

Getting the Help At Home

Senior Services programs allow many local seniors to stay at home and still get care

By Jeanie Senior

JoAnn Darland talks about the caregivers from Klickitat County Senior Services who assist her with chores so she can continue to live in her cozy house.

“Write about the girls who help me,” she says.

Although JoAnn calls them girls, the caregivers are women—three of them—who visit at different times and on different days.

They help her with personal tasks, pick up items at the stores, cook meals and clean.

The help they provide allows JoAnn to stay in her small house in Goldendale, rather than having to move to a retirement home or an assisted-living facility.

Looking around her living room, JoAnn says, “I know where everything is here.”

JoAnn, 72, has health problems—the major one being epilepsy. She also uses a walker.

“Basically, what we’re doing is helping them get along so they don’t have to go to a foster home or a nursing home,” says Joelle Balcom, supervisor of in-home services and transportation for Senior Services.

Seniors—or people with disabilities who qualify for Medicaid—can request the assistance, which includes personal care, cooking, help with bathing, vacuuming and doing dishes.

A case manager does an assessment that determines the level of care needed.

For JoAnn, the ability to stay at home is important.

She is not alone. Although more than 11 percent of Washington’s population is 65 or older, the

Klickitat County percentage is higher: almost 15 percent for the entire county and even higher in the cities of Goldendale and White Salmon.

“I’ve stayed at assisted living twice. There was absolutely no one that is my age there. Besides, I like the girls because they come in and they help; they cook my meals, things like that. If I had a seizure out there or fell down and had the stove on, that could start a fire.”

JoAnn’s friends visit her at home, where she also works on projects ranging from scrapbooks of local history to latch hook rugs, embroidery and crewel work—all of which have won ribbons at the county fair.

JoAnn takes advantage of the bus service provided by Mt. Adams Transportation—a Senior Services program—catching a ride from her home on Tuesdays and Thursdays to the senior center meal site.

Mt. Adams Transportation also provides rides to The Dalles for doctor’s appointments.

“I’ve had people tell me they don’t know what they’d do without the buses,” driver Alan Jussila says.

JoAnn’s roots go deep in Klickitat County, although she was not born here. She was adopted as an infant from the Washington Children’s Home Society.

“My mother went up to Seattle with my grandmother and picked me because she liked me so well,” JoAnn says.

For the first part of her life, JoAnn lived in the country, in the Blockhouse area. She and her parents moved to town to the house where she still lives. She graduated from Goldendale High School.

Darland Street in Goldendale and L.E. Darland Substation in the

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JoAnn Darland, center, talks with Klickitat County Senior Services caregiver Joelle Balcom, right, while caregiver Emily Randall cleans up around JoAnn's house. JoAnn says Senior Services allows her to stay in her own home and still have her chores and other

Blockhouse area are named after her father, who was a Klickitat PUD commissioner in the 1940s—the years when the utility got its start.

“A lot of people think I live on Darland, but I don’t,” she says, laughing.

JoAnn has dealt with epilepsy all of her life.

“I don’t know how or why I got it,” she says. “I had it when my parents got me. I could be a lot worse off. You can always find somebody worse off than you.”

The condition has not stopped JoAnn from leading a full life. She was in Girl Scouts, Rainbow Girls and 4-H.

She has been a member of Eastern Star for more than 50 years, joining when she was 18. She recently got an award for her tenure on the lodge’s Sunshine Committee, which sends get well, sympathy and other greeting cards.

JoAnn has been a member of the Grange for more than 55 years.

“My grandfather, George H. Darland, organized the local chapter,” she says. “I did a scrapbook of the history of the Grange.”

JoAnn also has been a member of the Rebekah Lodge for more than 55 years.

More than 21 years of working at the senior center in Goldendale earned her another award.

“I didn’t know hardly what to say,” she says, recalling the formal acknowledgment of her volunteer efforts.

Roger Gadway, the director of Klickitat County Senior Services, says the agency started in the late 1970s with senior meals programs. The vans came a little later.

“Beyond that, helping people in their homes came on in the 1980s and 1990s,” says Roger. “The model has changed, from sending people to old-folks homes to providing services they need to stay in their own homes. It’s been driven by seniors asking for that. That’s what they prefer.”

Besides, he says, “it’s cheaper and more humane.”

Funding for the programs comes from the federal Older Americans Act, Medicaid and Klickitat County.

Senior meals are served at the Pioneer Center in White Salmon Mondays and Wednesdays, in Goldendale Tuesdays and Thursdays, at the Lyle Lions Club building once a week and in Bickleton at the Grange once a month.

Senior Services also offers information and assistance.

“We’re here to help people get information,” Roger says. “We find the resources that they need. We’ve really spent a lot of time on Medicare D, because it’s very complicated.”

Another service—case management—helps people arrange for long-term care, assesses what they need and helps them figure out what is available.

“We help people understand what’s available and what the alternatives might be,” adds Roger. ■