

Ready Hands Credits Growth to Key Practices

In 2011, Ready Hands logged another year of record service volume, exceeding 2010 numbers by about 30% in both offices. In Alexandria, we also relocated to larger space and added additional administrative staff in order to position our home care agency for continued growth. Reflecting on these developments reminds us of the key practices that we feel have something to do with our good fortune. Here are a few:

Hire good aides.

Proper credentials, competence, experience, references and background checks are important. But just as importantly we seek aides who exhibit a friendly, willing attitude and understand the need for punctuality, initiative and a constant focus on client needs. To attract and retain good aides we treat them with respect and kindness and we try hard to meet their needs too. As a result we are rewarded with a steady stream of applicants from which to choose.

Set high expectations for our office personnel.

Our office employees know that we want every single caller to be treated with impeccable courtesy and responsiveness. They are expected to be productive and efficient. We also ask that they accept responsibility for challenging standards of performance.

Make sure that owners take ownership.

All callers know that they can reach the Bensons at any time for any reason. The owners are the public face of Ready Hands Home Care. We don't employ marketing personnel or "community liaisons." We don't use an

answering service or a delegated on-call staff.

Assign each client his or her own primary aide.

We want the same aide to work daily except for occasional relief. (Or, for round-the-clock care, the same two aides). We want a mutual bond of trust and good feeling to form between each client and his or her assigned aide. Many agencies will routinely assign aides to multiple clients each week. Ready Hands never does this.

Strive to deliver on every promise.

(And don't promise what we can't deliver well.)

We know that generating happy clients through consistent high quality service is our best form of advertising—but that also requires knowing our limits. Prospective clients often present with unusual scheduling needs or other factors that we know will jeopardize our ability to the job well. In such cases, which arise virtually every week, we courteously decline and instead direct them to other home care providers in our area.

Don't cut corners with staffing and scheduling.

Getting the right aide to each client every day is practically an art form. The aides' abilities must be matched to clients' needs. Commuting time, the presence of pets in the home, aides' income needs and even personality considerations all must be taken into account. Those doing short-term relief assignments must be given careful advance preparation, often "orienting" to a client under the direction of the primary aide. We spend a lot of time trying to get staffing and scheduling right.

Villages, continued

An ongoing concern for Villages is sustainable financing. According to Sullivan, Mount Vernon at Home gets about 60% of its funding from membership dues. The rest has to come from elsewhere, including charitable donations and federal, state and local grant monies. Governments and private entities concerned with aging in place are taking notice. The D.C. Office of Aging, for example, gave \$15,000 to help launch the DuPont Circle Village in 2009. The Village earlier received a \$3,000 grant from the DuPont Circle Citizens Association.

Besides funding concerns, there are other challenges. It is unclear how successful the Village model can be in low-income communities. In addition, neighborhood residents are not always receptive to the idea of paying hundreds of dollars in yearly dues. Nevertheless, Mount Vernon at Home's Sullivan is confident that neighborhood Villages are here to stay and will play an essential role in allowing seniors to remain safely in their home communities.

For more information on aging in place and the Villages concept, visit:

- ◆ www.vtvnetwork.org, the website for the Village to Village Network
- ◆ www.mountvernonathome.org

Four Employees Get Recognition Awards



Fikurte Gebresalassie Docas Dankwah Irene Edua-Mensah Agnes Salifu

Ready Hands is fortunate to have some wonderful employees, and it is always hard to pick out individuals for special recognition. However, the most recent recipients of our Quarterly Recognition Award make the task a bit easier.

Fikurte joined the Manassas office in March, 2011 and has been a joy to Ready Hands and to her clients. She is always cheerful and always ready to help. With Docas, hired in May, 2011, the watchwords are friendly, steady and reliable—all of which she has exemplified with her regular client. Irene, with the Alexandria office since April, 2008, has provided unfailingly dedicated care for many clients over the years. Agnes, hired in July, 2009 is the epitome of professionalism, warmth and dedication.

We thank them all for the great job they are doing.

To Our Clients and Friends:

The statistics are by now familiar: the number of seniors 65 and up is mushrooming and will more than double by 2050; the 90 and over population will more than quadruple. America, however, is far from prepared to deal with all the implications of what has been called this “demographic time bomb.” In this issue, we highlight one promising answer being tried around the country and especially in the greater Washington, D.C. area: the Village

movement. We hope you will find it interesting and thought-provoking.

Ready Hands continues to grow year over year by strong margins, a successful experience for which we are deeply grateful. On page two, we reflect on some of the practices that we feel have been contributory. And as always, we want to thank the many clients and professionals who have placed their confidence in us over the years!

The Ready Hands Home Care Team

“Village” Movement Builds Virtual Retirement Communities

America’s burgeoning senior population will require creative new strategies for successful aging in place. One such strategy is embodied by the “Village” concept, pioneered by Beacon Hill Village in Boston, Massachusetts. Conceived in 1999, Beacon Hill Village is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that makes a broad range of services available to its members through volunteers, selected service providers and strategic partnerships.

Now often referred to as an “aging in place community”, the Beacon Hill Village model has spread to over 60 similar community organizations nationwide, with many more under development. Although their offerings and resources vary, Villages share certain common features: they are grassroots organizations driven by neighborhood seniors who are determined to stay in their homes; they are primarily supported by and governed by resident members, who usually pay a regular membership fee; their central function is the coordination of access to affordable services, which can include anything from transportation to home repairs to social events to in-home personal care; they offer pre-screened providers who often discount their services to members; they depend heavily on neighborhood volunteers.

In Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. there are now 12-14 open Villages and another 17 or so in the planning stages. Mount Vernon at Home is one example. It opened its doors in 2009 and now has about 180 dues-paying members. According to its Executive Director, Barbara Sullivan, the



Mount Vernon at Home members on an outing. Transportation and socialization are among the most important needs served by Villages.

organization now boasts 80 volunteers and has 250 preferred providers on its list.

Sullivan points out that starting and sustaining a Village requires hard work and careful strategic planning. Since each community is different, planners must think early on about the specific needs of area seniors. “Transportation was one of the biggest needs for our seniors. If they don’t drive, they still must be able to do shopping and get to appointments,” said Sullivan. Social connectivity and minor household repairs were other areas where the organization found it could provide value. Mount Vernon at Home volunteers do myriad seemingly simple tasks that can be problematic for the elderly--everything from troubleshooting a computer to replacing a ceiling bulb. “You’d be surprised at the requests we get from our members,” said Sullivan.

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