

SO WHAT DO WE DO WITH MOTHER?

by Bob Axford with the Community Newsletter

Due to modern society's improved health care and the Baby Boomers moving up in age, Manitoba is changing its demographics to a point where there is a disproportionately growing population of seniors. Because of this burst of volume, for those seniors contemplating some of their comfort years, there are also new realities of the degree to which they can expect to be supported by society around them.

Yes the government offers some program support if you get "in" a program but for many seniors it seems infrequent, inflexible, indifferent, and inadequate. Programs often demand that clients be sufficiently incapacitated to get "in" so much so that there is a drive to institutionalize rather than interdict with preventative measures.



On the other hand, there is an interesting and growing private sector response to a clear need to fill the vacuum left by the public sector. What is offered for those savvy folks who choose to give their parents a little help is invigorating, inspiring, individual attention which preserves independence and dignity as much as possible.

Is there a difference? You bet there is! Why do we not know more about it? Perhaps we are too busy listening to what the government tells us about all the good they do and fail to look a little closer for ourselves. We caught up with Katherine Gregoire this week and really had our eyes opened.

A bit of background: Katherine is a very nice lady from rural Manitoba (St Jean Baptiste to be exact.) a hairdresser who also worked to receive her Social Work degree in 2003. Having moved from Winnipeg in January 2005, local work was difficult to find. When she broke her wrist she had time to seriously consider her own future. Casting around for what she really wanted to do, she decided to create some self employment instead.

Her subsequent internet search led her to [The Seniors Choice](#), a company out of California that loves nothing better than to help others succeed. She did go to a government agency to try to get some assistance with putting it together and you can almost guess what the result of that was. The officials said it would never

work in Southern Manitoba. The Seniors Choice however understood her concept of supplementing senior's care because they knew the market and the concept was already common in the US. They helped her set up her own Canadian version and it has been working now for over a year.

What does Katherine's service do? It offers non medical, preventative comfort and care to seniors where the public sector does not. We will let Katherine tell you a little about that in a minute but it is important that you understand a bit of **how** it works first. Compared to the big city, many rural communities have only minimal trouble looking after their seniors. The reason is that the whole community knows who they are so family and friends offers them the deference they deserve. This is not the case in the busy and impersonal urban setting where there is a real need for help.

What Katherine has done is recognize the need in one spot and the source for the capacity to fill that need thereby creating a business. Her firm, Comforts of Home - Care offers affordable assistance with meal preparation, errands and shopping, laundry, companionship, transportation and light housekeeping. The secret is that she recruits caring, experienced individuals who have moved to the city but generally come from rural backgrounds and delivers the sensitive consistent support to people in urban areas. What a concept!

According to Katherine, in 1921 seniors were 1/20 ratio but in 2021 our population will be one senior for every four non seniors (or 1 in 5 people.) That is a four fold ratio increase and most of it has occurred in the last ten years. She explained, "Not only are there more people who are potential clients but also they are used to a better lifestyle and expect and can afford a level of service different than something from the past. The younger members of this demographic, say between 65 and 70 often remain active and are not satisfied with government homecare. Try and tell a 65 year old that they only get help with one bath a week. They are just not willing to tolerate this and they do not have to. The problem is that it is not going to get any better. Government dollars are under pressure and the number of service users is growing. They are stretched as it is. Even though the politicians and public agencies keep saying that they will look after you, people know better and they have come to the conclusion that you really have to look after yourself."

The public sector follows the medical model. This means that they take care of acute problems in institutional settings. They largely do not pursue prevention. Their "Aging in Place" (poorly named) initiative is using \$80 million of their designated \$98 million to build and renovate Personal Care Homes. Only a portion of the remainder will be used to support individuals in their homes.

According to Katherine, the current mindset of public agencies seems directed to constrain preventative assistance until clients are so badly off that institutionalization and isolation becomes the solution. She says, "For younger

family members, worrying about their aging parent and agonizing over a choice between independent living propped up by the family or alternatively institutionalizing a loved one, it is a difficult problem. The reason it is difficult is because it is falsely posed as an **either/or** decision when it should not be. I would really like families in this position to talk with me. There are alternatives. I know that the kids have busy lives but we can help keep loved ones healthy and independent quite a bit longer.”

Katherine offered an example. “We had one 88 year old with osteoporosis. This means her bones were getting fragile and extra care must be taken. This lady was not making lunch and was dividing up her three weekly meal deliveries to six. She was just getting weaker. We came in for a few hours Monday, Wednesday and Friday to help. She is now eating properly, feeling better, getting stronger and likes some of the personal things we can do like filing her nails or that sort of thing. The family is extremely happy and found it very affordable”

It does not matter what people say, there is a difference between private care and public care. Private care is more personal and weeds out workers who do not belong. Serious background and health checks are undertaken. A quality client relationship does not include a worker who is constantly changing and in the private sector, performance is judged not by how many hours they show up but by what a difference they made for the client.

Although somebody has to pay for the work, it is not expensive and sometimes may be covered by insurance or other funding bodies which is something that Katherine may be able to help on. When a family has to pay directly, generally the price is around \$200 a month for a regular weekly visit and as she says, “The parent really deserves it! A life well lived deserves a caregiver who cares.”

So how can you find out more? Comforts of Home - Care can be reached at 888-758-3234. The web site is www.comfortsofhomecare.ca Katherine’s business is expanding and she is also looking for special individuals 35 to 70 who have a heart for people and some real life experience who might enjoy this kind of work. To learn more, for inquiry or a free assessment why not pick up the phone.