



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Public Administrator's Office helps protectees through COVID-19 pandemic



SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Like many offices in Greene County, the Public Administrator had to work through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. While only having the staff of four social service workers, the Office had to call and check on over 600 people and overcome the difficulties of not meeting them in person.

The Greene County Public Administrator serves as a guardian or conservator to “protectees”, usually deemed by the state as “incapacitated.” A hospital will petition for a guardian, and once appointed by the Greene County Court, the Public Administrator’s Office assigns social workers to help manage the protectee’s estate and finances.

The Office will look at bank accounts, investments, real estate, insurance, and burial plans. Social workers will also open up new accounts and help protectees with Social Security, Medicaid, rent, grant applications, and even sign them a weekly allowance.

Teresa White, an Administrative Deputy for the Public Administrator, says, “the biggest misconception with our protectees is we just deal with the elderly. The majority of our clients are actually people 25 to 45 years old who have mental illness, addiction problems, are in trouble with the law, or are homeless.”

Missouri requires Public Administrators to lay eyes on each protectee once a year. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic that was not possible. The Office had to make hundreds of phone calls to protectees or talk with people over Zoom. “We were concerned how they would be affected during the pandemic without social interactions due to facilities on lock down and not allowing visitors or outings,” said Sherri Martin, the Public Administrator for Greene County. “My Deputies were in constant contact via telephone trying to keep morale up. We are very pleased with the outcome, and how well they handled the situation.”

Greene County protectees live all over the state, not just in the Ozarks, and live in a variety of facilities. Some are in supported living with more freedoms. Some are in assisted or skilled living. Some are in jail and have behavioral issues.

White says it’s difficult to help someone virtually and she worries about the people who don’t answer, but there are some positive stories that have come out of the coronavirus pandemic. Two people were released from their guardianship after learning to adapt to a new lifestyle. One of them, a man, was given an allowance, learned how to manage his money, and continued to take his medication. A doctor then reviewed his case and found he no longer needed County help.

“Sometimes it takes tough love. It’s like being a mother. You have to help manage money and life. They learn responsibility and budgeting. They have to meet with people, face struggles, and learn how to deal with it,” said White.

Another positive story, staff in a local nursing home helped a young boy after he was hit by a car while on his skateboard. The women helped him recover with extra physical therapy and giving him extra dessert. They also have given other people clothes to stay warm during the winter.

The Greene County Building Operations staff also opened up some space to store couches for a protectee who was moving into a new apartment during a two-week gap.

White says over the last two years some people still aren’t themselves even today, but her Office is finally starting to see more people in person. “I don’t want people to think families just give up on their loved ones. Mothers often say they’ve failed their child. I tell them no; your child made those choices. It’s about people who need help. And we’re going to be there for them,” said White.

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Greene County is the State of Missouri's fourth most populous county, serving approximately 295,000 people. Its mission is to provide all citizens of Greene County, including those in its cities, a safe and thriving community through excellent customer service, unparalleled dedication, and the efficient use of taxpayer dollars. The Greene County Commission is the executive body of Greene County operating under guidelines established in the Revised Statutes of the State of Missouri. Within that authority the Commission enacts ordinances, resolutions and policies, supervises the activities of county departments, fixes salaries, adopts the annual budget, provides for construction and other services, and conducts hearings on planning and zoning matters.

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