

There are many benefits in allowing older adults to continue living at home, but it can be a challenge to the relatives and friends who provide support. To help alleviate this stress, the DHS Area on Aging offers assistance through its Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP).

Working with area providers, the FCSP helps support the care provided to frail adults at home. Its services include assessment of caregiver and older adult needs, benefits and resource counseling, training in caregiving skills, access to support groups and respite care.

Qualifying caregivers may receive reimbursement for the purchases of caregiving supplies and/or services, as well as funds for home modifications and assistive devices. Assistance is also available to those ages 55 or older who are caring for young relatives through 18 years of age.

The FCSP currently provides training, financial aid and stress relief for about 500 county residents. Two of those stories are presented here, providing an example of how just a little help can make a big difference for families who find themselves in a caregiving situation.

For more information, call the SeniorLine at (412) 350-5460 or (800) 344-4319.



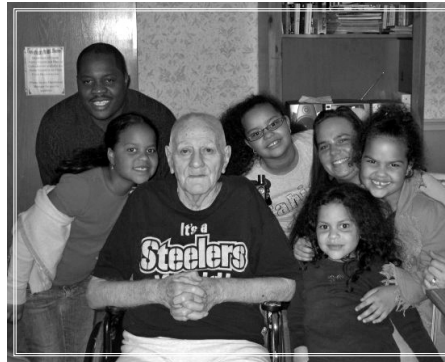
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DHS MAKING AN IMPACT

Family Caregiver Support Program



The Benjamins

Angelique Benjamin was living in North Miami Beach with her husband and five children when her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. At the time, both parents were living in Allegheny County with her sister, Christina, who is also married with five children.

"Our family had a very challenging year in 2009," Angelique recalls. Mom passed away in November and shortly thereafter, Dad had a stroke that left him unable to talk or swallow. He received speech therapy and other rehabilitation at a nursing home, and finally got to the point where he was able to feed himself."

Once their father's recovery reached a certain point, the family wanted to bring him home again. "My sisters and I brainstormed about how to get him back home, and the only thing that made sense was for me to take care of him." The Benjamins relocated to West Mifflin and began looking into assistance programs.

One of the biggest problems they faced was the cost of care. "Dad has a pension and Social Security. While he gets some support, he doesn't qualify for everything he needs, Angelique explains. "If it weren't for us, he would not be able to afford to care for himself." At the same time, of course, the Benjamins have all the typical costs associated with raising their children.

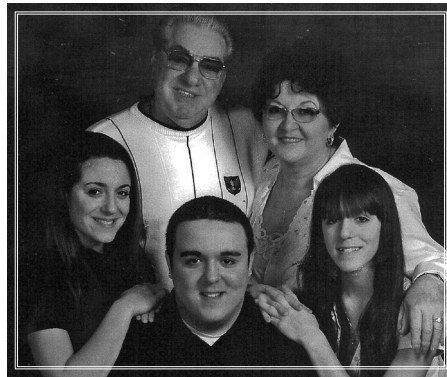
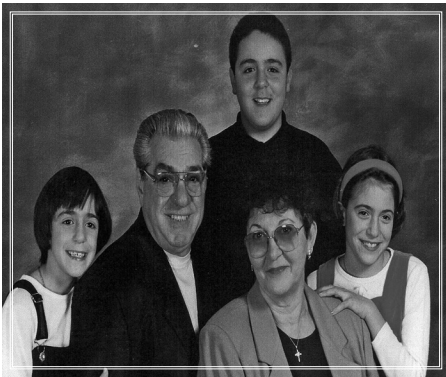
They found the help they needed through the Family Care Support Program. Working with a provider in the program, they were able to hire a sitter. Now, they have several hours of in-home care each week. "Dad's home health aide is absolutely spectacular," Angelique adds. "Dad enjoys having her around."

The Benjamins continued:

Angelique and her husband, Kennedy, are examples of what's often referred to as "the sandwich generation": those who care for both their own children and aging parents.

With the assistance of the Family Care Support Program, managing this challenge is a little easier. Angelique especially appreciates the reprieve that having a home health aide offers. "If we have to run out for activities, we need to have someone in place to stay with Dad."

The challenge of relocating the family was difficult, yet everything turned out alright, Angelique says. "Things are very different up here, but [the children] love their school. We had a lot of obstacles to overcome to have Dad at home, but we worked our way through every one of them. Having his grandchildren around has helped make her dad's recovery a little better. "There are definitely benefits—for him and for us. I would say that if you have the desire for your parent to be home with you, you can work it out. And help is out there if you need it." —



The Giordanos

When Gina Giordano, 38, was diagnosed with cancer in April 2002, she was a single mom with three children, ages six, eight and 10. Her parents, Ralph and Grace Giordano, invited Gina and her children to live with them in their Rankin home while she underwent medical treatments.

Sadly, Gina passed away in August of that year. In less than six months, Ralph and Grace became full-time caregivers to Robbie, Nicole and Angela.

For the next 11 years, the couple worked as an energetic team to raise their grandchildren. "Thank God I have a good husband," Grace says, "because I couldn't see one person doing all that we've had to do." Grace worked six days every week, and Ralph worked the night shift. "I would come home from work, and Ralph would have them all sitting at the kitchen table with their homework spread out around them and not just snacks but healthy snacks. He didn't know how to do their homework, but he knew they had to do it."

The Giordano's were working hard and doing everything they could, yet the family budget was still tight. Then one day, Grace was standing in line at a local store when she overheard a woman talking about her daughter who had died.

"As it turns out, I realized that her daughter knew my daughter." The two instantly bonded and began to share stories of helping to raise their grandchildren. "She mentioned the name of a program that could help with the little extras that we needed." That program is the Family Caregiver Support Program. "In the beginning when the children were little, they paid me a percentage of what I spent for necessities they needed, which was so helpful because Social Security doesn't go far," Grace explains. "That program helped us get through their growing-up years."

Considering the circumstances, Ralph and Grace are confident that they've raised their grandchildren to be healthy, balanced and happy. "Robbie is working as a landscaper, Nicole is at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Angela is considering either the military or college," Grace reports. "I'm hoping that everything will be okay with them. You do what you have to do, and take it one day at a time."

Grace encourages others to make use of FCSP. "I tell them, 'Call this number. Don't be afraid or ashamed. Even if you only get enough support for a pair of shoes, why wouldn't you do it?' Every little bit helps."