

A NETWORK of support services for seniors

By Devon Gallivan

Based on a University of Massachusetts study from 2014, there are over 215,000 people on Cape Cod, 27 percent of whom are over 65, which is twice the national average. With these ever-increasing numbers, the need is also growing for support services for these seniors, whether it is financial advice, the drawing up of key documents, home health care, living arrangements, therapy, support groups and more. In promoting aging with dignity and empowering our seniors, it is essential for agencies offering these services to work together in this community as partners.

A strong network of these resources and agencies are found in two established local organizations. Cape Cod offers the Community Care Resource Group (CCRG) and Plymouth County has the Plymouth Networking Group For Senior Services (PNG). Groups like these offer networking meetings for industry professionals and events where these professionals work together for the greater good of our senior population. Per the credo of the PNG, "The best way to learn about other companies is to collaborate with them."

Councils on Aging and Senior Centers bring seniors in direct contact with many professional resources. Senior Centers offer blood pressure clinics, podiatrist services, and audiology assistance from medical professionals. Special events might include elder law attorneys offering advice and assis-




tance with planning, preparing documents and understanding insurance policies. Social workers provide direction with finding financial assistance, housing options and veterans benefits. On a lighter level of things but still just as important, there is the support of fitness classes offered by trainers familiar with the typical ailments of boomers and seniors.

There are more than 40 million people in the U.S. over the age of 65, representing roughly 13 percent of the population. There are nearly 6 million people in the U.S. over the age of 85, representing 2 percent of the population. At current growth rate these numbers are expected to double by 2050 (per Brad Prescott, Caring.com Senior Editor).

An ideal model of an organization that is well networked in a community is HopeHealth. HopeHealth's mission is to enhance comfort and quality of life for those who are experiencing the impact of serious illness and loss. Melissa Weidman, Director of Community Relations and Outreach, stated that "working in partnership with a wide range of community organizations allows us to enhance public awareness of needed services and how to access them. Many people don't realize what resources are available and are so grateful to learn this from us." In addition to direct care to patients and families, HopeHealth offers support groups and presentations at many Councils on Aging and Senior Centers. Churches and veterans groups are other venues for their informational presentations. They also work with Elder Services of Cape Cod and the Islands, another non-profit agency which is a central source of information for aging adults. Pertaining to education, HopeHealth offers training and development to professionals and community members on topics such as Alzheimer's and dementia, advance care planning,

grief, caregiving, pain management and end of life care.

Senior living communities want to help older adults stay healthy and remain independent as long as possible. Healthcare providers want the same thing. Teaming up with a senior living community allows this to be a possibility. Thirwood Place, for example, has a partnership with Cape Cod Healthcare. This relationship allows medical professionals and C-Lab services to hold office hours on site at Thirwood Place for the convenience of senior residents. Ed Goodwin, General Manager of Thirwood Place, says, "Our population of seniors is coming in later in life with more needs but perseverant and determined to hold on to their independence. With that said, all these resources at their fingertips make them feel more in control." Sight Loss Services has also teamed up with quite a few communities in the area to hold monthly support groups. And banking institutions offer their services in many of the Cape and Plymouth senior communities.

Yes, senior care is a "business," but the business of senior care is one of compassion and helping people. Building a network of trustworthy organizations and working together for the betterment of our community's seniors and their families will help boomers and seniors keep informed while continuing to maximize their quality of life. 



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