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February 2016

## Oak Park Township Senior Services

Oak Park Township Senior Services has a long history of providing a wide array of services to older adults in Oak Park and River Forest, starting with the formation of a Senior Citizens Committee in 1971. The township hired its first senior citizen coordinator in 1973, and has been adding and refining programs ever since. It joined with River Forest Township in 2002 through an inter-governmental agreement to combine funds and resources to better serve the older adults of both communities.



In 2015, the agency served 4,766 unduplicated older adults.

“Township government is the level of government that is closest to the people we serve,” said Desiree Scully-Simpkins, the agency’s director. “We have an ethical and moral responsibility to serve the people in our

communities to the best of our ability and provide services that enhance their quality of life and promote the values of independence, self-esteem and dignity.”

That’s why the current state budget impasse and its effect on social services saddens her. “I think of our most vulnerable populations: seniors, the disabled, mentally ill and dependent children – those with the smallest voices and the largest needs,” she said. “If we do not serve the underserved, then as a society we have failed.”

She has seen the agency evolve since joining the township in 1992 as a case manager. But while programs and requirements may change throughout the years, the main premise of senior services remains the same, she explains, citing the agency’s mission: “To enhance the quality

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of life for seniors in our community by providing a broad array of supportive services that promote the values of independence, self-esteem and dignity.”

One of the oldest services is the transportation program, which started in 1975 and offers curb-to-curb bus service for residents of the two communities age 60 and over, and persons with disabilities of any age. The program also provides scheduled bus service to grocery stores and shopping malls, as well as special trips to activities outside the area.

Another popular program is a three-pronged meal service that includes the Senior Lunch Program combining complete meals with opportunities for social interaction and educational programming, the Home Delivered Meal Program and the Dine Out Program, which offers older adults the opportunity to enjoy an affordable, well-balanced meal at specified local restaurants.

Other services include:

- Information and Assistance
- Case Management
- Case Advocacy
- Adult Protective Services
- Caregiver Support
- Health and Wellness Activities
- Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP)
- Access to Public Benefits
- Money Management
- Affordable Wills
- Energy Assistance
- News and Views Newsletter

For the 2016 fiscal year, AgeOptions provides \$69,562 in funding for Information and Assistance under Title IIIB of the Older Americans Act; \$320,142 for the Congregate and Home



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Delivered meal programs under Title IIIC; \$18,998 for the Caregiver Resource Center under Title IIIE; \$6,950 for Respite services; and \$4,118 for the Adult Protective Services I-Team.

While Scully-Simpkins describes the state budget impasse as a “great inconvenience,” she remains hopeful that it will be resolved and both the funds promised and dollars billed directly to the state will be paid. For now, she said, the township is “fronting” the money to keep senior services in full operation, but she doesn’t see that continuing indefinitely. “I hope the powers that be stop the craziness so we can all continue helping the people that we serve,” she said.

For more about Oak Park Township Senior Services, go to

<http://www.oakparktownship.org/departments/seniors>