



Family Affairs is a newsletter of Family Services of Western Pennsylvania

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*Pictured: The front of Alice's home*

## A Home, A Castle, A Lifetime of Memories

By Lindsay Welsh, OPTIONS Care Manager

*In December 2011, Allegheny County Dept of Human Services (DHS) awarded Family Services the contract to provide OPTIONS Care Management services to senior citizens in Allegheny County. OPTIONS refers to long-term, in-home services made available through the DHS Area Agency on Aging (AAA). Persons who are 60 years of age or older may be eligible for OPTIONS long-term care services. These services are intended to provide customized support to help older adults remain in their homes and communities. Through the Care Management portion of OPTIONS, AAA will assign individuals a care manager who will work with them and their family to develop a care plan that addresses their needs, as identified by the assessment. The care manager coordinates the necessary services, which may include adult day care, home-delivered meals, personal care, chore service, home health, home companions, and respite care. Following is the experience of one care manager for Family Services and the work she has done to coordinate services for one senior citizen.*

After only two months at my position as an OPTIONS Care Manager I received a new person on my case load named Alice. Alice is a 79 year old African American woman who lives in the Hill District. She owns the home that she grew up in with her parents and sisters. I met with Alice in her home to complete the initial assessment and determine the care she will need. Prior to the meeting the only information I knew was on the intake report from the Area Agency on Aging. I knew she did not have working gas and that her home had no furnace. I knew she did not have a refrigerator and that her stove needed to be replaced. But what I didn't know is that her *only* working utility was electric, a home

was torn down next door exposing her interior wall to the elements, her home was cluttered with items from her family who had passed away, and her home had an overwhelming smell of ammonia. I also quickly observed that her floors, walls, piles of clutter and furniture were all covered in a layer of dirt and dust. The environment was clearly unsafe and unhealthy for any person.

After talking to Alice about her health, life, and situation it was hard to not feel incredibly sad and extremely overwhelmed. I also knew from our first meeting that she was a special case that would require extra time and care to build her trust. Alice is an extremely independent person who is full of pride and determination to stay alive. It is clear she has been living this way for years and, if not for the referral from the gas company, she may have not lived through this past winter.

To speak about her home is to speak of Alice's true identity. The only memories of her life are directly connected to her home and they make Alice, Alice. I have visited Alice weekly since meeting her in late August and since that day she has opened up to me more each visit. She shared with me a photo of her biological father, her sister's ashes that she keeps on an upstairs mantle and other keepsakes that she has in her home. Although the home had no functioning plumbing, heat, or water Alice chose to stay and we supported her choice and worked to keep her warm this winter and safe in her home.

The goal of the Options Care program is to give the participant the freedom to choose their own providers and remain in their homes if they

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## Agenomics: The Economic Challenges of Growing Old

We are a region growing older in an aging America. In 2009, the Bureau of the Census reported that life expectancy had hit an all time high of 78 years and, by 2015, 1 of every 5 individuals would be older than 65. Based on this observation, the average person in the near future will live at least 13 years beyond the typical retirement age and 16 years beyond the actual average retirement age. This is a fine achievement when one considers the extra decade and a half of opportunities to contribute to society and enjoy great grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

However, a significantly longer retirement than our grandparents enjoyed requires a significant nest egg to fund; and experts predict that many retirees will run out of the savings they expected when they planned for their retirement. The National Retirement Risk Index shows that half of today's households will not have enough retirement income to maintain their pre-retirement standard of

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## Economics of Aging

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living even if they work to age 65 (Munnell, et al, 2009). Even though poverty among older adults has declined significantly over the past four decades due to Social Security with its Cost of Living Adjustments and other adjustments, and with Medicare and Medicaid to help with medical costs, a sizeable number of elders live just above the poverty line (Rank and Williams, 2010). In fact, 34.6% of all people with Medicare live below 200% of the federally defined poverty line of \$10,890 for an individual (Dalin, 2011). Hope for an upward trend in income seems uncertain based on recent history as median income gains of elders over the past 40 years are slightly more than half that of people younger than 40 when measured both for couples and single people (Reno and Veghte, 2010).

These economics of aging are strategic issues affecting not only the retirees of today but also future generations who face less secure pensions, longer work lives, and political challenges to the stability of Social Security and the public financing of health care. Our understanding of these issues and our ability to address them will impact on the future of Americans as they age.

On May 3rd, Family Services will host a conference (see page 3 for conference details and registration information) that we hope will help us develop knowledge and solutions to the financial challenges we face in our golden years. Please join us. The conference committee welcomes your input on economic issues of aging most important to you ■

## A Home, A Castle, A Lifetime of Memories

*(continued from page 1)*



choose – to age in place. It is our job as care managers to help them stay safe in their homes and assist them in getting the care they need—or the care their home needs—to keep them independent. My goal was to have all of Alice’s utilities functioning and to improve the structure of her home to improve her health and well being. Although I did not have a timeline, I tried to make her my priority. It was frustrating at times but I always had to come back to the reality that it took years for the home to fall into disarray and I could not fix all the problems overnight. I did not want anyone to have a reason to condemn and demolish her home.

I began working with many providers and non profits in our region as well as utilizing the help of Family Services of Western Pennsylvania’s Helping Hand Fund. The Helping Hand Fund supplied the funds to purchase Alice a refrigerator. Catholic Charities assisted in purchasing a stove. The Urban Redevelopment Association supplied a grant to have her outdoor wall repaired. Equitable Gas supplied the parts and labor to have a heater installed in her home and Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh donated a water heater and the cost of installation. One contractor, out of the goodness of his heart, repaired her water lines to her kitchen sink and upstairs bathroom. Without the

support of Family Services and the numerous other individuals and agencies, her home would have never received the improvements it needed. Now Alice has a functioning bathroom and running water. She can store and cook food and she is warm on cold winter nights.

Alice is appreciative of the help she has received even though she isn’t outwardly vocal about it. She was so used to living without the basics that she grew comfortable with her life. Alice enjoys listening to the news on the radio, reading her Bible every morning and working on word search puzzles. She is independent and takes care of all her needs. She is quite the character sometimes. When I called to ask how her heater was working she said she was too hot! I coaxed her to take off her house coat and just wear a sweater since she was inside. She was so accustomed to wearing her coat day in and day out that it didn’t dawn on her to remove it. I have learned so much from working with Alice and we still have a long road ahead to improve her condition. I enjoy the time I spend with Alice and I can see that we’ve brightened her spirits.

Please contact the AAA SeniorLine at 412-350-5460, toll-free 1-800-344-4319, TTY 412-350-2727 or [SeniorLine@alleghenycounty.us](mailto:SeniorLine@alleghenycounty.us) to learn more about OPTIONS Care Management services ■

The **Helping Hand Fund**, mentioned in the above article, was established as the result of generous support from employees, community donations and fundraising efforts. It was established to help meet the special emergency needs that many of our consumers experience in their daily lives. **This fund is accessed only after all other resources have been explored and exhausted.** Examples of other resources would be Family Self Sufficiency monies, contingency monies, food banks, Women, Infant and Children (WIC), and other community supportive resources.

This fund is **not** for consumer field trips and outings, monthly rent and utilities, medical services and other outstanding bills. **This fund is for emergency consumer needs.** Emergency needs would include immediate physical life needs of basic food, shelter and clothing. To donate to or sponsor the Helping Hand Fund, please contact Laura Latini at [latinil@fswp.org](mailto:latinil@fswp.org) ■



# Upcoming Events

## We Are Family!

Join us on April 29th from 5:30 pm to 8:00 pm at Rizzo's Malabar Inn in Crabtree, PA, for an evening of good food, good friends and good conversation in support of Family Services Educational Assistance Initiative which helps underprivileged young people to succeed independent of social services. Meet some of the inspiring local youth pursuing their educational/vocational dreams with help from this program.

Ticket and sponsorship information is available by visiting [fswp.org](http://fswp.org) and selecting "About US", "Agency News." For additional information, please contact Julie Cawoski at 724- 837-5410 ext. 701, or via email at [cawoskij@swp.org](mailto:cawoskij@swp.org) ■



## Agonomics: A Conference to Resolve Economic Challenges of Growing Old

(See "Economics of Aging" on page 1)

**May 3, 2013**

7:30 am to 5:00 pm

(Registration begins at 7:30 am. Conference starts at 8:30 am)

Marriott City Center Hotel

112 Washington Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Please register today at [WWW.AGENOMICSCONFERENCE.ORG](http://WWW.AGENOMICSCONFERENCE.ORG)  
(Approved for five Social work CEU's)

For additional information, please contact Beth Kurcina at 412-580-3256 or via email at [bkurcina@comcast.net](mailto:bkurcina@comcast.net) ■



## Running for Laptops

The Running for Laptops (RFL) runners are gearing up for their next running adventure, at the Pittsburgh Kids Marathon and 5K (May 4th) and Half Marathon, Marathon and Marathon Relay (May 5th.)

The RFL runners run with a cause, to raise funds to purchase laptops for at-risk youth aging out of the social services system who have the desire, but not the financial means or family support network to chase their educational dreams. RFL is part of the agency's Educational Assistance Initiative for youth aging out of services.

If you'd like to run for RFL in any of the May events, register for RFL at [www.crowdrise.com](http://www.crowdrise.com), type "Running for Laptops" in the search box, click on the RFL logo, and then the Charity Registration box and select your event. Ken Lambert, founder of RFL, will then register you on the Marathon site. Learn more about RFL at [www.runningforlaptops.org](http://www.runningforlaptops.org) ■



## Time to Tee One Up!

Our 17th annual Charity Golf Classic will be held on:

**Friday, May 17th, at Green Oaks Country Club in Verona.**

Hope you can join us! Bring your mom, dad, brother, sister, business associate. Complete details and registration are available online at [fswp.org](http://fswp.org) (click on the golf ball when you get there), or by contacting Dennis Kowalski at 412-820-2050, ext. 409.

**Golf...it does a body good! ■**





Family Services of Western Pennsylvania is accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children, Inc.

Family Services of Western Pennsylvania is a non-profit organization declared tax-exempt by the federal government (under section 501 C 3 of the IRS code) and the Commonwealth of Pa. A copy of our official registration may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free from within Pennsylvania 800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement All donations to Family Services of Western Pennsylvania are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

Family Services of Western Pennsylvania receives funding from the United Way's of Allegheny, Washington and Westmoreland Counties.

## We are on the move to better serve our clients!

Over the past few months Family Services moved to two new buildings, on the outskirts of New Kensington and in Tarentum, to better meets the needs of the individuals that use our services.

The new Adolescent and Diversion and Stabilization site (top photo) is a 24 hour, short-term residential treatment facility for adolescents 12 to 17 years of age with a primary mental health diagnosis. Diversion and Stabilization enables teens to learn problem solving skills in a therapeutic group setting. The new site includes 10 private bedrooms, 3 bathrooms and 4 showers, class room, dining room, living room, laundry facilities, exercise room plus outdoor recreation on nine acres, and a full kitchen staffed by a certified cook— three meals per day and snacks.

The location in Tarentum (bottom photo) will house our new Integrated Model of Care, bringing together disciplines from across the agency under one roof to meet all the needs of our clients. This will include both mental health and primary care services.

If you would like more information on these moves, please contact the Development office at 412-820-2050 ■



Family Affairs

*Empower people to reach their full potential...*

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**Administrative Office**  
3230 William Pitt Way  
Pittsburgh, PA 15238  
412.820.2050 ph  
412.820.2060 fax  
fswp@fswp.org email  
www.fswp.org website

**Bulk Mailing Center**  
104 Beta Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15238

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
PERMIT NO. 29  
NEW KENSINGTON,  
PA 15068