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ELDERLY CITIZENS OFTEN OVERLOOKED DURING WINTER HOLIDAYS

While the winter holidays are a joyous occasion for most people, many of our elderly citizens are often left out in the cold. A number of senior citizens rely on Social Security as their sole source of income, and have little or no family.

“Loneliness and isolation are the biggest problem for the elderly, 365 days a year, not just during the holidays,” said Mich Magness, coordinator of aging and long-term care at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. “Many senior citizens have limited income and transportation, and few friends or family.

“Another consideration is that so many of the elderly are widows or widowers who may suffer from a heightened sense of depression or aloneness at this time. Much of society is celebrating Christmas and New Year’s with their loved ones, spouses or significant others. When you’ve spent 50-plus years with a husband or wife who is now deceased, that can make for a lonely holiday.”

Magness said churches, schools, civic organizations and charities often focus

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attention on children at this time of year, which is wonderful, yet the elderly are often overlooked. In addition to providing underprivileged children with toys, clothes and other goodies, why not give some of the same things to elderly citizens living on restricted budgets, as well?

“I have known of schools that gather items for the elderly, including simple crayon drawings on grocery sacks,” Magness said. “Even a year later, some recipients will still have that drawing stuck up on their refrigerator as a symbol that someone does care about them.”

Magness said schools, churches, civic organizations and charities could gather clothing, non-perishable food items or gift certificates for the elderly. Another idea is to raise money to pay for utilities, medical expenses or other items.

And, for those people who visit elderly loved ones during the holidays, “take the time to restock supplies you have used,” Magness added. “Families need to be mindful that most senior citizens are on a fixed income. When they visit Grandma and Grandpa, they need to restock the pantry. It does become an issue for people on a fixed income, because five or six grandchildren can empty the pantry in a hurry.”

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Editor’s Note: If you would like to make arrangements to interview a Department representative concerning this or other issues related to mental health, substance abuse, or domestic violence and sexual assault, please contact Jeff Dismukes at 405-522-3907.