



Gatekeeper Update

Spring 2013

The Gatekeeper Program is designed to assist vulnerable people who need help, but may be unable to get it for themselves.

A single call can save a life.



Gatekeeper Referral Numbers

Multnomah County
(24/7)

503-988-3646

Clackamas County
503-650-5622

Washington County
503-640-3489

Columbia County
503-397-5863

Clark County
360-694-8144



Time for a Gatekeeper Training or Refresher?

Would your business, local branch, office or work unit, church or neighborhood association like to have a Gatekeeper presentation? Please contact the Gatekeeper

Coordinator, Lynn, to schedule a training or refresher. Trainings can be tailored to the specifics of your group and can be 30 minutes (or shorter) or an hour long, depending on audience, agenda and questions. The valuable information presented can help you learn how to identify warning signs and red flags that an elder or an adult with disabilities may need some support or may be the victim of a scam or financial exploitation. Call or email Lynn to discuss your training needs and to get a training scheduled.

503-988-6717 or lynn.schemmer-valleau@multco.us

Easy Things you can do to Help Your Elderly Neighbors

- Introduce yourself and explain where you live in relation to them and offer your phone number should they need something.
- Offer to stop on your way to the store and see if there is anything they could use. Maybe they could have a list ready for you if you go on a certain day.
- Depending on the time of year, there could be lawn mowing or leaf raking to do. Sometimes this would be a good job for your kids.
- Mealtime can be a lonely time for the single elderly person. This can lead to poor eating habits due to not having anyone to fix a meal for. If you are preparing your families meal, perhaps you might make a little extra and share with your neighbor.
- Alert the person to scams that you know of or door to door solicitors you have recently noticed in the neighborhood.
- If you don't have time to stop by, maybe a quick phone call each day will work. Have a prearranged time to call.
- Is there a doctor's appointment they could use a ride to?

Just do whatever you can to help, sometimes the smallest gesture can help in so many ways. For some of our elderly neighbors, they would simply enjoy visiting with someone periodically, especially when their families are not close by.

**Gatekeeper
Red Flags to
watch for:**

- **Communication:** confusion, anger, forgetfulness, hostility
- **Financial:** trouble paying bills, mentions “missing” funds, bounced checks, large withdrawals
- **Caregiver Stress:** yelling, frustration, despair, lack of support
- **Social Isolation:** self isolates or being isolated by someone, unable to leave home, no visitors or help
- **Emotional Health:** depression, anxiety, significant personal loss, paranoid thinking
- **Appearance of the Person:** unkempt, unshaven, soiled clothes, odor, inappropriately dressed for weather
- **Physical Limitations:** difficulty seeing, hard time moving around home, home not accessible, difficulty hearing
- **Around the home:** mail and newspapers stacking up, yard is not kept up, debris, pets neglected or too many pets, strong odors

Isolation in the Elderly – The Hidden Dangers of Loneliness

Social isolation has been described as a hidden killer, causing serious health problems which can have devastating consequences for older adults. 1.2 million people over age 50 are classed as severely excluded from society, meaning they have very limited social contact. 400,000 of them are over 80 and with the increased limitations of age these people in particular are at real risk. 56% of people who are classed as socially excluded believe their health is not good while only 17% of the non-excluded feel the same, suggesting isolation can have a significant impact on wellbeing.

Everyone can relate to the emotional effects of loneliness, but the harm can extend far beyond that. Prolonged isolation can damage the immune system, leaving people more vulnerable to infections. It can also affect the cardio-vascular system, increasing the risk of heart and circulatory problems. Unchecked, loneliness can gradually sap health away from the elder, reducing not only their quality of life, but its length as well. Friends and relatives die or move away, mobility slowly starts to restrict activity and sometimes problems such as incontinence, deafness and fear of falling over can mean the person spends more and more time stuck in their home. Some elders will speak openly about their loneliness, but sometimes those who don't are actually the ones suffering more.

About 48% of the Gatekeeper Referrals we receive are for people who are not already receiving services and support—they are at risk for isolation. Making a Gatekeeper referral for an isolated elder can really be a life-saver by helping that person get connected to support and services in their community. Services such as transportation to the local senior center and congregate meal site, for example, can really open up the potential for new friends, social connections and group activities. The Meals on Wheels People operates more than 35 meal sites throughout Multnomah, Washington and Clark counties. In addition to hot, nutritious lunches served Monday through Friday, many of the centers offer a wide variety of programs, from exercise to art classes to field trips and outings. Anyone over the age of 60, regardless of income, is invited to dine.

The number of people someone sees doesn't define loneliness. It's the quality of social contact which makes all the difference. It's an old truism that a bustling city can be the loneliest place of all because if you have nothing more than passing contact with others you can easily feel intensely lonely. Gatekeepers play a critical role in potentially reducing the risk of isolation for elders and adults with disabilities living in our community.