

In-home care business sees growth in tough times

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Senior citizens, those with disabilities and chronic health problems and even new moms now have somewhere to turn in Gloucester County for in-home non-medical care.

"Sadly, my mom suffered from Alzheimer's and passed away several years ago, but for a while my sisters and I dealt with her care at home and ended up turning to home health aides from a private agency," said Marcy Schachinger, owner and president of Home Helpers of Gloucester and Camden counties. "When we found the right one, it was so wonderful. So, when I decided to go back to work after being a stay-at-home mom, I decided I didn't want to go back into the corporate world and instead thought about what business is booming and will continue to boom."

Schachinger said she came upon statistics that baby boomers are aging over 65 exponentially and that an in-home care service could be a "recession-proof business."

"People are realizing that there are alternatives to the traditional nursing home especially for people who might not need care 24/7," she said. "Many people are looking for companionship, someone to run errands with them or someone to help them organize their homes and that's what we do at Home Helpers. I have experienced caring for a loved one firsthand and I know the trauma and drama that family members can go through. I wanted to make a difference and make people's lives easier and that's what our business's whole direction is. We customize a care plan for each client that meets the needs of that client and his or her family members. We're flexible with clients' scheduling needs and budgets and it's just a great business to be in."

Schachinger said Home Helpers allow clients to maintain independence in their homes and age with dignity. The Gloucester/Camden county service opened in January and is currently recruiting employees and clients.

"I saw a great opportunity in Gloucester County and it's exciting because we're

working with Alzheimer's support groups, senior centers and church groups to get the word out was well as nurses and social workers," she said. "It's a complex business in that we want to make each client feel special and serve as a compass for the clients and their families."

Home Helpers employs two different types of Helpers. There are companions - who don't do anything involving personal care and are responsible instead for things like transportation, meal preparation, housekeeping and keeping the client occupied - and Certified Home Health Aides who are certified to provide non-medical personal care such as grooming, feeding and helping with personal hygiene.

Home Helpers also serves a wide variety of clients from those suffering with Alzheimer's, dementia, Parkinson's and other physical and mental challenges to new moms who just need a little extra help temporarily as they adjust to caring for a newborn.

"It's really neat and it's something that sets Home Helpers apart," said Schachinger. "We're also marketing to NICUs, hospitals and fertility physicians because there is a lot of need among people with high-risk or multiple pregnancies that may need to be on bedrest. We can come in and help them take care of household chores, meals and additional children as well as drive them to and from doctors' appointments. For new parents, we can be there to run errands, do laundry, prepare meals and, for moms that had complicated deliveries, help them with recuperation. Also, if a child is sick or needs surgery, a parent can call Home Helpers to come in temporarily and care for that child while the parents are at work."

Home Helpers does not require clients to sign long-term contracts or meet minimum hourly requirements - different from a lot of other agencies. Schachinger said that while 90 percent of her clients at this point are seniors, the demographic might change as people become aware of the business. She said they will go out of their way to make clients' comfortable and ensure that each caregiver is the perfect match.

"We will make every effort to fit their needs mentally and physically and all of our employees are licensed, bonded and insured," said Schachinger. "I think this is a growing industry because options are more prevalent. When I was younger, people's parents just went into nursing homes but in this day and age, people are staying mentally-alert longer, living longer and don't necessarily need constant care. From a personal standpoint, I can relate to the people making these decisions and that's why I went into the business. I will treat every client like a family member and will be honest if a potential client is beyond our level of care."

For more information about Home Helpers, contact Schachinger at (856) 812-0626 or visit the web site at www.HomeHelpers.CC.