



Connecting Older Adults with Community-based Resources and Options

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November is National Family Caregivers Month

South Suburban Family Caregivers Find Help and Hope Through AgeOptions Caring Together, Living Better Program

Life has been a series of struggles for Ruby Frazier of Calumet City since her husband had a stroke in 1982. At first he could walk around the house, but the challenge of caring for him increased dramatically when he lost mobility because of a hip fracture in January 2010.

Mrs. Frazier's caregiving situation became more difficult after the loss of her son, who would help with tasks such as shaving his father.

In March, things got even worse when she lost her job because of the demands of her caregiving responsibilities.

"I was depressed," she says. "I felt like no one cared about what happened to me as long as I kept caring for my husband." As 30 years of caregiving consumed her life, she wasn't even eating or bathing regularly.

Knowing she needed assistance, Mrs. Frazier called Catholic Charities South Suburban Senior Services, where specialists assessed her situation and referred her to the Caring Together, Living Better program at Covenant United Church of Christ in South Holland. Caring Together, Living Better is a partnership-based program to support caregivers in the south suburbs of Chicago that is funded in part by a grant to AgeOptions from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation.

Covenant is one of eight south suburban faith-based and community organizations partnering with AgeOptions to provide services to relieve the responsibilities and stress that family caregivers experience. Volunteer-based services include meal delivery, in-home and onsite respite care, transportation, support groups and educational workshops.

Mrs. Frazier receives weekly visits from Dorinda Robinson and the Rev. Wayne Cunningham, Caring Together, Living Better project leaders at Covenant. They provide encouragement, link her to other community resources and even do Bible study.

Mrs. Frazier is planning to start attending the church's support group for caregivers, and said she may accept respite care, in which a volunteer would stay with her husband for short periods to give her a break.

She said Covenant's services have boosted her morale, and that Mrs. Robinson and Rev. Cunningham feel like "long lost family friends."

"I feel like a new person," she said. "I now feel like I have a purpose beyond caring for my husband."

Mrs. Frazier is one of an estimated 61.6 million family caregivers of older adults nationwide, including 1,660,000 in Illinois.

A proclamation by Governor Pat Quinn declared November to be Illinois Family Caregivers Month. The Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging, which includes AgeOptions, advocated for the proclamation, which "honor(s) Illinoisans caring for older adults who are no longer able to care for themselves, and grandparents and other relatives raising children...."

Included in the proclamation are facts and figures about caregiving, including the financial, physical and emotional cost to caregivers, the economic value of caregiving, and the cost to U.S. businesses of lost productivity. Click here to see the proclamation:

<http://www.ageoptions.org/newsandviews/documents/CaregiversMonthproclamation.pdf>

Those statistics and more are also available on the National Family Caregivers Association website:

http://www.nfcacares.org/who_are_family_caregivers/care_giving_statistics.cfm.

AgeOptions and its network of community agencies are the principal source of information regarding senior services in suburban Cook County, Ill. A nonprofit organization located in Oak Park, AgeOptions has served the older adults of suburban Cook County and their caregivers as an Area Agency on Aging since 1974. For more information, please visit the Agency website at www.ageoptions.org.

AgeOptions connects adults age 60 and over with resources and service options so they can live their lives to the fullest and remain in their homes as long as possible. In 2010 we met the needs of more than 198,500 individuals in 130 communities within 30 townships that have a diverse population of 460,000 older adults. AgeOptions advocates, plans, develops and funds programs and coordinates a network of community-based senior service agencies to ensure an effective and efficient system of service delivery. Support is provided through the Older Americans Act, Illinois General Revenue Funds, local funds and individual contributions.