

August 2016

## AgeOptions Staff and Peer Mentors Help Nursing Home Residents Move Back to Community



*Peer Mentors received Certificates of Appreciation at a recent Lunch & Listening session with transition engagement specialists. Front row: Coretta Leona (peer mentor), Meghan Jenkins Morales (AgeOptions), Gavella Norment (peer mentor), Robert Green (peer mentor). Back row: Chelsea Hawkins (AgeOptions), Joy Aaronson (AgeOptions), Treneice Jackson (AgeOptions), Tramaine Martin (AgeOptions); Susan Linderman (peer mentor).*

Victoria has lived in a nursing home for more than three years without any expectation of transitioning back to the community. But with AgeOptions' help, she is now in the process of doing just that. She is one of hundreds of nursing home residents in suburban Cook County who have learned about their options from AgeOptions transition engagement specialists.

Since 2013, the team of two full-time and two part-time TES staff members have visited all 108 suburban nursing homes multiple times. They educate staff and residents about the Colbert Consent Decree, an Illinois class action lawsuit that provides a process for Medicaid-eligible adults with disabilities who live in nursing homes to receive information and assistance to move



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out. In 2015 they provided information to 551 individuals, referring 201 of them who are eligible to move.

Victoria, who has some physical and mental health issues and speaks limited English, had become discouraged when someone from another agency advised her not to move out of the nursing home. But after a Spanish-speaking AgeOptions transition engagement specialist worked with her to determine her interest in returning to the community and the types of assistance she would need, she decided she wanted to transition to live with her son and his family.

The TES specialist then referred her to the next step in the process: evaluation by a managed care organization (MCO). She will be evaluated by a Spanish-speaking assessment worker and nurse, after which the MCO will help her get funds for assistive devices and home modifications, such as an entrance ramp. The Colbert Decree provides up to \$5,000 for home modifications and assistive equipment so residents, known as Colbert Class Members, can move to their own homes or live with family members. The MCO staff will also make sure the necessary services and supports are in place to ensure Victoria can live successfully in the community.

Services and supports for Colbert Class Members include home and community-based services, community mental health services, rental subsidy assistance, housing location services and assistance with security deposits, furnishings and moving expenses.

Nursing home residents also receive assistance from a housing location specialist. In addition to families, options include private apartments, senior buildings and supportive living facilities.

Many residents like Victoria are also aided by peer mentors who have made the transition themselves. Eight peer mentors now volunteer with AgeOptions, and their unique perspective



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helps both residents and nursing home staff understand what is involved in the process and helps to allay their concerns.

The peer mentors talk to residents about their own experiences moving out of nursing homes and adjusting to changes, such as no longer having a rigid schedule, not always having things done for them and not having people around all the time. Transition engagement specialists provide further assistance by teaching life skills through the AgeOptions Community Reintegration program.

When Victoria moves out of the nursing home, the MCO will arrange for frequent follow-up visits to ensure her continuing health and well-being. Her experience is an example of what AgeOptions TES staff tell all eligible nursing home residents: Don't give up hope.