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Alabama Agency on Aging expands its advocacy to ensure justice for older adults

We are all aging, and for those in the latter stages of this process, it can often become overlooked, forgotten, or misunderstood in society. Older adults are often lacking the adequate care and support needed during this important stage of life.

The Middle Alabama Area Agency on Aging (M4A) is helping to educate about the importance to support older adults and family caregivers, by equipping them with proper tools so they can better care for their loved one.

As a society, much is done to prepare people to become parents of children, but little is done to prepare children to become caregivers of aging parents.

"It is important for family members, neighbors, and local residents to serve as the 'voice' for older adults when needed, which can stop them from feeling isolated and depressed, especially if the elder lives alone with little or no support," said Carolyn Fortner, Executive Director of M4A. "We need to rally around them and continue to provide them a sense of community, and a social life, that empowers and energizes them to age with dignity, purpose, and peace. They have given so much of themselves over the years, and now it is time for us to give back to them and support them to continue to age in place across our communities."

M4A, in partnership with several key stakeholders, has brought together a network of multi-disciplinary agencies and organizations as a strong force to create the Elder Justice Alliance of Shelby County. The mission of the Elder Justice Alliance is to mobilize communities to prevent and properly respond to adult mistreat-



"There are four kinds of people in the world. Those who have needed a caregiver, those who have been a caregiver, those who are a caregiver, and those who will be a caregiver."

— Rosalyn Carter

ment so people can live with dignity, purpose, and peace as they age. The Alliance will increase coordination and collaboration among responders, law enforcement, service providers, and other relevant stakeholders; improve the prevention, detection, reporting of, and response to elder mistreatment; and deter elder abuse through community education, professional training, and support to older residents and caregivers.

M4A's new nonprofit organization, 4 ALL Foundation, will oversee the Alliance as well as work with stakeholders to develop an Adult and Caregiver Respite Program and a Temporary Elder Emergency Shelter in Montevallo. This facility

will also provide direct support and assistance to older adults and their caregivers and provide extensive training to professionals and the general public.

"The center will also enhance autonomy and independence, while mitigating the risks of recurrent abuse so vulnerable adults can remain safe and independent in their local communities as they age," Fortner said.

According to an article published on AARP.org, more than one in five Americans (21.3 percent) are caregivers, having provided care to an adult or child with special needs at some time in the past 12 months.

This totals an estimated 53.0 million adults in the

United States, a number which is up from the estimated 43.5 million caregivers in 2015.

"There are many misconceptions about our aging population," Fortner said. "Many perceive our older population as 'frail, elderly, and dependent' on others. Most elders are thriving, very active, and strong leaders across their local communities. Over 90 percent want to live out their lives at home, in their communities that they helped build for the other generations. We need to support them to 'age in place' when they need our assistance."

While most families want to keep their loved ones in a home setting as they age, many may not have

the financial or emotional resources needed to keep them at home, which is why M4A encourages the importance of planning early for a caregiving journey. Some of the ways to do this include seeking support, training, and resources through the elder justice center and aging networks.

"The local Area Agencies on Aging across the state provide extensive resources, support and programs to care for older adults, individuals of any age with a disability, and caregivers," Fortner said. "For the purpose of the elder justice center, we will be easily accessible to offer support, direct services, training and resources."

Referencing Rosalyn

Carter who said, "There are four kinds of people in the world. Those who have needed a caregiver, those who have been a caregiver, those who are a caregiver, and those who will be a caregiver," Fortner said the statement is true and if families can begin the discussion and better "prepare to care," the task will be less strenuous on the care recipient, and the family members.

For additional resources visit www.m4a.org, www.elderjustice.org or www.4allfoundation.org, or by visiting the Alabama Department of Senior Services website at www.alabamaageliine.gov to find the contact number for all AAAs in Alabama.



Justice For All

CENTER **4**
ELDER JUSTICE
& ADVOCACY

Help us purchase a building we can call "HOME" for 4 ALL Foundation and the Center for Elder Justice & Advocacy.

Our goal is to build a stronger social structure to support older adults and their caregivers.

Our Mission is to meet the diverse elder justice needs of Alabama's Older Adults through:

- Elder Justice Resource Center • Victim & Elder Justice Support Services
- Professional & Community Training • County Elder Justice Networks
- Caregiver & Adult Respite Program (Coming Soon) • Temporary Emergency Shelter (Coming Soon)



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**To Report Elder Abuse & Mistreatment
Adult Abuse Hotline: 1-800-458-7214**

Reports can also be made to a County Department of Human Resources or local law enforcement. Reports can be made anonymously.

elderjusticeal.org | Phone: 205-490-8448

