

Local

DEVELOPING

# GRADD given \$510K for 38 AmeriCorps members

✍ By Bobbie Hayse Messenger-Inquirer

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Green River Area Development District received a half-million dollar grant to fund almost 40 full-time AmeriCorps members for its Senior Connections program.

The \$510,340 funding is part of the nearly \$6.7 million granted to Kentucky from the AmeriCorps federal funding for 20 programs and more than 900 members, according to GRADD. This money will fund 38 full-time AmeriCorps members to help GRADD provide a range of services and support for seniors. Most of this money was funded through federal government grants, according to David Clark, GRADD AmeriCorps program director.

Clark said the grants will pay the AmeriCorps members a \$13,732 annual stipend to work 1,700 hours a year. When someone enrolls in AmeriCorps, they are essentially agreeing to serve at least a year of community service. However, this is more like a full-time job, Clark said.

"It's a minimum of 1,700 hours, so it looks a lot like a full-time job for the year," Clark said.

Upon the completion of the minimum 1,700 hours, a \$5,920 education award is granted to the members. For individuals who are 55 and older, that education award can be given to children, grandchildren or stepchildren.

Health insurance is also provided for members who are not already insured.

The AmeriCorps members will work with the GRADD Senior Connections program, which has a goal to minimize hospitalization for individuals who are on Medicare.

"When someone on Medicare goes into the hospital, the average stay is 5.2 days, and the average cost is about \$13,000 for that five-day stay," Clark said. "If we can prevent one hospitalization, we can save Medicare and taxpayers the cost of that hospital stay."

He said in the first two years of this program, GRADD was able to save Medicare \$6.2 million because it was able to assist in decreasing hospitalization stays.

Kentucky ranked 50th in the nation in the number of people who are on Medicare and hospitalized every year, so the goal of GRADD, and what AmeriCorps members will be working toward, is providing food, services, transportation and social support to 6,000 older adults.

Clark said GRADD partners with senior centers and other community agencies to provide such care, and they even partner with emergency management in order to teach disaster preparedness.

While most of these 38 positions have already been filled in the Owensboro area, there are still a few open. Most of them are locally filled, with a few out of state, and many are adults who are 50 or older, Clark said.

U.S. citizens 18 and older and with a high school diploma are eligible for the program. Individuals age 55 and older are encouraged to apply. No one is over-qualified or underqualified to serve as an AmeriCorps member.

For more information, contact GRADD at 270-926-4433.

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