

## **Gatekeeper Program**

A proactive community training program to locate, identify and refer at-risk, home dwelling older adults to local agencies who can assist them.

The Gatekeeper Program was developed in 1978 by Ray Raschko, MSW, at Spokane Mental Health's Elder Services. Since its inception, the Gatekeeper model has been applied nationally and internationally to train employees to identify and assist isolated, at-risk older adults residing in their own homes. These elders may have little or no support system to act on their behalf and may experience serious difficulties that compromise their ability to live independently.

This year marks Michigan's 29th Gatekeeper of the Year event and will be celebrated with a luncheon with the Commission on Services to the Aging (CSA) and the Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) on May 19, 2017. Consumers Energy joined with OSA in 1987 to initiate this program, DTE Energy joined in 2009 and MBLP joined in 2015.

### **Who are Gatekeepers?**

Gatekeepers are employees of local businesses who come into contact with older adults on a regular basis. Through the Gatekeeper program, these non-traditional referral sources are trained to identify and refer older adults who appear to have problems that may place them at-risk of hospitalization and/or premature out of home placement. Gatekeepers can include utility employees, bank personnel, apartment and mobile home managers, postal carriers, police, fire department, paramedics, etc.

### **What Do They Look For?**

Employees look for signs of distress in communication, economic condition, social condition, emotional health, personal appearance, physical limitations and condition of the home. Below are descriptions of some situations, symptoms, and behaviors that may indicate a referral is needed if they see signs of:

- significant deterioration in personal appearance, including dirty clothing, clothing not appropriate to the weather/season, missing articles of clothing, i.e., pants, shoes, etc.
- dilapidated and dangerous exterior/interior home environment, serious hoarding that creates safety issues, calendar on the wrong month or year, little or no food, strong foul odors, many pets, numerous empty alcohol containers.
- confusion, disorientation, inappropriate verbal/non-verbal responses, forgetfulness, repeating information, feelings of hopelessness/suicide.
- significant hearing/eyesight impairment, limited mobility/inability to get food, etc., acute physical illness, numerous medication bottles.

### **How Gatekeepers Benefit Those in Need**

Many older adults live alone and have little contact with others. If they become ill or unable to function independently, they easily can go unnoticed and unattended. A trained gatekeeper can be the eyes and ears of a neighborhood, linking older adult customers who need and want assistance with available services.

### **Helping Those in Need**

Once a concern is realized, a Gatekeeper referral is submitted, which initiates a contact to the appropriate agency, such as a local Area Agency on Aging. Once the agency responds, they report the outcome back to the utility company and document it on the referral.

Referrals are sent monthly to OSA and reviewed by staff. The top referral is selected from each utility company, with the important criteria being if the employee went above and beyond his or her normal job duties to help an older adult. A congratulatory thank you letter signed by the OSA director, along with a nice frameable certificate signed by the OSA director and Commission on Services to the Aging chair, is sent to the utility companies who honor and award their employees at monthly staff gatherings.

At the end of each year from the monthly winners, one referral is selected by OSA staff from each utility company that represents the employee who exhibited the most effort to go above and beyond to ensure the safety of the seniors in their communities. They are invited to join the Commission where they are honored with a plaque and letter from the governor.

Over the past 29 years, thousands of Michigan's senior citizens have been referred to the program. This has allowed many of them to receive assistance with essential, often life-sustaining services, allowing them to age in place, and live a happier, healthier life. The Gatekeeper Program's continued success in our state demonstrates the dedication and commitment from the CSA, Consumers Energy, DTE Energy, MBLP and their employees to improve the quality of life for Michigan's older adults.