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January 2021

Client Stories: How AgeOptions and Our Partners Help Older Adults and Caregivers

Every day, older adults and caregivers call AgeOptions and our partner agencies throughout suburban Cook County for assistance with challenges such as access to food, financial crises, caregiver stress, Medicare enrollment and many more that affect their ability to thrive as they age. Below, dedicated staff members at AgeOptions and our partners share some recent experiences assisting members of the community.

Helping a Caregiver Confront Stress

Amanda Wojan, AgeOptions Caregiver Programs coordinator, facilitated a Stress Busting for Family Caregivers program with Catholic Charities South Suburban Senior Services. Amanda said one of the participants became very emotional during the second week as she had an important breakthrough. She explained that participating in the class helped her to recognize her stress and feel connected to other caregivers she can relate to. "It's great to see the work we do positively impacting the day-to-day lives of family caregivers, especially when added stress from a global pandemic is taking a toll on their physical and mental well-being on top of normal caregiver stressors," Amanda said.

Meeting Increasing Needs

Sue Ernst, site coordinator of Bremen Township Senior Café, shared a note from a café participant who had lost her husband at the same time her own needs were increasing. This is what she wrote:

"Today Amanda called me from PLOWS (Council on Aging). She was so nice. I only needed to answer a few questions, and my meals start on Wednesday! In addition, I'm entitled to 15 hours

of home help a week (and I need it, I am in a lot of pain and can barely drive or use a knife to cut up food). They will also take me to doctor appointments and pick up my medicines and groceries. I can't thank you enough. My needs have greatly increased, and I am more than a little bit sad. Because we are isolated with COVID and really can't have visitors it's become hard, especially without John. I loved our conversations at the senior center and I miss my lunch buddies."

Addressing Social Isolation

Addressing social isolation is an AgeOptions priority. One way we're helping older adults stay engaged is through Uniper, a social engagement platform with live and recorded programming they can access through a television or mobile device. Uniper proved to be ideal for a Spanish-speaking client who we originally connected with as a Top Box food delivery recipient. We then learned that she would like to have friendly volunteer check-ins, but at the time we had no Spanish-speaking volunteers. However, Cristina Diaz, AgeOptions CARES Program specialist, stayed in touch with her and helped her access Uniper. Cristina reports the woman likes it a lot, and it's keeping her connected.

Agencies or organizations that would like to refer clients for Uniper are asked to contact Cristina Diaz at Cristina.diaz@ageoptions.org.