative idea or best practice and the resulting benefits to your organization or the consumers you serve. Limit the narrative to 3 pages, excluding attachments such as forms.

The suggestion for a Low Vision Support Group first came from the Resident's health Committee 6 years ago. The Committee noted that more than ten percent of the population over sixty five had visual disability. Most visual loss, at this stage of life, was due to Macular Degeneration, Glaucoma or Diabetic Retinopathy.

On April 7, 2000, thirty-one residents came together for the first time to explore the idea of organizing a Low Vision Support Group. Since that time, the group has held ten monthly meetings each year. The most recent meeting was enthusiastically attended by forty residents. The sessions are divided into two parts. The first encourages sharing information, support and discussion of problems. In the second part, leading professionals are invited to speak. The group has heard physicians, educators, technologists, nutritionists and other specialists with interests in the medical, sociological and psychological problems that accompany visual

disabilities.

It became evident that there were many visual problems but few rehabilitation programs available, especially since the mobility of many persons in the group are hampered by not being able to drive. A small planning group decided to develop a Low Vision Resource Center equipped with new and existing technologies. The focal point of this resource center is a landmark computer system that can read and speak printed matter. Other points of interest include a library with related resource materials which can be read with the help of a special magnifying light and an audio book library is planned in the future. In another area of the center, a volunteer contributes special hours in the week to read documents and letters for persons who cannot read their mail.

Much of this has been made possible by a generous \$10,000 grant from the John McGovern Foundation. Plymouth Harbor management gave permission for the Resource Center to use space in the Assisted Living Facility. The job of choosing and purchasing the computer system and making it operational has been made possible by generous and skilled resident volunteers and Plymouth Harbor staff members. A professional computer instructor has been engaged. Thirteen low vision students have enrolled to learn how to use the computer to assist them in reading, writing, and searching the internet. New skills were taught in weekly classes. A guide for helping people who are visually impaired was published.

Through these monthly sessions of the Low Vision Support Group, trust and confidence grew to the point where the members have been able to share freely their suggestions for improving the health and happiness of the low vision segment of the Plymouth Harbor population. The program seems to attract applicants for admission to Plymouth Harbor. It is believed that this is a creative and innovative model of which Plymouth Harbor can be proud.

Since its inception approximately 70 programs designed to rehabilitate residents with low vision have been presented. Health professionals including physicians, optometrists, physical therapists and psychologists have provided support for the program without charge. Many residents now use their own computers to amplify images and some use voice recognition to dictate letters and to have printed materials read aloud to them by computer. The quality of life has been enhanced significantly.

2. **Budget:** Provide information about the annual budget or total cost of your innovation (if a one-time expense) and the number of staff or volunteers used to implement it. If your innovation did not require a budget or staff, please indicate.

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