



HOME for the Holidays

A DIFFERENT TAKE: NEWTON AT HOME

By Susana Lannik

Most of us associate the upcoming holidays with joy and anticipation. But this time of year can be a minefield for elderly members of our community who are determined to remain at home without family or others nearby who can assist. No one is around to help when it snows or if someone needs to be out and about during inclement weather. It is natural for out-of-town or very busy adult children who don't have enough time to deal with their own complex lives to also worry about their parents' needs. The guilt can become incredibly stressful.

Given these circumstances, I present the reader with a special holiday gift that could be life changing. Take a look at Newton at Home. It is a not-for-profit organization that provides an infrastructure for seniors to live safely and happily at home for as long as possible. Newton at Home is modeled on The Village to Village Network, which originated in Beacon Hill. This movement is now 250- 300 strong across the country and growing. It presently serves 30 members in Chestnut Hill, in addition to many other residents across the city. Any Newton senior may become a member.

I recently sat down with Newton at Home's Executive Director Maureen Grannan to learn more about how this organization helps so many. Grannan began by telling me, "While our mission is to keep people in their homes, we also help people make the transition to the next point in their lives." She shared very helpful information about the function of Newton at Home in the lives of our friends and neighbors

Q: Maureen, what do you believe is the most significant problem for a senior who wants to stay at home?

A: Isolation. Sometimes older people will isolate themselves in a form of self-inflicted non-socialization.

Q: How does Newton at Home help with this problem?

A: We have a number of programs and trained volunteers who reach out to our members.

As a person who drives, but dreams of having a chauffeur in my next life, I had been aware of the volunteer drivers from Newton at Home before this interview. They take members to and from the airport, medical facilities in the Boston area, supermarkets, pharmacies and many other venues. But there is so much more! Maureen filled me in on some of their other offerings.

Q: Tell me about the Winter Buddies program.

A: This program was born out of problems associated with Hurricane Sandy. At that time, we had our volunteers contact our members to ensure that furniture was taken in, windows were protected, cell phones were charged, and that needed supplies such as milk, eggs, flashlights, and medications were purchased before the storm's arrival. The volunteers also helped our members secure these items. At the time of the hurricane there were 10 to 15 members in the system. Last year, we had 49. Our volunteers have helped people in so many ways, from moving recycling bags away from hot radiators, to seeing to it that someone

with no electricity was temporarily relocated to the home of a board member.

Q: How does the Newton-Wellesley Hospital program work?

A: The program has been in place for a while, and addresses the need of our seniors and hospitals to avoid repeat hospitalizations. Newton-Wellesley has a corporate membership, where Newton at Home ensures a follow-up with people who leave the hospital to avoid the problems that might land them right back there. For example, the hospital discharge planner could require someone return for a checkup. But what they don't know is that the patient might not have a car or a person to drive them back to the hospital for that appointment. Missing a checkup might mean re-hospitalization. We take on people for 30 days following hospitalization. The first year we worked with ten people; the second year [this year] saw an additional ten. For the last few months, we have been working with high-risk case managers in internal medical practices in much the same way.

Q: What are affinity groups?

A: These are groups that enable members to share their interests

with each other. They may focus on Scrabble, knitting, dining, theater, books or discussion groups. Socializing with peers with the same interests is a strategy for avoiding isolation.

Q: Maureen, my clients always ask me, "How much will this cost?"

A: Our fees are outlined on our website. We offer a variety of fee structures.

Q: In addition to giving someone the gift of being able to stay at home while remaining engaged in life, as well as helping with everyday needs such as replacing a hard-to-reach light bulb or dragging heavy trash bins to the curb, what else does Newton at Home give to members and their families?

A: "I often tell our out-of-state or out-of-city families who seek help; 'We are going to be your second pair of eyes and ears to help with mom or dad.' Their relief is palpable, and more than once there have been tears of gratitude to know we are there."

To contact Newton at Home please visit newtonathome.org or call 617-795-2560

Newton at Home is a non-profit membership organization created to assist Newton's older residents to "live life to the fullest," enabling them to remain in their homes as they age, with comfort and peace of mind, while they enjoy the social support, active community participation and practical services which we provide.



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newtonathome.org