Groups help people 60 and older tackle hoarding

Maricopa County residents age 60 and older challenged by compulsive object hoarding who are willing to self-identify and commit to addressing the disorder can now register for the Area Agency on Aging’s 14-week Too Many Treasures Hoarding Therapy Group, the only object-hoarding therapy program in Maricopa County.

The free, confidential and voluntary therapy sessions begin in February.

The groups will meet at locations in central Phoenix and Glendale. Space is limited, and qualifying participants will need to complete an intake process by calling 602-241-5577 no later than Jan. 31.

Meeting locations are confidential. Addresses will be provided to qualifying participants.

Individuals accepted into the program must be willing to attend the 90-minute weekly sessions, engage in group activities and complete home assignments.

The sessions, which are moderated by a licensed professional counselor, are composed of three phases:

- Understanding the causes of hoarding disorder, techniques to identify obstacles and tools to help decluttering or acquiring.
- Discovering new ways to change unhelpful behavior.
- Learning techniques to help avoid recurrences and to maintain progress.

Biweekly follow-up support-group meetings for graduates will be scheduled to provide ongoing support and encouragement.

Too Many Treasures was recently recognized with an Aging Achievement Award at the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging annual conference.

“Through the therapy groups, participants suffering from excessive acquiring and clutter behavior are introduced to new information and techniques to help them change current behaviors and thoughts,” said Heidi Donnaquio, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who manages Too Many Treasures. “Compulsive object hoarding is a serious problem that can be managed.”

According to statistics, 5 percent of the world’s population displays some sort of clinical hoarding that affects between 700,000 and 1 million people in the United States.

Research at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine indicates that the compulsion to hoard often starts in childhood or the teen years but doesn’t become severe until adulthood. Hoarding often runs in families.

According to www.psychologydegree.net, 75 percent of those who hoard engage in excessive buying. 50 percent excessively acquire free items. 15 percent acknowledge that their behavior is irrational and 50 percent of hoarders grew up with a hoarding family member.

For more information about Too Many Treasures and the Area Agency on Aging, email hoarding@aaaphx.org or visit www.aaaphx.org.

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