



Connecting Older Adults with Community-based Resources and Options

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Volunteers Assist South Suburban Residents Caring for Older Adults

Residents of Chicago's near south suburbs who care for older family members will have a chance to take breaks from their caregiving responsibilities, thanks to volunteers who are mostly older adults themselves.

The new AgeOptions Legacy Corps respite program aims to not only reduce stress for caregivers, but provide an opportunity for civic engagement among older adults.

Volunteers commit to providing about 450 hours of respite care a year (approximately 10 to 12 hours a week), and receive a small stipend to offset the costs of volunteering. After completing extensive training, the Legacy Corps volunteer stays with the older loved one for a few hours so that the family caregiver can have some time away from his or her caregiving duties. Caregivers can go shopping, attend church, visit friends and family and, most importantly, have a break from the stress of caregiving.

AgeOptions received a grant for the Legacy Corps volunteer respite program, which is funded by the corporation for National and Community Service and administered by the University of Maryland. Part of AmeriCorps, Legacy Corps is designed to match older adult volunteers (75 percent must be over 50) with families caring for older adults. Legacy Corps has been in existence about 10 years and has nearly 600 volunteers at 19 sites nationwide. Evaluations of the program have shown that volunteers become more involved in their communities after participating in the program, and that it also reduces stress among caregivers.

The Legacy Corps grant supports the activities of AgeOptions' successful Caring Together, Living Better caregiver support program. In that program, which started in November 2009, churches and community organizations in the largely African-American communities of the near south suburbs offer volunteer-based caregiver support services such as respite care, transportation and friendly visiting to assist members of their communities who care for older adults.

Caring Together, Living Better partners hosting Legacy volunteers include Valley Kingdom Community Development, Victory Christian Assembly Baptist Church, Bethel AME Church and the City of Blue Island.

Caring Together, Living Better is funded in part by a grant to AgeOptions from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, which also provides some funding for the local Legacy Corps program.

Information for volunteers and caregivers

The first group of Legacy Corps volunteers has completed training, and there are spaces for a few more. Volunteers receive a small living allowance to help with gas and other costs of volunteering, as well as an

education award once they successfully complete their year of service. Legacy members over 55 can choose to transfer the education award to a child or grandchild.

Potential volunteers -- and caregivers who would like to receive volunteer assistance -- are encouraged to call AgeOptions for information. Please call Sarah Stein at (708)383-0258 or Katrina Garrett at (708)271-6251.

AgeOptions is a nonprofit organization located in Oak Park, IL, that 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. As the Area Agency on Aging, AgeOptions serves suburban Cook County, which includes 130 communities within 30 townships and a diverse population of 460,000 older adults. **AgeOptions**, a nonprofit organization, 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 is available. In fiscal year 2009, AgeOptions distributed \$12,641,000 to these agencies. Support is provided through the Older Americans Act, Illinois General Revenue Funds, local funds and individual contributions. **AgeOptions** and its network of agencies are the principal source of information regarding senior services in suburban Cook County.