



Media Release

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For Immediate Release

February 10, 2012

More Living Options Available for the Elderly

Kathryn Lewis noticed slight changes in her mother's behavior about five years ago. But when her mother, Shirley White, began forgetting to take her medications and failed to do routine tasks, Lewis grew concerned about her ability to care for herself.

"Like it is in most families, it was hard for both my mom and I to accept that she was changing," said Lewis.

Soon, doctors diagnosed her mother, a long time Conway resident and business owner, with dementia. Eventually, Lewis sold her mother's small business and used the proceeds to move White into an assisted living facility in Little Rock close to Lewis' home.

White, then a widow in her early 70's, didn't need to be in a nursing home, Lewis said. She needed to live somewhere with minimal care and supervision, and she settled into a happy life at the assisted living facility for two years until her money ran out.

"Then it was crunch time," Lewis said.

White did not initially qualify for Medicaid because she had been receiving a monthly payout for the sale of her business, which made her ineligible for assistance. So Lewis used a good portion of her own retirement savings to keep her mother in place, where she was happy. Once White's financial assets were gone and Lewis could no longer cover the cost of her mother's living arrangements, Lewis applied for Medicaid for her mother.

That's when she learned about a new concept in Arkansas called an Adult Family Home (AFH). AFHs are certified single family homes, where an older person lives and receives help with personal care, medication reminders, supervision and transportation to appointments. Services are provided in a

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home-like environment that includes a private bedroom, semi-private bathroom, home-cooked meals, a common living area and assistance with activities of daily living.

Lewis' mother qualified for this Medicaid-funded program and moved into an Adult Family Home in Little Rock in November 2011. White, soon to be 77 years old, is one of the first Department of Human Services' clients to be placed in an AFH. Medicaid covers this type of facility because, at about \$2,200 a month, it typically costs less than a nursing home or assisted living facility and allows people to remain in a home-like setting longer, said Krista Hughes, director of the DHS Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS).

"The move to an Adult Family Home is an alternative for those seniors who don't need to live in a skilled nursing facility or nursing home, but need someone to watch over them fulltime," Hughes said. "When an elderly person can no longer live alone, the AFH provides needed support and care in a warm and personal home setting."

DAAS has a rigorous quality assurance program to ensure all Adult Family Homes are a safe and positive environment for Arkansas' seniors. DAAS also has developed a two-tier monitoring system that addresses the quality of care and the home's physical operation. Frequent visits by program nurses are made to each home to assess the resident and their care. Regular inspections of the homes and their operation are conducted by program staff. Once certified, homes must be recertified annually.

Lewis said she's pleased with her mother's care.

"She's very happy and has a wonderful rapport with her caregiver," Lewis said. "She gets three hot meals a day, snacks and anything else she needs."

Most important to Lewis is the ability for her to stop by and see her mother whenever she wants. "It's an open house," she explained. "I can go there any time to see her."

Client care is paid for by Medicaid while room and board is paid for by the client or their family.

The establishment of Adult Family Homes under the Medicaid-funded Elder Choices Home and Community-Based Services Waiver program is part of a movement to offer Arkansas seniors as many care options as possible. More than 40 states have Adult Family Homes including long-running programs in California, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin.

Since DHS began accepting applications for certification of Adult Family Homes last year, four homes have been certified and are available to house senior citizens. The homes are located in Little Rock, Mabelvale and Hot Springs. The certification process takes an average of three months and includes a detailed application, background checks for adults living in the home who are at least 16

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years old, training on care giving and home operations, as well as a comprehensive inspection by DAAS staff to insure safety and accessibility.

Lewis said she hopes her mother can remain in the family home where she lives for a long time. “I feel blessed to have her there,” she said. “I think this might be a good option for families who were in the same situation we were. This program has been a godsend for us.”

For more information about this service, contact Adult Family Homes Program Specialist Ramona Sangalli with the DHS Division of Aging and Adult Services at 501-320-6579.