



## The Oklahoma Department of Human Services

# Respite Program Gives Caregivers Gift of Time

A national survey by the Family Caregiver Alliance reports an estimated 14.4 million working Americans are providing care for someone with a disability or chronic health problem. For these caregiver families, time is precious and time to one's self is wishful thinking among the endless lists of tasks.

What these families need is a respite program.

Respite is temporary relief - time away from constant caregiving -- for families of children or adults with special needs, such as disability, chronic disease or severe illness. Respite care is the service provided to the family member requiring care while the family caregiver is away.

In 1997, a small group saw the need and the value of having a respite program in Oklahoma - and did something about it.

Members of the group were Rose Ann Percival and Kathleen Kovach, Developmental Disabilities Services; Terry Johnsen and Frank Gault, Family Support Services; B.K. Kubiak, Children and Family Services; and Madalyn McCollom, Oklahoma Areawide Services Information System. The group began gather-



*Rose Ann Percival, left,  
and Kathleen Kovach*

ing facts, garnering support from program divisions within DHS and reaching out to other state agencies and private partners.

As a result, the Oklahoma Respite Resource Network was formed in 1998 as a statewide public and private collaborative dedicated to providing respite care. Funding for the respite program comes from state and federal funds and private foundation grants.

"The goal of the Oklahoma Respite Resource Network is to preserve and strengthen families who care for someone with chronic health needs or disabilities," said Rose Ann Percival, Developmental Disabilities Programs Manager. "We do this by making

respite care available and accessible to families caring for loved ones of all ages."

Respite care is provided through the use of a voucher system. The voucher works like a checking account. Vouchers are issued and payments can be made for hourly, daily or weekly respite needs. DHS acts as the fiscal intermediary by processing vouchers and issuing payment.

DHS divisions participating in the respite program are Developmental Disabilities Services, Aging Services, Family Support Services, Children and Family Services and Office of Field Operations. Other state agencies involved in Oklahoma Respite Resource Network include Department of Health; Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services; and Oklahoma Health Care Authority. There are a total of 36 public and private partners in ORRN.

The family receiving respite care chooses whom they wish to hire to provide respite care. This can be a professional, a family member or a friend who knows the family's needs. The person hired to provide respite care cannot live in the same home as the family.

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"When a family has the power to choose a friend or family member to provide respite care, the family feels more comfortable about being away, and it's also reassuring to the person receiving respite care to see a familiar face," Kovach said.

Respite care allows family caregivers to visit friends, enjoy leisure time, run errands or do other chores. The time provided by respite care can reduce stress on families by allowing spouses to spend more time together or with their other children.

"We heard from a woman caring for two adult children with disabilities and a parent with disabilities, and she told us that without respite care she and her husband couldn't see a light at the end of the tunnel," said Percival. "She said she didn't even want to think about where they would have been without the help of respite services."

Families who qualify for the respite program must earn less than \$60,000 a year and must meet requirements of participating agencies, primarily relating to other forms of government assistance and private foundation criteria.

Families are eligible for a \$300 voucher good for three months. Families are eligible for two to four voucher packets per year, depending on which program issues the voucher and the availability of funds.

For information about respite, call the Oklahoma Areawide Services Information System (OASIS) at 1-800-426-2747. Or, click on [oasis.ouhsc.edu](http://oasis.ouhsc.edu).

## Winter Storm Consequences

*In December and January, DHS county offices in many areas of the state were packed with people seeking assistance following devastating winter storms. County office workers processed more than 56,000 applications for disaster food stamps, and more than \$16 million in food stamp benefits were issued. Eastern and southeastern counties were hardest hit, and these scenes from LeFlore County were typical of the 39 counties declared by the federal government as a disaster area. (photos courtesy Laflore Co. staff)*



*Applicants for disaster food stamps arrived early at the county office in Poteau, filled the waiting area and continued to line up outside in the cold rain.*



*Once inside, applicants still had a long line in front of them, but at least they were out of the rain.*



*County Administrator Sevilla Vance distributed bottled water to those waiting for their applications to be processed.*

## Caught Working



Marilyn Guient was caught working when Director Howard H. Hendrick visited the Seminole County Office during the busy period after ice storms struck the area. Guient, a comprehensive case manager and 26-year employee at the Wewoka office, sat the Director down and showed him how things work on the front lines when the waiting room is full and people are needing help.

## Dancer in Painting and in Person



Dancer Belen Esqueda, 12, stands beside painting of herself in action. With Belen is Elizabeth Fine, DHS Office for Civil Rights. The painting of Belen was done by Neal Freeman, retired county director of Oklahoma County 55-A. From a photograph, Freeman produced the oil painting used on the poster for the Hispanic Heritage Celebration held in October. Freeman gave the painting through DHS to Belen, who lives with her parents, Rigo and Lourdes Esqueda, in Norman.

## Trotter Tickets



Harlem Globetrotter Bacari Alexander presents Gary Taylor, left, recreation supervisor at Pauline E. Mayer Children's Shelter, and Clinton Burke, recreational specialist, with tickets for DHS custody children in Oklahoma County to attend the Globetrotter game in February. Taylor said the Globetrotter organization has worked with the children's shelter staff on several occasions to provide event opportunities for the children, but this was the first time a Globetrotter team member came to the shelter. Alexander spent several hours visiting with the children. He taught many of the youth the five basic moves of a Globetrotter, which, Taylor said, the staff did not master.

# Carolyn Wilson to Receive Foundation Award

Carolyn Wilson, a DHS legal secretary, will receive the National Kidney Foundation of Oklahoma President's Award for Volunteer Service during the foundation's third annual awards ceremony March 8 in Oklahoma City.

That night, after the celebration has ended, Carolyn and her son, Taylor, 9, will go through a familiar routine. Taylor, will help his mother load the 10-pound bags of solution into the dialysis machine. Carolyn will spend the next nine hours linked to the machine by a surgically implanted connector as the cleansing solution flows through her body.

Carolyn is known at DHS for her smile, positive attitude and hard work. Few people know that Carolyn suffers from End Stage Renal Disease. She lost her kidneys when they failed in 1993 and had two failed transplants, the last almost ending her life. In addition to dialysis, Carolyn must also

maintain a six-times-daily medication regimen.

Despite these challenges she has spent her precious time working in the best interest of others who suffer from kidney disease. Carolyn has served on Kidney Foundation Committees and Boards, and speaks at universities, hospitals, churches and organizations across the state.

"I really enjoy the work I do for End Stage Renal patients," said Carolyn. "I can't erase their medical bills or worries, but I can help them learn about their illness. Helping others helps me educate myself as well."

Prior to coming to DHS a year ago, Carolyn served as a Revenue Examiner for the Oklahoma Tax Commission.

If you would like to know more about kidney disease, it's symptoms and treatment, contact the National Kidney Foundation of Oklahoma, Inc. at 1-800-946-6405, or [www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org).



Carolyn Wilson

## CAs, CDs to Gather for Fifth Reunion

The fifth reunion of Former County Administrators and Friends will be Saturday, April 7, at Holiday Inn, 1000 North Interstate Drive, Norman. Registration begins at 9 a.m.

Anyone who is, or who has ever been, a County Administrator, or similar title, with DHS, DISRIS, or the welfare department, is encouraged to attend to share photos, anecdotes, and the real stories about those who are not there.

Fliers with reservation forms are in the works.

For more information contact Phylis Steelman, present Cleveland County Administrator, at (405) 573-8300 or [phylis.steelman@okdhs.org](mailto:phylis.steelman@okdhs.org); or Sallie Groves, former Cleveland County Administrator now retired, at (405) 329-2372, or [sgroves@mmcable.com](mailto:sgroves@mmcable.com).

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