

# Free help to set up Mom, Pop

By Jane Adler, Special to the Tribune  
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Finding new housing for an elderly parent is never easy.

After her father died, Shelley Crosby worried about her 81-year-old mother who lived alone in Indiana. So Crosby was glad when her mother, Bettye Segraves, agreed to sell her home of 50 years and move to Chicago.

But mother and daughter faced a daunting search for housing. They weren't sure what buildings had vacancies or what type would be most appropriate for Segraves, who has a few health issues but is still independent. Also, Crosby has a busy job as artistic director at the American Girl Theater and didn't have a lot of time to devote to a housing search. "I didn't know what we were going to do," she said.

Help came from a service called Senior Living Experts Inc., a Chicago-based company that assists seniors and their families with housing selections.

After meeting Segraves, the Senior Living representative suggested a building for independent elders, with some services.

Mother and daughter toured three buildings and selected a one-bedroom apartment at the Breakers, a North Side building that offers meals and housekeeping. "Senior Living helped us narrow the housing choices," said Crosby. "It was a godsend."

Services are available to help seniors and their families navigate the maze of senior housing. Geriatric case managers and social-service agencies can help seniors find housing as part of an assessment of the individual's needs. There is also a handful of new services that offer housing advice.

Senior Living Experts was started about a year ago by Lisa Sneddon. In a typical case, Sneddon talks with the senior's adult daughter over the phone to find out how much care the senior needs. Sometimes, Sneddon meets with the senior. Then Sneddon arranges tours of several places. "Families get overwhelmed. So it's good for me to be there," said Sneddon.

Sneddon's service is free. Something like an apartment-finder service, Sneddon is paid a fee by the building the family selects. Sneddon works with buildings in the suburbs and city. But, she emphasizes, "I send people to places I do not have contracts with. It depends what [the senior] needs."

Another service is A Place for Mom, an online housing referral source. Like the other service, it's free. (The selected building pays the company a referral fee.)

A family member or senior can fill out an assessment at the Web site, and an adviser calls within 24 hours. Or, the family can call a toll-free number and talk to an adviser immediately. The adviser asks about the situation, what the elderly person needs and finances. "Once we have that information, then we give them a list of options that fit their parameters," said Sarah Bentz, marketing director at A Place for Mom, based in Seattle.

A Place for Mom works with about 11,000 buildings nationwide, Bentz said. That makes the service helpful for families who don't live nearby, she added.

It should be noted that these free housing services work with market-rate buildings. The services are meant for people who have the money to pay for an assisted living or retirement building, fairly expensive housing arrangements. If your parent has a low income, your best bet is to contact your area agency on aging.

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