



Seniors Need Help Too



Dear Friends,

As most of you know from reading my columns and from your own life experiences, getting older is not always fun, or easy. Many of us worry about having enough money after retirement to live with some semblance of dignity. Set the word "dignity" aside for the time being and let's just talk about getting older and having others understand what that means.

Elders represent 22% of Brevard County's population, whereas children represent 19%. Of my taxes, 44.6% goes to children's education while 0% goes to seniors. In addition to taxpayer money, Brevard County and its municipalities receive federal funds through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The CDBG was established by Congress in 1974 to improve the quality of life in low and moderate income areas.

So why am I am talking about this in my column? Helping Seniors asked for CDBG funds to help pay for our information specialist, who directs elderly clients to needed services. One way to qualify for CDBG funding is to provide a low/moderate limited clientele activity that benefits a specific group of people automatically presumed by HUD to be principally low/moderate income persons. Helping Seniors fulfills this requirement by serving elders. In the past nine months, we have managed nearly 450 individual cases.

Unfortunately, due to government over-management and a plethora of paperwork that must be signed by those receiving service, we have been prohibited from receiving CDBG funds. Since most of our clients are served over the phone, they circumvent the office visit precluding us getting their financial data, age, race, etc., i.e., a signed piece of paper.

I understand the need to qualify for federal funding, but are we making the qualifications too difficult? Isn't it enough that people are being helped: dentures are provided, hungry people are directed to food sources, and people existing on \$800 a month and food stamps suddenly learn about VA Aid and Attendance? Information and education are the key to empowerment, and that is what Helping Seniors and similar organizations do to help people.

The result of over-management is that seniors do not get the funding they need. We have to follow rules, but at times the rules need changing. Does it make any difference whether or not the 89 year old needing help is wealthy, of average income, poor or low income, Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, single, etc.? It shouldn't make any difference! We need to simplify. We need to develop better ways of directing information and/or funding to the elderly.

A Brevard County Aging Plan will help equalize the funding field and ensure that seniors and juniors are both treated well. It is great that United Way will help feed 2,000 children this summer, but how about the 245,000 seniors in Brevard, thousands of whom need the help described in this article? We need a community effort to help seniors and juniors, not one at the expense of the other. Seniors get hungry, lonely and depressed too!

By the way, if you would like to help Helping Seniors of Brevard, we are in fact a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that could benefit by donations and volunteers. We want to continue to help our callers who are desperately looking for help, and every penny and volunteer hour counts! Call 321-473-7770.



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Joe Steckler is the President of Helping Seniors of Brevard, a non-profit organization designed to advocate, educate, and fundraise on behalf of Brevard's senior citizens. Feel free to contact us at: info@helpingseniorsofbrevard.org or calling: 321-473-7770 ~www.helpingseniorsofbrevard.org

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