



## Free program helps poor stay healthy

ID: 0F7CE7B1CC2D560C  
Published: December 8, 2002  
Section: A

Author: CLAIRE O BRIEN

THE SOUTHERN

---

CARBONDALE — Wayne Wolfe thought he knew what living with arthritis was like. He had been living with the condition for 20 years, but didn't allow it to interfere much with his life. As a pizza deliverer, Wolfe had no health insurance, and so his visits to doctors were few and far between.

All that changed about a year ago, when Wolfe's osteoarthritis spread and grew more severe.

"I was in so much pain. It was pretty terrible," said Wolfe, who lives in Murphysboro. "I kept working right on up through the middle of March, but then the pain just seemed to swallow me up. I couldn't drive, so I lost my job."

Wolfe applied to the state for Medicaid, but was turned down. He was particularly worried about his medication, which was too expensive for his small budget.

"I take up to 30 pills in a single day, and some of these drugs are expensive, so I often had to go without my medication," Wolfe said. "I was getting pretty depressed."

He appealed the state's decision to deny him a Medicaid card, and was turned down again. Then he was hospitalized for six days, and when the bills started to arrive, Wolfe began to panic.

"I knew there was absolutely no way I could pay those bills," he said. "I told the staff at the Abundant Health Resource Clinic where I was going for free care, and they told me about a program offered through Land of Lincoln. My attorney over there, Diane Goffinet, was wonderful. She got me approved for a Medicaid card, and it was like a big weight had been lifted off me." Goffinet, supervisor of **Land of Lincoln's Law and Health Project**, is in the business of helping to ease these kinds of burdens for low-income people throughout the region.

"We were pleased to find that here in Southern Illinois we are actually on the cutting edge with this project," Goffinet said. "In fact, we are the only program like this in the state of Illinois."

The program, one of only a few of its kind in the nation, is co-sponsored by Memorial Hospital of Carbondale and the Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation.

The Health and **Law** Project provides access to free legal assistance to clients of the hospital's Abundant Health Resource Clinic, through the services of a social worker who sees people right on the clinic premises. After listening to a person's legal problems, the social worker brings the cases back to Land of Lincoln staff attorneys.

"The Health and **Law** project started when Woody Thorne, director of community benefits for Carbondale Memorial Hospital, came to me last year and proposed a way to bring legal help to people right in the health clinic," Goffinet said. "Woody and I put our heads together and came up with a plan for the project, then we did a pilot program from March to May that was very successful."

Goffinet said the Health and **Law** Project has achieved some satisfying results. "Many people don't know that Land of Lincoln is available to them, so we decided to have LOL come to them. Low-income people usually don't even consider going to an attorney because they assume they can't afford one," Goffinet said. "And when people are trying to feed their families and get turned down for food stamps, they have too much on their minds to be thinking about legal assistance."

Goffinet said that although most cases handled by the Health and **Law** Project involve Medicaid and Social Security disability benefits, the project staff also handles housing issues, child custody and support cases, and drafting wills and trusts.

"When people lack housing, or face an unlawful eviction, that can become a health issue," Goffinet said. "And when people get the Medicaid benefits to which they are entitled, they also get options and choices that Abundant Health simply can't offer them. The clinic doesn't have the funding to provide expensive care, so this project gives people the ability to choose other providers and services. It is also a great benefit for hospitals, because they will be reimbursed for treating otherwise uninsured patients."

Wolfe agrees. "I have peace of mind now. I know that I can get the medication I need, so I don't have to live in fear of the pain," Wolf said. "I am glad that the hospital was reimbursed for my care, and it means everything to me to know that I can go to the doctor when I need to go. My experience with Land of Lincoln showed me that you should not give up hope, even when things look their worst."

Low-income people who need legal services may call the Abundant Health Resource Clinic at 529-9459 for a legal services appointment. Clients also may ask to see the **Law** and **Health Project** social worker when they visit their doctor at the clinic.  
Obrien548@aol.com  
618-684-3725

Copyright 2002 Southern Illinoisan

---