

# Illinois SMP Volunteer Voice

## Introducing Our New SMP Volunteer Specialist: Bailey Huffman



Bailey Huffman began working with AgeOptions in September of 2013 through the Illinois Public Health Association's AmeriCorps Program. Bailey worked closely with the Take Charge of Your Health (also known as the Chronic Disease Self-Management) program and was trained as a Stanford Master Trainer. While working with health promotion, Bailey also expanded her knowledge and experience in the field of aging, and has since been involved in multiple roles with AgeOptions, including working

with our Information and Assistance team and our Benefits Access team, which connects older adults and people with disabilities with public benefits. Through these experiences, Bailey received training on Medicare and Medicaid policies. Bailey is excited to start a new chapter at AgeOptions working with SMP because she is passionate and strongly believes in empowerment of older adults through education and information.

Bailey has a bachelor's degree in psychology and worked her way through school as a pharmacy technician in Milwaukee (her hometown). She moved to Oak Park, Illinois, for her position with AmeriCorps, and she loves the neighborhood. While she usually spends her free time cooking, reading and seeing the city, she is currently busy with a newly adopted puppy.

Bailey looks forward to working with all of the volunteers who are the backbone of the SMP program. You can reach her at AgeOptions at (800)699-9043 or via email at [bailey.huffman@ageoptions.org](mailto:bailey.huffman@ageoptions.org).

### AgeOptions and the Illinois SMP Program

**AgeOptions**, the Area Agency on Aging of suburban Cook County, coordinates the SMP (Senior Medicare Patrol) Program for the state of Illinois. AgeOptions and our partner agencies are funded by the U.S. Administration on Aging to provide outreach and education on health care fraud through the SMP program. For more information about the Illinois SMP Program, contact AgeOptions at (800)699-9043 or visit our SMP website: [www.illinoissmp.org](http://www.illinoissmp.org).



Connecting Older Adults with  
Community-based Resources and Options



## Winter 2015

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### IL SMP Staff:

**Jason Echols**  
Health Care Consumer  
Protection Coordinator

**Peg Tully**  
Health Care Fraud  
Information Specialist

**Bailey Huffman**  
SMP Volunteer &  
Benefits Access  
Specialist

## Volunteer Spotlight: Michael Williams, Northeastern Illinois AAA

by Jim Sullivan, SMP Volunteer



Michael Williams is a poet. He has published two books of poetry.

Maybe it is the careful use of language and the efficiency of poetry writing that also drew Michael to the SMP program. Good communication skills are essential to teaching Medicare beneficiaries about the fraud, waste and abuse in the system.

Of course, it could also be Michael's background working 20 years as a special agent in the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for multiple agencies. Before his retirement in 2007, Michael worked in the U.S. Treasury Department's OIG, the Internal Revenue Service's OIG, and the Department of Labor's OIG. Michael points out that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) OIG, which works with SMP, is not the only OIG. In fact, almost every federal government agency has an OIG to ferret out waste, fraud and abuse in various federal programs.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is a part of HHS. It is

responsible for, among other federal health programs, running Medicare and Medicaid. The OIG at HHS was established in 1976 and targets Medicare and Medicaid fraud, waste and abuse. The office is responsible not only for Medicare and Medicaid, but also more than 300 other HHS programs.

I asked Michael where he fits in as an SMP volunteer. He explained that SMP volunteers are an important part of the larger OIG efforts at CMS.

After spending most of his federal government career on the east coast, Michael and his wife of 25 years, Karen, moved back to the Chicago area after his retirement. In Chicago, they are surrounded by Karen's large family. While Michael grew up in Detroit, Karen grew up in the Chicago area. She comes from a family of 11 children (7 girls and 4 boys), many of whom remain in the Chicago. In addition to spending time with Karen, Michael enjoys writing poetry, photography and reading.

After retirement, Michael became a member of the Advisory Council for the Northeastern Illinois Area Agency on Aging (NEIL). In addition to serving on the Advisory Council, Michael wanted to get more involved with NEIL's programs and services. When he considered his options as to how he could best serve as a volunteer, Michael chose the Senior Medicare Patrol as the best fit, given his background. Michael went through the standard SMP training and frequently attends AgeOptions conferences in addition to giving SMP presentations.

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## Volunteer Spotlight: Michael Williams, Northeastern Illinois AAA

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As an SMP volunteer, Michael gives fraud awareness presentations to consumers in Will County. He also attends senior fairs/expos and provides information at tables there.

In addition to working with the SMP program, Michael is also active in the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE). He is currently appointed as a NARFE Division Coordinator.

Michael feels he made the correct choice in volunteering with SMP. He enjoys educating beneficiaries about Medicare and increasing their awareness of fraud.

Michael points out that in addition to his investigative background, he has years of experience giving presentations and briefings at various governmental agencies and has even testified before Congress. This experience comes in handy when he does SMP presentations. In addition to the presentations, he also enjoys attending senior fairs and still does some presentations to government agencies.

Michael has advice for other SMP volunteers nervous about giving presentations: "If you don't know an answer to a question, admit it and promise to get back to the questioner."

The following is a poem written by Michael Williams, Illinois SMP Volunteer. Michael has published two works of poetry, both of which were written during milestones in his life and draw from his faith and Christian beliefs.

### **Laughter: The Music of the Soul**

*A joyful heart brings a smile to our faces.*

*A pleasant encounter brings happiness to our thoughts.*

*A tender touch or warm embrace excites our senses, and*

*A moment of quiet provides rest and calm.*

*Amidst these expressions, we rejoice!*

*Our hearts swell up with joy and*

*Our cups overflow with the wine of merriment.*

*Indeed these expressions provide a touch of tenderness.*

*So needed in a bustling and hurried society*

*However, the constant exposure to killing, robbing,*

*Mugging*

*And the like, crushes our spirits of optimism*

*And damages our fragile thinking.*

*Thereby polluting our minds with garbage.*

*As time moves on, laughter,*

*That jewel of priceless gaiety, is lost, and,*

*Our souls have no music*

*To caress the beautiful lyrics*

*Found in life.*

## **A Peggy Education: Tips and Advice from the Illinois SMP Program's Expert Hotline Counselor**

**by Jim Sullivan, SMP Volunteer**



In discussing her work as a Health Care and Fraud Information Specialist at AgeOptions, Peggy Tully describes the Medicare Summary Notice (MSN) as very close to her heart and encourages Medicare beneficiaries to carefully scrutinize the document as the best way to uncover fraudulent charges. The source of her wise advice? She recalls that growing up her mother taught her to scrutinize every bill she received *very* carefully for the same purpose – to find errors and fraudulent charges. Imagine Peggy's surprise when she found out that her mother never reads, much less "scrutinizes" her own MSN. "The woman who taught me to scrutinize every bill never reads her own MSN!"

But Peggy knows that her mother is not unusual – the vast majority of Medicare beneficiaries do not read their MSN. Peggy's best advice for SMP volunteers? Encourage seminar attendees to scrutinize their MSN carefully. She knows from personal experience that such advice is not always followed, but we should still repeat it often. Sometimes it just takes a little repetition for someone to heed important advice.

### Statewide SMP Hotline: A Resource for SMP Volunteers

Peggy is the Health Care & Fraud Information Specialist at SMP. She is a valuable resource for volunteers and Medicare beneficiaries. Volunteers delivering a seminar who are stumped by a question asked by an attendee or who believe a question pushes them beyond their role can provide the AgeOptions phone number, (800)699-9043. Once connected, the caller should ask for SMP, and Peggy or one of the other SMP staff members will take the call. Peggy is there to answer more in depth or personal questions that a volunteer is not expected to answer.

### SMP Hotline Call Trends

Many of Peggy's calls lately have involved home health fraud. These cases usually begin with an unsolicited phone call. The caller gives the name of his/her company, which often has a name that sounds *like* Medicare. (They probably want to give the impression of actually being from Medicare or closely associated with it.) The caller will ask if the Medicare beneficiary needs a monthly home visit from a doctor or nurse. Could they use some free house cleaning? (*Who wouldn't* want some free house cleaning?) What about a scooter, knee brace or wheelchair to help with mobility? The caller says that s/he knows how to get these services and equipment free from Medicare. All the beneficiary needs to do is to provide (you guessed it) their Medicare claim number and some other personal financial information and, like magic, the benefit will be provided.

This type of unsolicited sales call, according to Peggy, should immediately raise questions in the mind of the beneficiary. (You know the old saying, if something sounds too good to be true...) Yes, many of the benefits the caller lists are available from Medicare. But the beneficiary should **never**

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## **A Peggy Education: Tips and Advice from the Illinois SMP Program's Expert Hotline Counselor**

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give his or her information over the phone, especially their Social Security number, their Medicare number or checking account information. **“Tell beneficiaries they don’t have to be polite, just hang up,”** Peggy says. When it comes to securing these benefits, beneficiaries should always work with their established doctor.

Phone calls are not the only way fraudsters approach Medicare beneficiaries. These scams may also occur at a health fair or a senior fair. Amid the many legitimate, honest providers that purchase booths at these events, there are a few (fortunately *very few*) ‘bad eggs.’

Peggy reminds volunteers and beneficiaries that **many pieces of durable medical equipment (DME) can only be ordered every few (usually five) years.** If a fraudster gets hold of a Medicare number and uses it to “purchase” a piece of DME, that beneficiary would be prevented from receiving the same piece of equipment for several years – unless s/he can prove the fraud. Proving fraud may be successful in the end, but may take several years and a lot of time and frustration.

Therefore, Peggy urges beneficiaries to work only with Medicare-approved health care professionals and DME vendors. To find a doctor, hospital, DME provider or other provider who accepts Medicare, use Medicare’s provider finder tool at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

### The Importance of Being on Guard

The price of freedom from Medicare fraud is constant vigilance (which includes, of course, scrutinizing the MSN). Peggy warns beneficiaries to: “always know your providers; work with your doctor; ask for referrals to other providers or suppliers; check references; and never work with a health care or DME provider that came to you solely through an unsolicited sales call. If in doubt, call your doctor’s office and ask if they are familiar with a certain provider. Ask your regular doctor if he or she thinks you would be eligible for Medicare home health care.”

### Advice for SMP Volunteers

Tell beneficiaries to: Ask! Ask! Ask! (and Ask! again).

Peggy advises that SMP volunteers should listen carefully to what the beneficiary is telling them, and use their SMP training in deciding how to respond. For example, if they tell you they are receiving home health care, you don’t need to provide individual counseling or guidance, but you can repeat the general rules regarding who is entitled to Medicare home health care. This approach may simply raise more issues and questions with the beneficiaries which is exactly what it is supposed to do. If it does, have the beneficiary call AgeOptions at (800)699-9043, so that Peggy or one of the other staff members at SMP can provide more in-depth assistance on their particular case.



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# Last Year in Illinois...

*Between October 2013 and September 2014...*



**55** SMP Volunteers contributed

**1,153** hours of service to the Illinois SMP program



1,153 hours = **\$27,764**  
of in-kind work!



Together, SMP staff and volunteers educated

**31,539 people**



through presentations, community outreach events, and one-on-one counseling

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## THANK YOU

*for your service to the SMP Program!*



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The mission of Illinois SMP is to empower Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries to prevent, detect and report error, fraud and abuse in the Medicare and Medicaid programs through community outreach and education.



1048 Lake Street, Suite 300  
Oak Park, Illinois 60301  
Phone: (800)699-9043  
Fax: (708)524-0870  
[www.ageoptions.org](http://www.ageoptions.org)