



MEDINA COUNTY COMMON PLEAS COURT

Probate and Juvenile Divisions

93 Public Square, Room 104, Medina, Ohio 44256

KEVIN W. DUNN
Judge

MEDIA RELEASE

July 29, 2020

Medina County Volunteer Guardianship Program Adapting to New Guidelines and Continuing Support for Volunteers

MEDINA – The Medina County Volunteer Guardianship Program is built on the belief that all persons deserve the absolute best care and concern, should they become incompetent or incapacitated. The Probate Court program is dedicated to improving the quality of life for those in need of guardianship by providing trained, qualified, volunteer legal guardians to serve as decision-makers when no less-restrictive alternative to guardianship is available. But what happens when social distancing is required? How do volunteer guardians continue to make the best-informed decisions for their wards if in-person meetings are limited, or in some cases, restricted?

“I have worked with many volunteers over the phone in the last couple of months on making decisions for their wards, and many of them feel they have needed more support due to not being able to physically visit with their wards,” said VGP Coordinator Nicki Shook. “Many of our volunteers would visit their wards often prior to COVID-19, so not having onsite visitations has been an adjustment.”

While there is not much leeway with in-person visitations within residential facilities and nursing homes, Shook wanted to ensure that the volunteers are still being provided all of the tools needed to help with their decision-making. The program’s summer newsletter focused heavily on guidance for guardian’s during COVID-19, including alternate means of contact, protecting a ward’s rights and well-being, and court procedure during a pandemic. The full newsletter can be viewed on www.MedinaProbate.org. The Medina County Volunteer Guardianship Program also typically hosts three in-service trainings each year for the volunteers, ranging from topics on understanding mental changes to ethics and end-of-life decision making. Due to COVID-19, the trainings for 2020 had been postponed. That was until Shook and the VGP Board Members decided to take a virtual approach.

“We want the volunteers to feel connected and supported in their role as serving as guardians,” she said. “We want them to know how much they are appreciated for their time, dedication, compassion, and loyalty to serving our most vulnerable population.”

On August 5, Medina County Probate Court will sponsor its first virtual in-service training on artificial nutrition and hydration, presented by Sally Tomko, RN, BSN, for Hospice of the Western Reserve. The training will cover the perception of nutrition and hydration in our society, discuss adverse effects of inserting a feeding tube, and determine the various effects of artificial nutrition and hydration, as well as terminal dehydration, on a patient’s quality of life and death.

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To learn more about the Medina County Juvenile and Probate Court or Court programs, visit our websites at www.MedinaJuvenile.org and www.MedinaProbate.org.

This training is only offered to the Program's 33 volunteers, but Shook notes that Hospice of the Western Reserve also provides continued education courses for caregivers or for those interested in becoming a volunteer guardian who may want to do their own research before joining the program.

“Our Volunteer Guardianship Program wouldn't be possible without the compassionate members of our community who actively serve to make tough decisions and protect our precious elderly,” said Judge Kevin W. Dunn. “I can't say it enough how vital they are to our program, our wards, and our community overall. Anyone who joins our program as a Volunteer Guardian is entrusted and has a duty to make the right decisions for their ward. It's our duty in Probate Court to reevaluate our processes and ensure that they are supported every step of the way.”

Anyone interested in becoming a Volunteer Guardian may complete a volunteer application available at Probate Court or included with the VGP brochure on www.MedinaProbate.org. For more information or assistance, call (330) 725-9703.

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