

Continuing care under budget cuts

BY LOIS BELL
SHERIDAN SENIOR CENTER

SHERIDAN — As director of the Senior Center's Help at Home program, Janet Korpela is familiar with the rollercoaster funding world for nonprofit agencies.

Her constant challenge is to provide in-home services in an environment of increasing demand with decreasing resources. So, when Korpela received news that almost \$175,000 was lost through a combination of state funding cuts and program changes, her team huddled to come up with ways to respond.

Their goal? to ride out the current financial bad weather and keep services at the same levels.

"There's a mentality out there that our services are free," Korpela said. "But that's not a sustainable model. No one would last long giving their service away."

The licensed home health care Help at Home program is offered through the Sheridan Senior Center, a nonprofit organization. But a payment stream is necessary for the program's sustainability. Payment for services to older residents for personal care, light house-

keeping and light meal preparation services come from private payments, long-term care insurance, Medicaid, a contract with the Department of Veterans Affairs and through a Wyoming Home Services grant. Occasional donations specifically directed to the program help. One donation currently provides some subsidy for in-home services for a number of older residents in the Tongue River Valley who need assistance.

Korpela said that 90-95 people in their current clientele of 200 rely on WyHS subsidies from the Wyoming Department of Health to help pay for services. But when the WDH passed budget cuts from the state Legislature through, the cuts impacted most those who need the financial help.

"Two thousand, seven hundred dollars per year would provide two hours of care once a week for 52 weeks," Korpela said, "versus \$8,000 or more a month in a care facility. We are really a cost-effective way to receive care."

Despite proven cost effectiveness of community based in-home care, Korpela and her team have to work with the current state of funding. They developed a three-point approach to keep their current staff and long-term clientele.

"We first looked at our current (WyHS) clientele and what services they were getting," Korpela said. "We looked at alternatives for them to get their needs met."

Solutions included shifting clients to getting groceries delivered instead of staff shopping with them and



COURTESY PHOTO

Director Janet Korpela and the Senior Center's Help at Home leadership team responded with strategies to continue in-home services to elders in Sheridan County communities when funding was cut. Standing with Korpela are two of the team members, Kim Schultz, left, and Kathy Watson.

engaging them in the Senior Center's home delivered meals program in lieu of meal preparation.

The second response addressed the need for human contact.

"Despite all the socialization studies, instead of sitting down to a cup of tea (with a client), our aides visit while they work," said Korpela.

Some years ago, Korpela had endorsed visiting with clients as part of their care plan.

"This is really critical especially for those who don't have family members," Korpela said about visitation being an essential component of care. "This is how we help people not be scammed and provides an opportunity to notice chang-

es in health and behavior that lead to referrals to other needed services."

The third response was to keep a few spots open to provide short-term care to people who need services only temporarily such as those recovering from surgery.

"In that way, we can provide care for more people for a shorter period of time, enabling us to respond to short-term needs. The model of in-home service is different than a group model such as Day Break," said Korpela. "We need to dedicate one staff person per client. It's the nature of the business."

These three strategies provided a limited number of openings for clients who rely on WyHS assistance. As a result, no client under the

WyHS program has been cut and the Help at Home team was able to add services for people under the WyHS grant funding under certain circumstances.

But the funding cuts have increased a waiting list from five to 60-plus individuals who need subsidized care on a sliding fee scale. The list makes Korpela cringe.

Korpela is upfront with people who approach for services that there is a waiting list. She will steer families to resources that help them meet their need in the interim.

"And we don't take first-come, first-served," Korpela said of the waiting list. "We triage the list and respond to those with the greatest need first."

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CENTER STAGE

Bridging the gap between hospital and home

The Senior Center is the home of many hats. I have worked for the Senior Center for almost nine years and am still amazed at all the programs we have to help our senior and disabled community. While all the services at the Senior Center are truly wonderful, the one that is nearest and dearest to my heart is "Help at Home."



JANET KORPEL

I am one of many Home Health Aides in the Help at Home department. We are a licensed Home Health Agency and we are bonded and insured. We are First Aid and CPR certified. Our goal is to provide assistance to help keep people independent and in their homes.

To help gather a mental picture of what we do, I would like to share a few stories of past and present clients of mine.

I had a wonderful little lady, with low vision, that had been in a nursing home and was ready to come home but needed assistance with her twice a week showers and needed some assistance with some light housekeeping.

I brushed her hair and even brushed her dentures and read her mail to her. After I would vacuum, she would always say her home looked so good and she felt better about herself.

Another client was an elderly gentleman who needed help with showers and shaving. I noted that he was losing weight; he said he was unable to stand to cook, so we called Home Delivered Meals and the next day he was getting a hot fresh meal for lunch, daily. His mood improved and he even gained his weight back.

Another client was a housekeeping client, she had to go to the hospital and when she came home, she needed help with her showers. Our nurse set her up and that day she got a shower and she was so happy to be in her own home.

As home health aides, we also wear many hats. A few things that we do for our clients include showering, dressing, hair care, shaving, shopping for them, taking them shopping, help prepare meals, vacuuming, mopping, taking out trash, laundry and many more tasks. We develop professional relationships with our people and their families. The families feel more at peace knowing that we come into their loved one's home and care for

them. Some families are caregivers to their loved ones and at times need a break; we provide that through the Family Caregiver Program.

Many clients are low income and are not able to afford an expensive service; we do have a sliding fee scale for those that qualify. Help at Home is not just for those with a lot of money.

As home health aides, homemakers, nurses and our access care coordinator, we help in so many ways I don't have enough space to mention them all. Our clients are cared for with gentle hands and caring hearts, from hospital or nursing home or just a person wanting help for their loved one, we do all we can to keep our senior community in their homes. We give smiles and laughter, a tender ear and companionship to those that need us. From one hour once a week or five days a week, we are there.

All these reasons and more are why my co-workers and I are proud to be a part of the Help at Home program.

JANET KORPEL is a home health aide for the Sheridan Senior Center. This column was originally published June 13, 2015. Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan Community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.

SENIOR CENTER HAPPENINGS

- Join us for a conversation with Dr. John Ziesel, founder "I'm Still Here Foundation" in the Sheridan College atrium, 4:30-6:30 p.m. on Jan. 25. This presentation on building a dementia friendly community is open to the public. If you know of a family who is living with dementia, pass on this information and encourage them to attend. For more information, call the Sheridan Senior Center at 672-2240.
- Wacky BINGO night at the Senior Center Jan. 25. Doors open at 5 p.m. Supper served 5-6 p.m. and is a suggested contribution of \$5 per person for those ages 60 and older and reg-

istered with the Senior Center; \$8 per person for those under 60 or not registered with the Senior Center. No charge for BINGO. Must call 672-2240 in advance to reserve your spot or stop by the receptionist's desk to sign up in the Activities Book.

- If it's January, it's JANE-uary! If your first, middle, or last name is Jane — no matter how to spell it — sign up for the 2017 JANE-uary celebration. Call 672-2240 to sign up and for more information.
- Pancake breakfast at the Senior Center, Saturday, Jan. 28, 7:30-9 a.m. with eggs, bacon and fresh fruit.

Bottomless cup of coffee or hot tea included and your choice of either milk or juice. Call 672-2240 in advance to let us know that you're coming. The cost is \$5 for those 60 and older and registered with the Senior Center; Senior Center meal tickets accepted for breakfast.

- The AARP Tax Foundation is offering free tax preparation services on Tuesdays at the Senior Center and on Thursdays at Fulmer Library for those ages 60 and older beginning Feb. 2. Call 672-2240 to make an appointment over the phone. Restrictions on what taxes can be prepared apply.

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