

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Caregivers report positive results from training

African-American dementia caregivers who've participated in the African- American Alzheimer's Caregiver Training and Support Project 2 (ACTS 2) over the past 24 months report their stress has decreased and their spiritual and emotional support has improved greatly.

This free, five-year project coordinated by Rob Glueckauf, Ph.D., faculty member in the Florida State University College of Medicine, and his health service team is seeking new caregiver participants and group facilitators.

"Our five-year goal," Glueckauf said, "is to serve African-American caregivers across the entire state from Pensacola to Key West and to expand our collaboration with a wide range of African-American faith community organizations." In past years, ACTS 1 demonstrated that telephone counseling is just as effective as in-person counseling in relieving caregivers' stress and providing support. Moreover, telephone delivery reduced the costs of transportation and respite care. Previous research has shown such expenses are major obstacles in caregivers' receiving needed assistance. ACTS 2 builds on those results by using lay pastoral care workers from the African-American faith community to deliver skills training and support. Among adult caregivers reporting high distress, African-Americans are twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to seek assistance from faith ministries.

"We routinely measure the effectiveness of the ACTS 2 project," Glueckauf said. In a recent evaluation, he said, 48 caregivers reported that:

- Their initial moderately high levels of emotional distress declined to low levels.
- Their self-identified caregiving and self-care problems showed significant improvement.
- Their ability to communicate effectively with health-care providers and family members also improved substantially.
- The skills-building group provided them a rich source of spiritual and emotional support. In fact, some caregivers formed follow-up support groups and prayer partners.

ACTS 2 is currently recruiting African- American adults who provide direct care for a loved one with dementia at least six hours a week and have a strong need to reduce their own stress. They're involved in the program for 12 to 14 weeks and receive up to \$90 for their participation. Trained faith community workers, or "lay pastoral care facilitators," help the caregivers with communicating effectively in stressful situations; dealing with

their loved one's difficult behaviors, wandering and general safety; managing the stresses and worries of caregiving; and increasing their selfcare, rest and relaxation.

"We have developed a skills-building program led by African-American facilitators who share a faith orientation and family values similar to those of caregivers, thus breaking down barriers to access — AND using telephones so that the participants don't have to travel for help," said Tomeka Norton-Brown, ACTS 2 project coordinator.

ACTS 2 currently provides services to African-American caregivers residing in communities in North and North Central Florida as well as the Orlando region. “Over the next two years Glueckauf said, “we plan to expand to the Tampa Bay and Palm Beach county. Another important goal is to expand our presence on the web to caregivers, the extended family, health-care professionals and other interested individuals. Our newly modified public websites, www.ACTS2Project.org and Facebook (ACTS2 Caregiver Project), serve as vehicles for providing information about ACTS 2 and recruiting new caregivers and lay pastoral care facilitators.”

ACTS 2 receives financial support from VALIC Inc., the Sandy Halperin Alzheimer’s Research Fund, the 11th Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Florida State Primitive Baptist Convention and private donors.

“Alzheimer’s is an epidemic,” Glueckauf said, “and it disproportionately affects minorities. Providing skills and support to African-American dementia caregivers is what the ACTS 2 staff, lay pastoral care facilitators and I feel led to do and is an important mission of the FSU College of Medicine.”

TO REGISTER FOR SKILLSTRAINING CLASSES, GET INFORMATION OR MAKE A DONATION: Call 850-274-4945 (Tallahassee), 866778-2724 (toll-free) or go to [www. ACTS2Project. org](http://www.ACTS2Project.org)