

FOR SENIORS, FEW BETTER PLACES TO ASK FOR HELP

By Agnes Herman, NORTH COUNTY TIMES, Nov. 3, 2010

Years ago, I was a young social worker for Family Service of Cincinnati and trekked through some of the poorest, saddest sections of the city. I was not distributing dollars; I was trying to dispense support, understanding and encouragement by making weekly home visits to a variety of families. Their difficulties and concerns ranged from parenting, marital relationships, loneliness, illness, poverty and the springtime flooding of the Ohio River. Soon, home visits went out of style; the nature of the problems never did.

Then, like all aspects of the fluidity of human life, home visits made a comeback. The folks in the helping professions began to understand the significance of seeing people in their own homes, in their own comfort zones, of visiting with the homebound, understanding the context as well as the person.

Annette Conway is the Director of Home-based Effective Living Professionals. The service has been available since 1993. Annette's interest was piqued by a newspaper story and she began working for the agency in the late 1990s. Mary Lichty Adams, a licensed clinical social worker, is its founder. Annette bought the business in 2005. She is a licensed clinical psychologist, a warm, caring and intelligent woman whose passion "is in-home therapy ... the most effective approach for helping people to alleviate clinical depression and develop healthy cognitive patterns and beliefs about themselves and the world."

The staff of HELP consists of more than 52 professionals: psychologists, social workers, bilingual therapists, neuropsychologists and a psychiatrist. All work on behalf of their clients in coordination with the family doctor, the hospital physician, case managers and facilities personnel. Sixty-five percent of HELP's clientele are seniors.

Seeing folks in their homes enables a professional to observe and evaluate family interaction, loneliness, the nature of personal care and the context of the comfort zone. As a young social worker, I saw alcoholism, isolation and frustration in action. Today, there are many reasons people cannot and do not leave home to visit with a therapist. Some are physically homebound, others cannot arrange transportation, still others suffer from agoraphobia and are fearful. Among us, the elder generation, there is considerable concern and fear that seeking mental health help will stigmatize us. "Will my family and friends disapprove and think I am crazy?" or "I can help myself, I have been around long enough."

Whatever the reason, HELP provides in-home psychological services, privacy and confidentiality. Many are not depressed, others see no need to seek help. There are, however, innumerable concerns that we elders and not so-elders endure. The list is long. How many of us feel the pressure of the negative economy, joblessness, threatened and real cuts in services? Loss, grief and bereavement do not go away or change



with a pill; time alone does not always heal. Help generates hope. An objective, knowledgeable professional can provide supportive, clarifying insights and new ways of handling bad things that do happen to good people. There are couples' problems, often accompanied by abuse. That is not easily discerned or discussed, may comfortably float up front in the comfort of home. Some couples problems bubble up at retirement. I can remember women friends telling me that they were happy with their mates, but "not for lunch." Now, of course, retirement and the economy keep many spouses home for lunch, for better or worse. HELP might make it palatable.

Other concerns that are met by in-home therapy include child behavior. Both kids or adult offspring worry and stress us out. How much help and guidance from us is too much? An objective professional can offer understanding and clarification of the many parenting problems that are contentious. Addictions, faulty memory and the management of caregivers are all pressures that can be shared and diminished with outside support. Many of us cannot leave home to seek it.

Conway said that the services of HELP are available in North County, from Fallbrook and Bonsai North, San Ysidro South and Alpine East.

According to Annette, they have a therapist who will drive almost anywhere. The need is substantial enough to motivate this agency to expand to Los Angeles, San Francisco and Santa Barbara.

HELP accepts Medicare, Medi-Cal, most PPO plans but no HMO. In addition a sliding scale fee can be arranged. That scale operates for those who do not have insurance or have an HMO and cannot afford the usual fee. Those who have Medicare only and have difficulty with the co-pay can negotiate for a fee that is affordable.

HELP can be reached by phone at 858-481-8827; by email at www.helptherapist.com. Annette promises a therapist will make contact for an appointment within 48 hours.

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