

MATRIXTM

ADVOCARE NETWORK

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Issues

Information and ideas for those
serving seniors.

on Aging

ADVOCATING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

A surprising number of people acquire a disability that profoundly affects their functional ability for the remainder of their lives. These disabilities often result from automobile crashes, recreational and work-related accidents, military service, acute and chronic illnesses and sensory deficits. Other people are born with physical or mental disabilities that will limit their functional ability throughout their lives. In this society that worships perfection, people with disabilities have struggled to be recognized as individuals and to have the same opportunities as people without functional impairments.

Advocating for people with disabilities requires knowledge of how the disability affects the individual's functional skills and interpersonal relationships. For example, a person with a spinal cord injury may have excellent communication skills but be unable to enter buildings that lack ramps. A person with schizophrenia, however, may be physically completely mobile but be unable to effectively express his or her own needs. The best way to determine how the disability affects the individual is to ask him or her to explain their areas of impaired function as well as their areas of ability. Also, family members or other significant persons can help determine which areas present challenges to the person with disabilities.

There are an almost infinite number of public and private services available to assist people with disabilities to improve their functional status. Many public services require people to meet certain financial guidelines to receive services, and other providers may offer sliding fee scales or require private

payment. The internet offers an easy method of accessing local, regional and national agencies, organizations and businesses that provide services and products to people with special needs. As in any business transaction, it is

necessary to ascertain the reliability of any business prior to paying for services or products, as unfortunately there are some unscrupulous individuals who attempt to take advantage of people with disabilities or older adults.

CASE SUMMARY: ACQUIRED DISABILITY

Mrs. G, age 44, became disabled three years earlier following a motor vehicle accident in which her husband was killed. She suffered partial paralysis of her right side and a closed head injury which resulted in intellectual impairment, and was unable to make decisions for herself, care for herself or handle her own financial affairs. Following a structured settlement, a bank trust department was appointed conservator of her estate, and her oldest child and her sister were named co-conservators of her person.

The three G children, ages 16, 18 and 21, lived in the family home under the supervision of the oldest child, while Mrs. G resided in an assisted living facility near the family home. The G children requested that modifications be made to the home so their mother could return home to live with them. The trustee was concerned about the cost of the modifications and of home care, and requested that Matrix conduct an assessment to determine how much care would be required if Mrs. G lived at home, and what home modifications

would be necessary to accomplish that objective.

The Care Consultant met first with Mrs. G at her assisted living facility to determine her specific needs for care and services and to ascertain that Mrs. G indeed wanted to return to live with her children. She also discussed Mrs. G's care plan with the Director of Nursing, and learned that Mrs. G needed assistance with bathing and dressing but was independent in grooming, toileting and transferring to and from her wheelchair. Mrs. G was physically unable to remove herself from danger such as a fire, although she knew to use her call button to summon help in an emergency situation. She took only two medications daily, both of which were administered at the same time in the morning.

The Care Consultant then met with the three G children at the family home to evaluate the modifications that would be needed for Mrs. G to reside at home. The home required a ramped entrance into the back hall which entered into the kitchen, removal of the kitchen island so the wheelchair could

get through the kitchen, and conversion of the downstairs den to a bedroom for Mrs. G. The adjacent bathroom was accessible and needed only a tub-transfer bench and toilet rails. Total construction costs were under \$5,000 for the required modifications and equipment.

It was determined by the Care Consultant that Mrs. G would require daily assistance with bathing and dressing. Because the children were busy in the morning getting ready for school and/or work, the Care Consultant suggested that a home health aide (HHA) be hired for four hours daily, from 8:00 a.m. to noon. The HHA would prepare Mrs. G's breakfast and lunch, and assist her with bathing, dressing and other personal care, such as setting her hair. In addition, the HHA would do laundry and cleaning for the household during her shift. As the only daughter was 16 years old, it was determined that it would be best to have a HHA seven days a week so that the daughter didn't have to be her mother's caregiver as the mother-

daughter relationship was already impaired by the client's intellectual disability.

After discussion with the client's sister and children, the Care Consultant agreed that Mrs. G could remain alone at home from noon to 2:20 p.m. when her daughter returned from school. Even though Mrs. G couldn't get herself out of the house in event of a fire, she was able to use the pre-programmed, push button phone to call her sister, doctor's office and 911 if necessary. Information on Mrs. G's dependency was provided to the 911 dispatch center and the local police; information about her disability would then appear on the dispatcher's screen if she called 911 from her home phone.

The Care Consultant received approval from the trustee to go ahead with the home modifications. At the same time she began interviewing agencies to provide home care services. About nine weeks after the initial assessment, Mrs. G was able to return home to live with her children. The cost of her home care was less than her

assisted living and she was able to stay home alone for several hours daily without problems. As a result of her returning home, she was able to resume relationships she had enjoyed with several neighbors and began going on routine outings, such as grocery shopping trips, with her children.

For further information about Matrix Advocare Network or for a complimentary consultation, call **763/560-1010** or **800/560-0961**. We also welcome your comments and your suggestions for future newsletter articles.

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