

THE ALERT

Volume 17, No. 6

November-December 2001

Grandparents Who Are Raising Grandchildren May Qualify for Cash and Other Assistance

Many older Americans, some retired and others still working, are finding themselves caring for their grandchildren.

The number of U.S. children living in homes maintained by grandparents increased by 76 per cent between 1970 and 1997.

Among reasons for the rise are death or incarceration of parents, job loss, substance abuse, family violence and illness. The majority of grandparent caregivers are women. According to researchers, grandparent caregivers are 60 per cent more likely to live in poverty than are grandparents who are not raising grandchildren.

But there is help available for struggling grandparents and older relatives caring for children.

Some benefits are dependent on the legal relationship of the relative to the child while others are available no matter the relationship. Some relationships between grandparents and their

grandchildren are informal. Others involve legal ties. They include foster care, adoption, legal custody and guardianship.

Some benefits also are dependent on the caregiver's income. Other benefits are available no matter what the household income. For instance, the

child or children may be eligible for cash assistance under the Ohio Works First or the Disability Assistance Programs no matter what the caregiver's income or resources. To receive

the latter benefit, the child does not need to be disabled. Some emergency help also may be available without regard to a working caregiver's income.

For some other benefits—such as child care assistance, food stamps and some emergency assistance—the family income is considered.

One very important benefit available for a child is full medical coverage that includes immunizations and well child visits to the doctor. Equally important

*...help is available for
struggling grandparents.*

IN THIS ISSUE

Grandparents Who Are Raising Grandchildren May Qualify for Cash and Other Assistance	1
You Can Apply Now for Heating Bill Help	2
It's Not Smart to Risk Your Low or No-Cost Loan and Your Home to Consolidate Other Debts	3
Anti-Aging Products Promise Much; Deliver Little	4
Some Information About Wills and Things	4
Senior Citizen Centers and Legal Aid Offices	5

is that some grandparents or other caregivers themselves may qualify for medical coverage under Medicaid or may be able to have their Medicare premiums paid for them.

The variety of possible financial and non-financial support available is so broad and the eligibility requirements so complicated it is hard for even the most informed caregiver to know about all of them.

It's best to ask lots of questions to find out what is available to you.

Most counties in Ohio now have a designated Kinship Navigator who can be a one-stop resource for finding out what programs are available, what the requirements are to qualify for them and where to go to apply for aid. Those Kinship Navigators also can tell you about programs available to seniors who may be caregivers to their spouses or some other person.

In Cuyahoga County, grandparents can call the office of Maridell Couture at 216-348-3978 for information and a copy of the very helpful "Grandparent & Other Kinship Caregiver Resource Guide." The Guide has information about everything from benefit programs to recreation for children. The Guide also lists documents such as birth certificates and Social Security cards which the caregiver needs to have.

In other counties, caregivers can call 1-800-755-4769 to get information about how to contact their county's Kinship Navigator. Also call that number for a copy of the state's resource guide.

The State of Ohio recently received just under \$200,000 from the U.S. Administration on Aging to improve the quality of support services for caregivers.

In addition to the financial support that is available to help caregivers and the children, counseling and respite care services are available.

Too, legal assistance is available to help grandparent caregivers. There are many legal factors to consider. For instance, a grandparent informally caring for a child may not have the legal right to make decisions about a grandchild's schooling or even to enroll him or her in school and may not have the authority to make medical decisions about the child in an emergency.

But there are many other factors to consider in deciding what legal or informal arrangement best fits a particular grandparent's circumstances.

By calling the above phone numbers, grandparents can find out about legal assistance available to help them decide.

Help also is available to persons age 60 or older through The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Senior

Helpline. To reach the Helpline, phone 216-861-5479 between 1 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Handicapped persons can call TTY 216-696-3081.

You Can Apply Now for Heating Bill Help

Applications are now open for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) and Emergency Energy Assistance Program (E-HEAP).

To be eligible for HEAP, a household must meet the following income guidelines:

Size of Household	Total Gross Household Income
1	up to \$12,885
2	up to \$17,415
3	up to \$21,945
4	up to \$26,475
5	up to \$31,005
6	up to \$35,535
7	up to \$40,065
8	up to \$44,595

Add \$4,530 per member for households with more than eight persons.

E-HEAP applicants must meet income guidelines and generally must have a disconnect notice from their utility.

To apply in Cuyahoga County, it is best to make an appointment by calling 216-589-9292. Applications can be picked up at many public places such as libraries.

For information call 1-800-282-0880 or the Council for Economic Opportunities of Greater Cleveland at 216-263-6266. You also may call 216-263-6266 to schedule a home visit if you are handicapped.

In Geauga County, call 440-285-9141

In Lake County, call 440-354-2148

In Ashtabula County, call 440-997-5957

In Lorain County, call 440-245-2009.

If your income is not low enough to qualify for HEAP or E-HEAP but you have a shut-off notice, you can have your gas or electricity turned back on by paying \$175 or the overdue amount, whichever is less, plus \$20.

It's Not Smart to Risk Your Low or No-Cost Loan and Your Home To Consolidate Other Debts

We heard recently about a senior who gave up a no-interest loan on her home in order to consolidate her other debts.

She fell victim to the television commercials and newspaper advertisements that promise you freedom from debt collectors if you only phone and sign up for a loan to consolidate your debts.

The senior did just that. She ended up with a high-interest mortgage on her house that cost her more than she was able to pay.

She lost her home.

We cannot emphasize enough that if you have a no-cost loan or a low-cost loan through your city or county it does not make sense to get a new mortgage just to put all of your debts into one basket.

If you need money to pay bills or make home improvements, and you think that refinancing or a second mortgage or a home equity loan is the answer—consider your options carefully. If you can't make the required payments on a new mortgage or loan, you could lose your home as well as the equity you've built up in it.

Don't let anyone talk you into using your home to borrow money you don't really need. **Never** let them talk you into giving up a favorable interest rate or no-interest loan.

Not all loans or lenders are created equal. Some unscrupulous lenders target elderly and low-income homeowners and those with credit problems. These lenders may cause you to lose your no or low-cost loan and they may offer loans based on the equity in your home, not on your ability to repay the loan. High interest rates and credit costs can make borrowing money by using your home as collateral very expensive.

Consult with an attorney or someone you trust before making any loan decisions. Have them check all loan papers before you sign.

Non-profit credit counseling services can also help you manage your credit and help you make decisions about loans.

Contact a non-profit credit counseling service such as Consumer Credit Counseling Service at 216-781-8624 or 1-800-355-2227.

If you consider taking out a loan, avoid any lender who:

- ⇒ Tells you to falsify information on the loan application. For example, the lender asks you to say that your loan is primarily for business purposes when it's not, or to say your income is higher than it is.
- ⇒ Pressures you into applying for a loan or applying for more money than you need
- ⇒ Pressures you into accepting monthly payments you can't make and can't afford.
- ⇒ Fails to provide required loan disclosures or tells you not to read them.
- ⇒ Promises one set of terms when you apply, and gives you another set of terms when you are asked to sign—with no legitimate explanation for the change.
- ⇒ Tells you to sign blank forms with the explanation that the lender will fill in the blanks later.
- ⇒ Won't give you copies of documents that you've signed.

Interested in learning more about predatory loans? Ask your Senior Center to call the Senior Helpline about a presentation. The Helpline can be reached at 216-861-5479 between 1 and 4:30 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays

Before you sign for a loan here's what you can do to protect your home and your equity in your home:

- ⇒ Shop for a loan, comparing the APR or the Annual Percentage Rate. The APR includes the interest rate and other charges expressed as a yearly rate.
- ⇒ Make sure you understand whether the rate is fixed or adjustable. The adjustable rate will change, increasing your payments.
- ⇒ Make sure you know how long you will be paying, how much you will be paying and whether the amount can change
- ⇒ Before you sign, be sure you will be able to make the payments required.
- ⇒ Try to negotiate out of your loan any prepayment penalty you would have to pay if you sell or refinance.
- ⇒ Do not commit to payments based on income that can change, such as if a spouse dies or a child grows up and moves out, a job ends, etc.

Anti-Aging Products Promise Much; Deliver Little

The Senate Special Committee on Aging offers these tips on how to avoid fraudulent products that promise to keep you young and healthy, but don't produce either youth or good health.

- ◆ Listen carefully to what is being advertised.
 - ◆ Don't be afraid to ask questions about the product. Fine out exactly what it should do for you and what it shouldn't do.
 - ◆ Research a product thoroughly before buying it. Call the Better Business Bureau to find out if people
- have complained about the product you are considering.
 - ◆ Watch out for so-called "Secret Formulas" or "Breakthroughs of the Century."
 - ◆ Be wary of products that say they will cure a wide variety of illnesses (particularly serious ones) that don't appear to be related.
 - ◆ Remember that testimonials and/or celebrity endorsements are often very misleading and sometimes are simply fabricated by the product's manufacturer to sell whatever it's pushing.
- ◆ Be very careful of products that are marketed as having no side effects. This is a hard promise to make and an even harder one to live up to.
 - ◆ Question products that are advertised as making visits to a physician unnecessary.
 - ◆ Always consult your doctor before taking any dietary or nutritional supplement.
 - ◆ Always tell your doctor about any dietary or nutritional supplements you are taking, especially prior to surgery.

Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Some Information About Wills and Things

In the last issue we asked readers to suggest topics for future Alerts.

Here are answers to a few questions that were raised by readers:

Q: If you name a beneficiary on a bank account, how does your will affect that?

A: When you die, the bank account proceeds would go to the beneficiary you named on the account. Your will has no affect on the account.

Q: If the beneficiary you name on a bank account dies before you do, who gets the money?

A: The money would become part of your estate and would be distributed according to instructions in your will. We recommend that if you want the money to go directly to another person that you simply go to the bank and name the new beneficiary on your account as soon as

you know about the death of the original beneficiary.

Q: If you have a "transfer-on-death" deed for your house that names the person you want to get your property when you die, do you need a will?

A: That depends on whether you named a contingent beneficiary in the deed and what else you may own. If a named beneficiary dies first and no contingent beneficiary is named, a will is useful. If you own nothing but your house and bank accounts on which you have designated beneficiaries, you really may not need a will. But if you own other things and don't trust your survivors to take care of matters as you would wish, it might be wise to have a will.

Happy Holidays

SENIOR CITIZEN CENTERS AND LEGAL AID OFFICES

CUYAHOGA COUNTY

For information or to make an appointment in Cuyahoga County
 phone the Senior Helpline
 at 216-861-5479
 on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday between 1 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.

EAST SIDE

WEST SIDE

Buckeye Senior Center
 11802 Buckeye Road
 216-491-8450

Maple Heights Senior Center
 15901 Libby Road
 216-587-5481

Lakewood Office on Aging
 16024 Madison Avenue
 216-521-1515

Emeritus House Senior Center
 (at Indian Hills)
 1554 East 193 Street
 216-289-8586

Martin DePorres Center
 1264 East 123 Street
 216-268-3909

Metro Health Hospital
 2500 Metro Health Drive
 216-778-5551

Fairhill Institute
 12200 Fairhill Road
 216-421-1350

Murtis H. Taylor Center
 13422 Kinsman Avenue
 216-283-4400

Parma Senior Resource Center
 7001 West Ridgewood
 440-885-8155

Goodrich-Gannett Center
 1368 East 55 Street
 216-432-1717

Stella Walsh Recreational Center
 7345 Broadway Avenue
 216-441-0111

West Side Legal Aid Office
 3408 Lorain Avenue
 216-961-6630

DOWNTOWN

Helen S. Brown Senior Center
 16100 Euclid Avenue
 216-761-8410

Woodland Branch
 Cleveland Public Library
 5806 Woodland Avenue
 216-623-7109

Downtown Legal Aid Office
 1223 West Sixth Street
 216-687-1900
 Extension 5336
 TTY: 216-696-3081

Hough Opportunity Center
 8555 Hough Avenue
 216-421-5400

For information or to make appointments outside Cuyahoga County
 phone the offices listed below

LAKE COUNTY

Lake-Geauga Legal Aid, 8 North State Street, Painesville
 440-352-6200 or TOLL FREE 1-888-808-2800

LORAIN COUNTY

Lorain County Legal Aid, 538 West Broad Street, Elyria
 440-323-8240 or TOLL FREE 1-800-444-7348

ASHTABULA COUNTY

Ashtabula County Legal Aid, 121 East Walnut, Jefferson
 440-576-8120

**The Legal Aid Society
of Cleveland
1223 West Sixth Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44113**