

Caregiver Corner

Caregivers Work to Keep Isolated Individuals Engaged

The pandemic has changed the way we go about our daily lives, especially for those caring for loved ones and others. Despite pandemic restrictions, home health care and assisted living and nursing facility caregivers have been able to play a more significant role in keeping older individuals connected and engaged with their families and friends on top of their regular duties.

Home Health Agencies

Caregivers working in the homes of those needing assistance keep them safe, healthy and engaged.

“Our caregivers are offering clients more help in ways to stay connected to family and friends,” said Kim Riggle, Synergy HomeCare owner.

Caregivers have been helping clients make phone and video calls, using Facebook and writing letters and cards. They also offer companionship by talking or playing games. And for those clients wishing to go out and do some shopping, caregivers assist them to do so in a safe way.

“Some of our clients love to cook; but maybe they can’t quite do it by themselves, so they’ll teach their caregiver a favorite recipe,” Riggle said.

Over time, caregivers build personal relationships with clients and will make a special meal for a client or swing by while in the neighborhood. One Synergy caregiver even gave a client a cut and perm in her home since she wasn’t able to leave. Some other caregivers went and spent a few hours during the holidays with clients because they knew they’d be alone.

“We hear about our caregivers

swinging by to say ‘hi’ or maybe picking up something from the store for a person,” Riggle said. “When you’re a caregiver and you are really great, it’s not just your job. It’s who you are in your heart and mind, and it’s infused in your life.”

Synergy caregivers were also able to help reunite a couple after not being able to see each other due to COVID-19 restrictions at the rehabilitation facility the husband lived in following a stroke. Caregivers and his wife were able to help him get the care he needed at home, and he has seen an increase in his ability and movement while living a happier life at home.

Synergy HomeCare follows all CDC guidelines such as doing temperature checks, wearing masks, gloves and using hand sanitizer. Caregivers are also encouraged to wipe down a client’s home.

“We coach our caregivers when they go into a home to wipe down the switch plates, doorknobs and countertops,” Riggle said. “And before they leave, they wipe down whatever they’ve touched and high-touch areas. This demonstrates good care habits to clients.”

Assisted Living

Many assisted living facilities began taking precautions in March 2020, closing to visitors. Caregiving staff worked to keep residents’ spirits up. At The Lexington Assisted Living Center, staff worked to engage residents in activities when possible and acquired extra iPads to allow more virtual visits.

“We are trying hard to keep our residents active and in touch with



Jodi Freeman of DreamCatchers Ride visits with residents of the Lexington.



Jimmy Thimsen, Synergy Client Care Director, spending time with a client to teach how to take a selfie.

their loved ones,” said Beth Dyer, resident services director. “The virtual visits are a different modality than what they’re used to, and they have a learning curve. But it’s neat to watch as they adjust to it and learn how to push the buttons. A lot of them are very comfortable using smartphones and doing FaceTime visits now.”

The Lexington has hired musicians to stand in the parking lot common garden area when the weather was nice for residents to watch out of their apartment windows. For a resident celebrating her 100th birthday, staff put together a drive-by parade and showered her with birthday cards.

While inside, staff take extra care to ensure residents are keeping as



Lexington staff member Jen Matthews, right, assists resident Tippy Tussey with a virtual weekly visit with her family.

active as possible and monitoring closely for declines in ability or health and getting the proper physicians or therapists involved if needed.

One staff member who drives residents to appointments demonstrated extra effort by knocking on doors to talk with residents and walk with them in the hall for a little exercise.

“He didn’t have to do that; but he got such joy out of it, and residents appreciated the extra face-to-face interaction,” Dyer said.


Knowing the holidays would be difficult for residents, staff helped as best they could.

“We wanted our residents to know that even though their biological families couldn’t be here, their Lexington family could be,” Dyer said.

Residents’ families were supportive, too. Families brought in home-baked cookies or Christmas treats, thanking staff for their work to keep residents safe.

“We are doing our best to not contract COVID-19 and bring it into the building,” Dyer said. “Families have been supportive and patient. We know it’s hard on them, too, to not see their loved one in person.”

The Lexington follows proper CDC guidelines and works with the Department of Health and Human Services and Nebraska Medicine’s Infection Control Assessment and Promotion Program (ICAP) to ensure staff and residents are doing all they can to remain safe. Staff and residents appreciate the support they’ve received from the community, including treats, flowers and animal visits.

“Our partners in the community have been amazing,” Dyer said. “The way Lincoln citizens, businesses and agencies have been supportive of assisted living and similar facilities have put so much time and effort into giving us the information and resources we needed to do whatever we needed to care for our residents and staff. It has been so greatly appreciated, and Lincoln should be proud. It takes a village, and we couldn’t have done it without everyone else.” 

Nebraska Family Caregiver Support

LIFESPAN RESPITE NETWORK

*Taking care of yourself is
one of the best ways to
help your loved one.*

Respite allows the family caregiver time away to:

- Go to the grocery store.
- Visit the doctor.
- Have lunch with a friend.
- Take a nap.
- Do anything else needed to help reduce stress.

A family caregiver is a person who provides ongoing care for an individual unable to care for themselves. Caregiving is rewarding, but also demanding and stressful. To supply “help for the helpers,” the Nebraska Lifespan Respite Network offers information, education and support.

For more information, including funding sources or becoming an independent respite provider, just call or click:

**866-RESPITE (737-7483) or
402-274-3993
respite.ne.gov**

NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Mission.

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES