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Happier at home: Nonmedical caregivers offer companionship and comfort

By Shelley Widhalm
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Seventy-year-old Betty Stanley considers herself to be a mother not only to her children but to the six caregivers who give her round-the-clock care.

"They're such good helpers, and I'm thankful for that," said the Loveland woman, who has multiple sclerosis.

Betty's son Mark, as well as his wife Julie and their three children, at first tried to give that care but found it to be trying and a challenge for their family.

Mark said he experienced firsthand the burden 24-7 caregiving can place on a family.

"Our life changed," Mark said, adding that he and his family became tied to the house. Often if they went out, "We had to get home."

At the same time, the Stanleys worried whether they were providing care in the correct manner and satisfying Betty's needs.

"That's why we sought out assistance to help educate us," Mark said.

Finding Helpers

Mark, 52, who had just been laid off and was unsure of what to do next, checked out a number of franchises and local businesses. He came across Home Helpers, which provides nonmedical personal care and companionship in the home for the elderly, infirm, those recovering from illness and injury, new mothers and anyone else who might need help at home.

On Jan. 3, Mark opened a franchise that serves Larimer County with in-home care, as well as providing resources and support for individuals and families wanting to remain independent and continue living in their home or community.

"With Betty, mentally she just does better at home," said Keri Dotson, one of Betty's caregivers.

"Anybody is more comfortable in their home than in a facility."

Betty's spirits declined when she left her home in April 2009, following the death of her husband, Thomas, to move in with Mark and his family.



Reporter-Herald/Jenny Sparks
Betty Stanley, right, shares a laugh with her son Mark, center, and Keri Dotson, left, one of her caregivers, recently at Stanley's Loveland home.

If You're Interested

What: Home Helpers of Larimer County.

When: 24-7 nonmedical in-home care services.

Where: Home-based business.

For more information: Call 278-1112, or go to www.homehelpers.cc/larimercounty58520.

Take note: Affiliated with Direct Link Help at the Touch of a Button, a national provider of medical alert units, including a personal 24-hour personal emergency response system and an automated medication dispenser.

Mark, a 30-year veteran of Lafarge, where he started as a laborer, was laid off from his position as area manager in December 2008. Betty's husband, Thomas, became ill at about the same time and had problems with his heart and kidneys, Mark said.

With the time free in his schedule, Mark started taking Thomas to doctor appointments two to three times a week, and then he started caring for his mother full time.

"With her MS, she couldn't do her daily activities by herself," Mark said. "She was lonely and missed my dad. ... She wanted to come live with us."

Betty did well at the Stanleys' home for the first three months, then started getting depressed and missing her husband of 50 years.

More Resources

Mark's sister and her husband helped out, but the Stanleys started looking for resources and additional assistance. They weren't satisfied with what they found.

"We wanted to get her healthy and get her back up to her cheerful, happy, loving self," Mark said.

As Mark researched assisted care, he realized he had found his calling, he said.

"I'm not going to get rich doing this, but I'll be rich in life," Mark said. "I loved my job, but this is far more rewarding. The most rewarding part is probably the contact with people — getting to know people and understand what they need."

Home Helpers has seven caregivers and two clients, but by the end of the year, Mark plans to bring on 50 caregivers. Mark goes to new clients' homes, assesses their needs and sets up an in-home care plan, providing a range of services such as transportation, light housekeeping, laundry, grocery shopping and cooking.

For those who have family and friends providing the care, Home Helpers offers a break for their caregivers, Mark said.

The caregivers from Home Helpers become a companion to the clients. They talk with them, play games and do crafts, go on walks and take them to the mall, the senior center or anywhere else.

"We do everything they typically would do every day other than medical," Mark said. "People want to stay in their homes. They want to live their life out of their homes."

Betty was able to return to her home in January.

"Now, she's as happy as can be. She loves her caregivers," Mark said. "She's gained her independence back."

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