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Financial service program starts up
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It handles money for benefit clients who have trouble managing funds

By Mike Carrels
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(http://muskogee phoenix.com)

Jo Ann Huff says one of her clients is “a lot happier” since enrolling in the Volunteer Services of America Payee Services Program.

The program, new to Muskogee this year, was made available through a \$30,000 grant by the City of Muskogee Foundation.

Huff, the payee services coordinator for the VOA Muskogee office, manages the finances of clients in Muskogee County who have been judged incapable of managing their benefits, clients who are having difficulty managing their benefits on their own, or who have a current payee who is taking advantage of the client by misuse of their funds.

From those funds, VOA pays the clients’ monthly bills and provides them with weekly spending money for groceries and other items. The program is recognized by the Social Security Administration.

The program provides services to the homeless, persons with mental illness, physical disabilities, developmental disabilities, young adults who have aged out of the foster care system, elderly, recently released offenders and other similar cases.

“There are a lot, especially seniors, who slip through the cracks,” Huff said. “And Muskogee has a high homeless population, from young to old. They just blend in, and unless you listen and pay attention, you wouldn’t know. We want to be able to reach out to them.”



Huff



Goldman

Dave Goldman, the director of payee services, said the program started in Tulsa and wanted to expand. The Tulsa office serves 410 people and has a waiting list. The goal for Muskogee is to serve 90.

Goldman said the main goal of the program is residential stability.

“The more services these people get, the better off they’re going to be,” he said. “We want to make sure all the money goes to the beneficiary.”

Goldman said the program can also alleviate stress from those who serve as a payee to a family member.

“We tell them, ‘Let us do it, it’s what we do,’ ” he said. “It’s just like the weight of the world is off their backs. Whenever you’re dealing with anyone’s money, it’s just a different dynamic. We’re not here to control, we’re here to manage.”

Goldman said the program is starting in Muskogee from the ground up and has met with many service agencies in the county. The program has six clients, averaging about one per week.

“The response has been really, really good,” he said. “It’s a unique program and a very valuable program to the community.”

Goldman said payees can charge up to \$38 per month for services. The VOA charges \$33, which Goldman said goes back into the program.

“The longer we’re here, the more good we’ll see happen,” he said. “It’s a wonderful program. It really does wonders.”

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You can help

If you know of someone in Muskogee County who is incapable of managing his or her benefits and would benefit from the Payee Services Program, call Jo Ann Huff at (918) 683-1578.

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