

SOUTH SHORE SENIOR NEWS



Program Pays Caregivers To Help Keep Seniors Home

By Susan Hess

BOSTON - Caring for a family member is one of the most rewarding, and difficult, jobs. In addition to the physical demands of helping a frail or disabled family member with everyday activities, caregivers also experience the emotional stress of watching as a loved one becomes less and less able to live independently. They may feel the financial impact as well, taking on the expense of contributing to food, prescription drugs and services for struggling family members.

One of the alternatives to nursing home care for Massachusetts residents is known as Enhanced Adult Foster Care. The program is funded by state and federal government and pays a family caregiver up to \$18,000 to take care of an aging relative at home, or pays non-family caregivers to provide care for a frail senior or disabled individual. Caregiver Homes of Massachusetts is a major Adult Foster Care provider in the Commonwealth and in 2004, parent company Se-

niorlink, Inc., was an original proponent of the concept.

A Daughter's Care

Marshfield residents Carol Schnitzlein and her mother, Florence Whelan, participated in the Caregiver Homes' program until Florence passed away last month at the age of 97. Carol experienced, firsthand, the responsibilities of being a 24/7 caregiver, but wouldn't have done it any other way. She says about her mother, "I feel blessed to have had her with me for so many years."

Mrs. Whelan had lived with her daughter and her daughter's husband, Richard, for twenty years, when Richard passed away unexpectedly. Still reeling from the loss of her husband, Carol was suddenly faced with the possibility of



Florence Whelan (front left) and her daughter Carol Schnitzlein who provides care for her mother, benefit from the help of Caregiver Homes staff members (back row, left to right) Mary Frugoli, Miriam MacKenzie and Karin Sullivan.

losing her house and the ability to care for her mother, whose only other option may have been nursing home care. She happened to see a newspaper ad for Caregiver Homes of Massachusetts and contacted the organization.

South Regional Director, Denise Baxter-Powell responded to Carol's call for help. Denise walked them through the application process for

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MassHealth (Medicaid) and Mrs. Whelan was able to qualify for Caregiver Homes under the Frail Elder Waiver. "Who would ever know a program like this existed?"



Edmund Dern (front) and his wife Donna Doherty (back left) are thankful for the support Janet White (back right) has provided through the program.

It sounded too good to be true," said Carol.

In addition to the twice-monthly payments that allowed Carol to keep her home, she appreciated

the support of her mother's Care Manager, Miriam MacKenzie and Registered Nurse, Karin Sullivan. "I will never forget all the kindness and wonderful support of the Caregiver Homes' program," said Carol, "(You two) are very special people and Caregiver Homes is a better program because you are part of it."

Mrs. Whelan's granddaughter says that her grandmother set a wonderful example for all the women in

the family. Carol remembers her mother in past years when, even after losing friends and family members, "Each morning she would get up, put her face on, do her work, visit people, help

people, and she even found time to deliver Meals on Wheels."

When asked about her days spent as her mom's caregiver, Carol smiles and says, "I'm so lucky, my mother was always so pleasant, and she was such a good mother."

Help Overcoming Setbacks

Hull resident, Edmund Dern is another example of someone who, although needing 24-hour care, is still able to live at home with the support of his full-time caregiver and Caregiver Homes of Massachusetts. An accomplished musician and singer who performed with his band on the Shore Shore almost nightly for many years, Ed casually mentions that he was once the opening act for Sammy Davis, Jr. and Liza Minnelli at the old Diplomat Hotel in South Florida. He is just as casual when he talks about the stroke and two amputations he had to undergo, that now require the use of a wheelchair and full-time care-

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giver. "It could be worse," says the ever-optimistic Dern.

After his second, unforeseen, amputation that removed the remaining portion of his leg up to the hip, Edmund was told by hospital doctors and staff that he would need to arrange around-the-clock care before he could go home. Denise Baxter-Powell was the first to respond to their call for information about Adult Foster Care. "She stepped us right through the process and got us into their program within six weeks," said Donna Doherty, Dern's wife. "Caregiver Homes just took such a weight off my shoulders."

Under Adult Foster Care and MassHealth regulations, spouses and legal guardians are not allowed to become paid caregivers. The person who stepped in to become Edmund's full-time caregiver was Janet White, long-time friend of both Edmund and Donna. "Before Janet came, we had a lot of difficulty arranging care," ex-

plained Donna. "We had to have daily meetings about who could be here to cover." Now, with Janet's full-time care, and the ongoing support and payment she receives from Caregiver Homes, life at the Dern household is much more manageable. "I'm just glad he's alive," said Donna. "I couldn't have done it without this program."

Program Requirements

A Caregiver Homes' client must be at least 16 years or older, need 24-hour supervision and daily assistance with physical care and must be on MassHealth, or eligible for a Frail Elder Waiver under MassHealth regulations.

A Caregiver Homes' caregiver is often a family member or friend already providing care, or is a non-family caregiver who may be carefully matched with a client. Caregivers must meet screening requirements and be able to commit to providing 24/7 personal care and supervision for a senior or disabled person. Caregiver reimbursement is not taxed and is

non-reportable to the IRS. Federal Medicaid Law prohibits payment to a spouse or legal guardian.

In addition to complying with MassHealth Adult Foster Care regulations, Caregiver Homes' case management teams develop individual Plans of Care and monitor client health with regular visits and through caregiver notes entered daily in "Seniortouch™," a web-based Case Management System developed by the company. Care Managers. Caregiver homes also coordinates with other services such as Adult Day or Home Health, Hospice and Private-Duty Nursing, to help ensure that clients receive the range of services they need to stay comfortably at home and in their communities.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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