



ELDERSERVE CAN BE A *Model for the* Community

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Not a week passes without me hearing the question, “What can I do for my elderly parents to keep them safe?” It’s mostly asked by a child of a loved one, but occasionally by other caregivers as well. These can be some of the hardest discussions to have with families. Mostly, elderly parents

want to stay independent in their own house, while caregivers want their safety, either in their own home or in a facility setting. There are no easy answers for these questions. It’s even harder when there are no family members.

With aging comes a number of challenges such as poor cognition, decreased mobility and a host of chronic medical problems. This population is particularly vulnerable to issues like elder abuse, financial fraud, loneliness, psychiatric issues like depression and anxiety, poor mobility, poverty and insufficient nutritional meals, to name a few. With health care costs rising and limited funding, the elderly are less likely to seek out help to address these issues.

In Jefferson County, we are fortunate to have number of health care entities focused on elder care. These include some great long-

term care organizations, assisted living facilities, home health care organizations and a few non-profits. One of these entities is the non-profit organization ElderServe.

Since 1962, ElderServe has been supporting adults aged 60 and older in Jefferson County. Their program includes four major goals. I’d like to review these goals and examine how they can be implemented by the Louisville community at large.

1. SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE THROUGH CARE MANAGEMENT, HOME CARE SERVICES AND ADULT DAY HEALTH CENTERS.

Care management helps to navigate geriatric care resources. The goal is to answer questions regarding affordable housing, social activities, legal and financial issues, safety and security.

Home care services include light housekeeping, laundry, meal preparation and cleanup, shopping, appointments, companionship, bathing, grooming, dressing, eating and medication reminders.

An Adult Day Health Center is an excellent option for elderly to live independently as their caregiver goes to work. The center has a nurse on duty to take care of seniors with health issues, check blood sugar and blood pressure, and handle emergencies. They serve lunch

and have a van to pick up and drop off the residents. It provides daily care for patients in need. One can still live in one's own house while enjoying the benefits of a safe daytime place where they can socialize and be engaged. Quite often, the cost is paid by the state for patients who have low income and qualify for subsidies.

2. PROTECTING SENIORS THROUGH CRIME VICTIM SERVICES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GUARDIANSHIP.

Crime victim services are available for adults aged 60 and older who have suffered financial exploitation; physical, emotional or sexual abuse; robbery or burglary; caregiver neglect and other crimes. This population is particularly vulnerable to scammers and con artists. The crime victim advocates help in filing police reports, acquiring protective orders in cases of domestic violence, working with the police or courts, finding short-term emergency housing in case of caregiver abuse, filing crime victim compensation claims and accessing community services.

Financial management can range from a representative payee, where Elderserve manages a client's government benefits for them, to conservatorship where they manage all of a client's financial affairs.

Guardianship is for adults who cannot manage their own affairs and may be at risk of neglect, abuse and/or financial exploitation. As a court-appointed guardian, ElderServe manages financial resources using bonded and insured staff members, arranges appropriate, safe and affordable housing, arranges medical, educational, social,

vocational and rehabilitative services and makes final arrangements.

3. OVERCOMING SOCIAL ISOLATION THROUGH THE FRIENDLY VISITOR PROGRAM, TELECARE AND SENIOR COMPANIONS.

The Friendly Visitor Program is a great option to combat loneliness and social isolation in an older population. A visitor can make all the difference in brightening a life and improving health. Volunteers are matched with a senior who holds similar interests, agreeing to visit at least twice a month for one year or more.

Telecare offers a way to check on a senior's well-being. Weekday calls give many older adults a sense of security and reducing loneliness can improve health.

A senior companion is another option for seniors. The goal is to manage active, low income adults aged 55 and older with frail or isolated peers. It is best described as "seniors helping seniors." They provide caregivers with a break, take clients to appointments or shopping, help prepare meals and join in activities such as arts, crafts and games. They also join together for service projects.

4. PROMOTING WELLNESS THROUGH ACTIVE CHOICES AND A SENIOR CENTER.

Active Choices supports adults aged 60 and older who are homebound or can't get out often. It's essential to help these seniors develop custom goals for adding physical activity daily.

The senior center offers access to a care manager who can help access community resources. It also offers educational sessions on diabetes, cholesterol and medication management. Wellness checks include blood pressure and podiatry, as well as vision and hearing screenings.

The need for organizations like Elderserve is growing. The number of people aged 85 and older is projected to triple between 2015 and 2040. The message from the CEO, Julie Guenther, summarizes their goal very well:

"The burgeoning population of older adults certainly presents challenges, but at ElderServe, we see opportunities. We could not have made it this far without a strong team of employees, partners, donors and volunteers. Thanks to your help, we know we're well-positioned to be a life raft for so many in the "silver tsunami."

Disclaimer:

Dr. Saleem serves on the board of Elderserve. Much of the information above is obtained from the website www.elderserveinc.org. 

Dr. Saleem practices Family Medicine at KentuckyOne Family Practice Associates and is medical director for various long-term health care facilities in the Metro Louisville Area. He is the President of the Kentucky Medical Director's Association, and serves on the board of directors for Doctors for Healthy Communities, Muslim Americans for Compassion, Elderserve, and the Louisville Islamic Center.



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