

# Help Adult Services

By Nousha Sabet



**H**elp Adult Services, a non-profit organization founded in 1982 by a group of fourteen Omaha philanthropists who came together to discuss problems as they related to metropolitan Omaha disadvantaged and underprivileged citizens and the defeating barriers they often faced.

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Among those original founders were Mrs. Marjorie Kiewit and Mr. Willis Strauss who helped to form the organization that was once known as Presbyterian Outreach and is now HELP Adult Services.

It was the group's original intention to launch a relief program with the aim of protecting family caregivers who were caring for loved ones twenty-four hours a day, 7 days a week, with no breaks and no hope of relief from their relentless caregiving schedules.

Today, the organization serves over 9,000 individuals every year. The two major programs are Respite Care and Health and Medical Equipment Loan Program (HELP):

**Respite Care:** "A break from the burden of caregiving?" This program emphasizes support for family caregivers so they can continue to provide care to a family member. Respite Care rescues a family caregiver so they don't become isolated, over-worked, and eventually burned out. As the population ages and life spans increase, respite care can help delay costly out-of-home placement by offering qualified in-home respite trained volunteers to isolated caregivers.

Family caregivers have become the backbone of the long-term care system and help disabled and elderly family members successfully remain in their homes longer. The result--avoiding admittance to the health care

system—and saving taxpayers billions in long-term care costs each year. Families do pay a small fee (\$5 per hour instead of the typical \$20-\$35 per hour) to help cover training and other basic costs of the program.

The Respite Care program provides orientation, educational training and on-going continuing education for volunteers. Every effort is made to accurately match volunteers with clients. In 2009, the Respite program supplied over 8,000 hours of respite. HELP Adult Services has recently employed a program community liaison whose job is to recruit new volunteers. As a result, we are anticipating unprecedented availability of more respite caregiver volunteers for 2010 and beyond. Training has already begun for the new volunteer recruits.

In 1982, after the Respite Care program's organization, a related need also became apparent for major affordable medical equipment. Today, with over 9,000 items in our warehouse (from walkers, wheelchairs, hospital beds and everything in between) the majority of equipment has been donated by individuals and medical facilities who no longer need the items for use by those who desperately do.

Health and Medical Equipment Loan Program (H.E.L.P.) was designed to meet two compelling needs: provide health and medical equipment to disabled,

disadvantaged adults and elderly regardless of their ability to afford it and to help the entire community stay green by reducing the volume of waste through recycled medical equipment. About 9,000 donated items stay out of landfills with extended life for many years. These are useful and probably costly items that are not ready to be labeled as trash or left in the basement.

The equipment includes donated medical items such as wheelchairs, crutches, bath benches, commodes, hospital beds, scooters, c-pap machines and lift chairs—and many others. The Health and Medical Equipment Loan Program provides durable items for a nominal processing fee to those who are uninsured, under-insured, do not qualify, or are waiting for access to Medicare or Medicaid. Populations served include anyone—especially those with low or moderate incomes. Job loss—and resulting insurance loss is a contributing challenge for people needing medical equipment. Individuals are referred to HELP by their friends, families, doctors, physical therapists, and medical facilities. And as a result, over 6,600 people annually obtain much needed medical equipment.

### **Two Stories of HELP Adult Services clientele:**

Janie takes care of her husband, Byron, who has Alzheimer's Disease and uses our Respite Program. In her story to us, she mentioned how it is a full-time job to take care of Byron. She is always on alert because Byron will get up anytime—day or the middle of the night and wander. Even if she is doing the dishes she has to keep an ear out for him. With the help of Respite Care service and

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their volunteer, Joze Pihlar, spending around 20 hours a month with Byron gives her enough time to recuperate, run errands, or just spend time by herself. “This program has been a tremendous help!”

Jan used the Health and medical Loan Program for her husband. “Without the H.E.L.P. program I wouldn't have been able to bring my husband home!” she told us. Through the program she received a hospital bed, bed rails, toilet seat riser, toilet safety frame, and a commode. This helped her to fit the needs of her husband so that he could be comfortable at home. Unfortunately, things got worse for him and he had to return to the hospital. Jan and her husband got married at the hospital because he wasn't well enough to get out of bed. The hospital opened up their chapel so they could have the ceremony there, a first for the hospital. Their honeymoon also wasn't a traditional one. They were Life-flighted to Colorado her husband's home and they spent his last moments in their cabin overlooking the mountains. Jan said, “The time he did spend at home was very special and thanks to HELP Adult Services it was able to happen.”

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