

Caring for those who care for the elderly

Quincy operation has a staff of 12, serves 125 clients

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QUINCY — Denise Baxter-Powell starts most of her sentences with “I have this client. ...” As the South Shore regional director of Caregiver Homes Massachusetts, she has met dozens of elderly clients, and their stories have stuck with her.

Caregiver Homes is an adult foster care program that places disabled adults and the elderly in residential homes with family members or other people in the community. It provides financial support as well as regular visits from a nurse and a case manager.

In many cases, people are already caring for family members at home, and simply need to go through Caregiver’s screening process (including criminal background checks) to participate. Because the program is paid for by MassHealth, participants must be enrolled in the state Medicaid program and be eligible to enroll.

Baxter-Powell started her career as a social worker in rest homes and nursing homes. For 20 years, she worked for Milton Residences for the Elderly, which then became executive director of Sunrise Assisted Living in Cohasset. She joined Caregiver Homes in 2007.

The 60-year-old Quincy resident and her staff of 12 are based in Quincy. They have about 125 clients on the South Shore; she said there are about 400 clients in the program statewide. Caregiver Homes is a subsidiary of Boston’s Seniorlink, which has built a nationwide network of care managers for the elderly.

Who is eligible for adult foster care?

Adult foster care has been around for 30 years. But in December of 2006, they expanded that adult foster care to include a frail population and family members to get reimbursed as caregivers. Before that, it was a nonfamily member, and it was for people that needed light care assistance with one activity of daily living. Now they’ve expanded that adult foster care to include a frail population who is literally eligible for nursing home placement. ... There are exclusions for family members. It won’t pay a spouse and it won’t pay a legal guardian, and the other exception is it won’t pay anybody under the age of 16.

How much are caregivers paid, and who pays them?

We bill directly to MassHealth. There are two tiers: the original adult foster care, tier one, which is for somebody that needs assistance with one activity of daily living, but 24/7 supervision – they can’t really live alone. That pays \$24.11 to the caregiver a day, seven days a week. And then there’s tier two, which is the enhanced adult foster care, which requires a client to need assistance with three activities of daily living – bathing, dressing, grooming, toileting or transferring – or if there’s a cognitive impairment like wandering, resisting care, verbal or physical abuse. That pays \$49.69 a day.

What makes this program different from other adult foster care programs?

Our program is unique for two reasons: That’s all we do, and we use technology. Every caregiver has a computer, and every caregiver is responsible for a daily note to the case management team. So if there’s an incident – whether it’s an emergency visit, illness, a fall – the case manager hears it right away, that day as soon as they report it.

What do you enjoy about your job?

I feel like Santa Claus every day. You go into homes and you see a daughter or son or granddaughter taking care of somebody with Alzheimer’s in their home, because they promised them they wouldn’t put them in a nursing home. And it’s such a sacrifice, and it’s being able to pay the bills and make things work. And then we go over and we say, “What you’re doing is incredible. We can give you support with a nurse and a case manager, and we’ll pay you a daily rate for what you’re already doing.” And they say, “What?” You know what it is every 15 days to know that check’s going to be there. It can pay the oil bill, it can pay for food, it can pay their kids’ tuition for all that care. But it’s relieving a little bit of the burden and stress on that caregiver.

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