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Northern New Jersey

A haven for elderly, at half the price

Tuesday, July 15, 2008


 By HARVY LIPMAN
 RECORD COLUMNIST

If you have an elderly relative who can't take care of herself at home any longer but doesn't need the extensive services of a nursing home, where can you turn?



DAVID BERGELAND/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elizabeth Davis, executive director of Bright Side Manor in Teaneck, with resident Lucy DeVries.

were discharged from the hospital. So she and a colleague formed a non-profit to fill the gap.

They called their organization Geriatric Services and took over Bright Side Manor in Teaneck, which had been providing senior housing since the 20s, turning it into a licensed assisted-living home dedicated to providing care for elderly clients at half the price of similar facilities.

Beyond a reduced charge, Bright Side is also distinguished by the fact that it accepts people eligible for Medicaid immediately. Most other assisted-living facilities limit their Medicaid placements to existing private-paying residents who have exhausted their assets.

Bright Side Manor

For \$3,500 to \$4,500 a month, you could place her in any of a number of assisted-living facilities across North Jersey. But what about low- and moderate-income families who can't foot that hefty bill?

Nearly 20 years ago Elizabeth Davis, then a social worker at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, began asking herself the same question. Her geriatric patients often found themselves with few options when they

were discharged from the hospital. So she and a colleague formed a non-profit to fill the gap.

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Prospective residents with few assets usually end up in nursing homes.

"We're taking care of people nobody else will take care of," said Davis, the non-profit's executive director.

Completely renovated in 2002 using foundation grants and loans
300 Teaneck Road

Teaneck, NJ 07666

201-692-1000

Bright Side Manor operates an assisted-living residence specifically designed to serve low- and moderate-income elderly clients.

from public financing agencies, Bright Side Manor houses 65 residents ranging in age from 60 to 96. The facility features brightly lit and decorated rooms, and staff who seem to know every resident

by name.

"A lot of our residents suffer from dementia," Davis said. Almost all of the residents, she added, need help managing their medication. "More recently we're seeing a trend of people coming in their 60s who have mild developmental disabilities. They were kept at home and cared for by their parents, who have either died or are themselves in nursing homes."

Relatives of Bright Side Manor's clients and counselors who specialize in helping families find placements for the elderly are unabashed in their praise of the facility.

"I've worked with them for seven years and I've never had a bad experience. I admire them a lot," said Teresa Kirwan, an elder-care adviser with A Place for Mom, a national organization that helps families find residences for their elderly relatives. "The staff know each and every resident. You never see them walk by residents without stopping to talk to them and rub their backs."

Adrienne Rothstein of Fair Lawn, whose 86-year-old mother-in-law lives at Bright Side Manor, said, "She is ecstatically happy there."

Because Margot Rothstein receives a monthly pension from the German government as a Holocaust survivor, her income is too high to make her eligible for Medicaid. Her family had been paying an additional \$2,000 a month for her to live in a different assisted-living home "and it was bleeding us to death," Adrienne Rothstein said. "Bright Side fills a real hole in the system. It's terrific. Everyone there goes the extra mile."

Davis certainly has, especially when it comes to keeping the non-profit's ledger in the black. The first eight years after it was formed, she worked a second job and took almost no salary from Geriatric Services. She also lent the facility \$90,000 "from my son's college fund."

At the same time, the organization has tried to keep staff salaries and benefits competitive - with apparent success. "Our director of nursing has been here for 14 years, and we have almost no staff turnover," Davis said. "That makes all the difference."

Fund raising has not been the group's forte, however. "We don't have a development director, and I've never been able to put time into marketing the place," she noted.

With the hiring of an assistant director last year, Davis hopes that will change. Bright Side will hold its fourth annual garden party fund raiser in September, and for the first time has been able to attract some corporate sponsors. It would like to attract many more. In addition, each of its nine board members is being asked for the first time to raise \$1,000 annually.

"I'd like to see us have an endowment fund or some sort of cash reserve," Davis said.

Spending on programs: The organization spends more than 90 cents of every dollar on services for its residents, putting it in the top quarter of all long-term care facilities for the elderly in New Jersey. Plus

Spending on fund raising: Bright Side raises about \$4 for every dollar it spends on fund-raising, among the bottom third in fund-raising returns for elder-care groups. Minus Executive compensation: Davis is paid \$67,000, the lowest salary of any chief executive at a long-term care non-profit in the state. Plus

Financial stability: The organization has struggled to stay in the black, although it did end up with a \$116,689 surplus in 2007. Neutral

Outcomes: Residents, several of their relatives and numerous professionals in the elder-care field say Bright Side provides a unique combination of professional and compassionate care. Plus

Demand for services: The facility is the only assisted-living residence in Bergen County willing to accept unlimited numbers of

Medicaid clients and charges relatively modest fees to others, making it affordable for low- and moderate-income elderly. Plus

Transparency: The organization readily provided all requested financial documents. Plus

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