

INTRODUCTION

Mary Jane has been an active person all of her life. She was a third grade teacher for many years and frequently directed school plays. Since her retirement nearly twenty years ago, she has been an active volunteer in local government and civic organizations, and a Sunday school teacher for her church. Though she never married or had children, she has a large circle of friends and frequently joins them for movies, plays and dinner.

Now Mary Jane is 83 years old, and her neighbors and friends have grown concerned about her. Her telephone and electricity recently were turned off, apparently because she failed to pay her bills. Mail piles up unopened on her kitchen table. Her usually immaculate appearance is now disheveled, and it is evident that she forgets to bathe. Her friends doubt that she is eating properly. She has been seen walking around the neighborhood in her bathrobe late at night, something she would never have done in the past.

What can or should Mary Jane's friends do? Whom can they call? Must a guardian be appointed to take care of Mary Jane? Who would that person be? Must it be a family member, or can her best friend help her? Are there any alternatives to guardianship that could help Mary Jane?

All of these questions come to mind when we face the fact that a loved one or someone we know cannot care for herself or make necessary decisions. This handbook is designed to help find the answers to these hard questions. It discusses the law of guardianship in Maryland, and describes when a guardian must be appointed to act for an incompetent person. Most importantly, this handbook lists many alternatives to a formal guardianship proceeding.

The handbook is arranged in a question and answer format. It provides sample forms, a section on where to get help, and a glossary of terms to make understanding guardianship and its alternatives easier.