

Five RNs Involved in Expanding National In-Home Care Franchise Serving Seniors

For RN Lynn Marie Houghton of Easton, Pennsylvania, there is no sadder memory than knowing that her grandparents were placed in nursing homes against their wishes. She vowed to do everything in her power to prevent that from happening to others by helping them stay in their homes and live independently.

She has done what she promised.

Houghton and four other RNs from Pennsylvania, New York and Massachusetts have joined the expanding Seniors Helping Seniors® In-Home Services organization, based in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Reading, part of the growing network of private and public support options for seniors who want to remain in their own homes for as long as they can.

The need for such organizations is great as our senior population keeps growing. Not only are there nearly 40,000,000 Americans who are over 65, but also about four million are over 80 with the majority in this age group being women. Every state has seen their elderly populations grow; in the Northeast, the average growth among states is 13 percent. The other side of the coin is the number of caregivers--estimated at more than 44 million Americans--who are struggling to help aging parents or elderly friends.

Houghton said, "I like all aspects of nursing, but I have a special place for seniors, especially since most of my experience has centered on senior care and I had a very close relationship with my grandparents. I truly believe that placing them in a nursing home shortened their lives. So, investing in a Seniors Helping Seniors franchise is my tribute to them. It is very important to me to help people live out their lives the way they chose to."

She continued, "I strongly believe that with my qualifications and experience, I know what the needs of seniors are and what they need to help them live independently in their own homes; the receivers of our services can, also feel confident because of that. I have not done any 'hands-on' nursing in over 10 years and I missed that. This opportunity was exactly what I was looking for because it allowed me to not only be a nurse again, but also to remain a stay-at-home mother."

Seniors Helping Seniors started in 1998 as a non-profit service for Reading and Berks County. It was the dream of Kiran Yocom, who worked with Mother Teresa in India. With the help of her husband, Philip Yocom, she turned that dream into a reality.

“Seniors Helping Seniors is unique since it is the first organization of its kind to offer non-medical in-home care to seniors (receivers) that is done by other seniors (providers). That is very important because they can relate to each other. We are giving seniors the chance to choose an independent lifestyle for as long as possible with the dignity and respect they deserve. Also, it gives seniors a chance to earn additional income,” said Kiran Yocom.

Seniors Helping Seniors providers deliver companion care, light housekeeping, personal care, transportation, overnight supervision, 24-hour care, house maintenance and small repairs and yard work to receivers. They also serve clients in assisted living facilities and nursing homes.

In 2006, the non-profit Seniors Helping Seniors group provided nearly 13,000 hours of service and since its founding, managed to help some 600 receivers and providers. Based on that success, the Yocoms launched the national for-profit Seniors Helping Seniors In-Home Services.

Philip Yocom said, “We believe we have found a practical, cost-effective way to help seniors remain independent and for them to continue contributing. As we grow nationwide, we remain committed to providing our brand of loving, giving, caring and compassionate service, which is something that all nurses can appreciate and understand, and one of the reasons why our services appeal to them.”

Also part of Seniors Helping Seniors are RN Katherine Munnely, Kings Park, N.Y., who supports the master license for Long Island and several New York boroughs; RN Janice Matheson, Yarmouth, Mass., who opened a franchise on Cape Cod; RN Beatrice Tettey, who has a franchise in Roosevelt, N.Y.; and RN Marianne Gawel, Temple, Pa., who is a provider with the Reading non-profit organization.

Gawel said it is very rewarding to her to be a part of an organization like Seniors Helping Seniors. Her experience as an RN gives her an added advantage as a provider and she also focuses on advising seniors about hygiene and equipping their homes properly. “A lot of older people withdraw, isolate themselves and live behind closed doors. Outliving spouses and friends or not being able to get around as much, can be especially devastating. Seniors need to stay connected. In addition to adult day care, social services and senior centers, Seniors Helping Seniors helps them do that.”

For Munnely, becoming involved was based on several reasons.

“The autonomy of having my own business was one. Giving back to the community I have lived and worked in for so many years is important to me, as it is for many nurses. The knowledge that I gained over the years caring for seniors and the frustration of working through systems that limit resources is very big.

Being able to spend time with patients and their families is very limited. The opportunity of having more time to spend with them through Seniors Helping Seniors is important to me,” Munnelly said.

“And, the mission of loving, caring and compassionate service appealed to me. This is very important to every nurse,” said Munnelly.

Matheson found that the chance to run her own business enabled her to combine her lengthy experience as a nurse working with the elderly and her skill set.

“Many people I spoke to felt this was a much needed service on the Cape even though there is considerable competition. A good friend of mine works as a case manager and one of the biggest complaints from people who do hire non-medical care is that the younger people they get do not understand what the person they care for is going through,” said Matheson.

Matheson also cited the overwhelming need for her service. “I also work as an independent contractor and have done long-term care assessments. In my experience, most older adults who are at home do not need skilled medical care to remain in their homes. They need basic support to help them remain as independent as possible.”

She said that while a Seniors Helping Seniors franchise may not be something that appeals to every RN, it did to her. “People who are ‘geri-centric’ and understand the needs of older people are probably most skilled for this. That includes nurses who have gerontological certification or who work as case managers.”

Tetty, a nurse educator in home care and a site visitor for a Long Island community health program, also was immediately drawn to the possibilities of expanding and extending her nursing career with a franchise.

“In-home services like Seniors Helping Seniors will help the elderly stay in their own homes for as long as possible and meet their needs safely. A simple thing like medication reminders can help them avoid hospitalization,” said Tetty.

“Most of my colleagues find the idea of being a nurse entrepreneur very rewarding and exciting. Clearly this is a much-needed service in all of our communities with our rapidly growing aging population. I look forward to providing services in an industry that I am familiar with and one where personal oversight will ensure best practice,” said Tetty.

“I would recommend this to anyone who cares for the elderly, wants autonomy, is willing to work hard and who would want the same for themselves or their loved ones,” said Matheson.

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