

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

**HENDERSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

MEETING DATE: April 17, 2013

SUBJECT: Social Services' Informational Update

PRESENTER: Melinda Lowrance, Member, DSS Board

ATTACHMENTS: Yes

SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

The DSS Board is providing monthly three-minute informational updates to the Board of Commissioners regarding various Social Services issues. The April 2013 update, provided by DSS Board Member Melinda Lowrance, pertains to the Special Assistance Program.

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:

No Board action requested. This item is for information only.

Suggested Motion:

No motion suggested.

Providing care to older adults at home can improve their quality of life as well as provide a better value. The majority of older people and those with disabilities overwhelmingly want to remain independent and receive the assistance they need in their homes, instead of rest homes. Most, in fact, do so. For many of these adults, the care they need as they age is personal care, not medical care, such as help with various activities including dressing, bathing or preparing meals. Often this assistance is provided informally by family members. But some older people with disabilities confront barriers that take the choice away from them...particularly if no family is present to help.

Henderson County provides a program that helps older people and those with disabilities have a choice regarding the help they need. This program allows for assistance in a rest home or in a private living arrangement.

The program is called the Special Assistance Program. Based on an eligibility assessment and need, an older person/person with a disability can receive help with the cost of living in a rest home or services, support and additional income for care in their home. The Special Assistance Program supplements the Social Security income of an older person or person with disabilities; they must be age 65 and older or age 18-64 with disability according to Social Security disability standards and:

- Require assistance with their daily living activities at the rest home level of care based on their doctor's verification; and,
- A U.S. citizen; and,
- Meet income and asset eligibility requirements.

Older people or those with disabilities who reside in a rest home are assisted by Special Assistance with the cost of room and board. The program assists with the cost of care by supplementing a person's Social Security income. Both the person and the program contribute to the costs of care in the rest home.

Older people or those with disabilities who live at home are assisted by Special Assistance with the cost of care and additionally have a case manager helping with services and support. An assessment is completed by a case manager to determine whether the adult can remain home safely and what service supports and income are needed to assure the adult's needs are met. Using the assessment information, the case manager works directly with the person and their family, or other supports, to develop a care plan that enables the adult to live at home safely rather than moving to a rest home. The care plan includes both the needed costs of care such as shelter repair, food and other daily necessities and the arrangement of needed services such as in-home aides, senior companions and transportation. The case manager's role is essential, and all Special Assistance In-Home Program participants receive on-going case management. Family, friends and neighbors can also be an essential part of the care plan.

An example of the Special Assistance Program for a person who lives at home is the case of "Mr. R.". "Mr. R." lives in Henderson County and suffers from multiple, debilitating health problems, such as diabetes. A friend assists with his care. "Mr. R." is eighty-seven years old...he values his independence and wants to avoid out-of-home placement. He uses services arranged by his Special Assistance case manager, as well as additional funds for home repair, utility bills and special food for his dietary needs. "Mr. R.", his friend and the Special Assistance case manager meet monthly to plan for his care and safety. Without his friend and case manager, "Mr. R.'s" needs could not be met and out-of-home placement would be necessary.

Research and a study of the North Carolina General Assembly found that enabling people to live in their homes instead of in facilities is a better value for everyone. Programs used by older adults and disabled adults, including the Special Assistance Program, allow people an opportunity to live at home longer. Overall, in-home services, support and additional income costs 29% less than assistance with the cost of room and board in a rest home. Medicaid and prescription drug cost savings were 30%.

The Board of Social Services believes that in times of belt tightening, Henderson County must find ways to reduce costs without denying essential care and self-determination for our community's older people and those with disabilities. The Special Assistance Program helping older people and those with disabilities is a win-win.