

Improving Resident Care and Future Operating Success Three Pillars Senior Living Communities, WI

Background

Three Pillars Senior Living Communities (Three Pillars) in Dousman and Cecil, Wisconsin, has been serving older adults for more than 100 years through independent living, assisted living, memory care, rehabilitation, and skilled nursing. Sponsored by the Masonic Fraternity, Three Pillars is dedicated to meeting the social, physical, and spiritual needs of seniors through high-quality housing and services.

While consistently mission focused, it became apparent in recent years the organization needed to evaluate its operations, programs, and financial performance to ensure ongoing efficiency and effectiveness. Evolving payment and other market pressures have resulted in Three Pillars increasing its financial dependence on charitable donations from the Wisconsin Masonic Foundation. The Wisconsin Masonic Benevolent Activities Board (WMBAB) is the umbrella corporation that oversees all charitable activities of the organization. The WMBAB sought out Health Dimensions Group (HDG) to assess Three Pillars' operations against industry benchmarks and best practices in an effort to improve operating results and help sustain its charitable mission.

We recently spoke with L. Arby Humphrey, Grand Master, Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons of Wisconsin, regarding the operational challenges facing Three Pillars and how HDG helped to guide future decision making.



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L. Arby Humphrey, Grand Master
Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons of
Wisconsin

Interview

Health Dimensions Group (HDG): Three Pillars is a unique organization with an important mission. How do you describe Three Pillars?

Arby Humphrey (AH): Three Pillars, a senior living community sponsored by the Masonic Fraternity in Wisconsin, is grounded in our Masonic principles. So, I think it's important that you understand the Freemasons as a fraternal organization. The Freemasons were founded as a fraternity over 300 years ago; here in Wisconsin our fraternity was chartered under the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons about 174 years ago. In the early 1900s, about 60 years after we were chartered as a fraternity in Wisconsin, we saw the need for a Masonic home to care for elderly and indigent Masons, their wives, and families.

We established the home with an endowment and the gift of a farm in Dousman. From that time we have grown into a charitable organization providing the continuum of senior living care in two locations. We serve statewide fraternity enrollees and their families as well as non-Masonic community residents.

HDG: What led you to seek out Health Dimensions Group for this project?

AH: The Wisconsin Masonic Benevolent Activities Board (WMBAB) oversees all charitable activities for Wisconsin Freemasons, including Three Pillars. The WMBAB selects the Wisconsin Masonic Home Board to oversee Three Pillars' operations. While we have very highly talented and capable business people on both boards, we have very few people who have a real technical background in this ever-changing and evolving business of senior living and health care.

The business is becoming increasingly complex and there's a lot of government oversight. I think everybody is familiar with the challenges in the business. As Masons, our first concern is to provide high-quality care; however, our operating debt has continued to increase and we've used charitable endowment funds to make up the deficit. We looked for a third party to provide us an outside view of our operations, take an in-depth look at how we can improve the operating deficit, and give us some knowledge and background as we look to the future of senior living and health care.

HDG: What were your objectives for this partnership with HDG?

AH: We wanted to identify the root cause of the challenges, limiting factors, and operating deficit in depth, including government oversight, regulations, and high management and staff turnover rates. We also wanted strategic recommendations as we look toward the future.

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HDG: How are some of the challenges Three Pillars is facing unique to Three Pillars as a rural provider?

AH: Really unique to Three Pillars is our Masonic organization. We have members across the state, and while we are a charity, we are also a fraternity. We have to keep both in mind and balance charity and service to our members. Usually when people go to a home like Three Pillars they want to be close to their family members. While Three Pillars is located in two small communities in Wisconsin, we have members located across the state, and we provide charity to people across the state and even outside of our state.

What is also unique to Three Pillars is we're trying to look beyond the borders and boundaries of bricks and mortar to how we can serve people in today's world. For example, we are looking to help people live better at home and reaching out with partnerships with other facilities to serve people across the state, not just in a certain area.

HDG: What did you learn from this assessment and what were some of the key results of the work together?

AH: HDG confirmed we have a very high-quality and well-run operation. They also confirmed that while we have a healthy endowment, it is not all needed to support Three Pillars' operations. We have the ability and the financing to reach out and do some other things. Our question will be: How do we expand into this business, or should we do something different to provide those charitable means to the rest of the senior living community?

HDG also helped us to better understand the turnover rate on our management team. We learned that our executive management team has to do a better job communicating with mid-level and higher-level managers, particularly between operations of each level of care, or communications get a little fractured overall. We also learned that we need to do a far better job of marketing and communicating what our Cecil location has to offer and to reach out beyond the boundaries of just that area.

Finally, HDG recommended we implement preparatory surveys due to the more complex regulatory environment.

HDG: How would you describe the working relationship with HDG?

AH: Everybody was excellent to work with, and if we had concerns, HDG was very receptive to us and our needs. They were able to adjust and focus as we needed them to; we were very happy with that.

About HDG

As one of the country's leading full-service post-acute and senior services management and consulting firms, Health Dimensions Group partners with clients to deliver solutions that help solve their most complicated needs.

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