

AUGUST JACKSON
Senior Corps Virtual Conference
Dr. Erwn Tan Footage

DR. TAN: So now we're going to talk about the senior corps evaluations and the senior corps surveys. For me this is a really exciting prospect. We're about to embark on two years of planned studies that will lay the ground work for future studies as well, and the goal is to lay the evidence basis for all three programs, the evidence basis for the impact of senior corps, and the evidence basis for the value of volunteering, the health benefits of being a volunteer when you're 55 and older. Now, there are four studies that we've planned right now, and there are some feature studies that we're preparing for, and so what I'm going to do is walk through the four studies and talk about the future as well.

So study number one is a senior companion program, independent living performance measure survey. In our independent living sessions here at this conference we've talked about a mandatory performance measure instrument, a survey for the senior companion program. This survey is designed to measure the impact that senior companions have on the clients they serve or the caregivers who are supported through our care mission. This survey asks ten to eleven questions, mostly about social ties and perceived social support. We know that social ties and perceived social support are things that influence a client's or caregivers health. We're asking all of our senior

companion programs to have their senior companions give these surveys to their clients and the caregivers. We're asking all our senior companion grantees to then report this data back to the agency. As part of this study we're going to go back to a few of our grantees and ask you how was this data collected, did you have any difficulty with this, and the goal is for us to create better technical assistance and training for the implementation of this survey in the future.

Study number two, the foster grandparent program and senior companion program volunteer study. This study seeks to evaluate the health benefits of volunteering as an FGP or SCP volunteer. It's a survey that we'll be asking every FGP and SCP volunteer to fill out. We'll record those results and compare all our volunteers in these two programs to a similar population of Americans who are 55 and older. So we're asking very specific questions so that we can compare these two groups, and we hope to use multi varied analysis, which is a statistical analysis that allows us to compare similar groups of people to each other. We're seeking to explore the health benefits of volunteering. Now we know that Americans, older Americans who volunteer live longer and have other health benefits. We think this is because of volunteering. We believe that one of the ways that volunteering helps your health is

through self advocacy; this belief that you can do the things you need to do or want to do in life. We also believe that being an FGP or SCP volunteer helps your self advocacy, and this survey will really measure is the self advocacy of volunteers FGP or SCP the same or better than a similar group of Americans. This then lays the ground work for a future study I'll be talking about later, where we're going to use quasi experimental design to ask is there a causal link potentially between being an FGP or SCP volunteer and these proposed health benefits.

Study number three is a senior companion program, independent living pilot. In this study we'll be asking a random sample for our senior companion program projects to work with us so we can ask their clients a group of questions. I will take the results of these questions to compare the clients to a similar group of older Americans who are also receiving services. Now, if this is feasible, we'd like to, in the future, to do a larger study, to look at the causal link between being a senior companion client and health benefits, in particular, perceive social support and social ties. We know that these factors influence someone's health, and we believe that receiving the services of a senior companion can improve social ties and perceive social support, but we have to prove it and that's what that future study would be about.

Study number four, evaluating RSVP. I want to assure you that we have not forgotten about RSVP. When we started this research process about several months ago, we put some of our surveys on the federal register to ask for public comment, and we've received a lot of comments from RSVP project directors. Some of them were concerned about the burden of engaging in this research process. So we read those comments, we listened, and we're taking a step back and we'll be engaging with some RSVP project directors as part of a working group where we can ask what's the best way to study independent living in RSVP, how do we best measure the health benefits of being an RSVP volunteer. We hope to start this study some time in the middle of 2013 and finish it some time in the middle of 2014. So you'll be hearing more about study number four and evaluation of RSVP soon.

Study number five are our plans for future research. What we've described in these five studies is a research agenda for senior corps that takes us beyond the next couple years and asks are there health benefits to being involved with senior corps. We're looking to doing some logical studies. A logical study would be where we would interview a client before they became a client or a volunteer just as they were starting. We would then follow these individuals over time and then compare the results of

these surveys to a similar population of Americans. The goal is to see if there's a causal link to being a client or being a volunteer and future health outcomes. Now, we've always believed there were health benefits to being involved with senior corps. Our research agenda for the next few years will actually try to back that up with evidence.

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