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News for Older Adults, Caregivers, & Partners in Supporting Health & Independence

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“You’re like a raw nerve”

Challenges in the process of becoming a caregiver can come on slowly until, all of a sudden, you no longer know how to cope. Springwell can help.

Marilyn is a true jack-of-all-trades: a scuba diver, a former professional singer, and a skilled craftswoman. For 25 years, she helped her lifelong friend Jeanne turn craftiness into a thriving home renovation business. The business worked so well because of the depth of their friendship and their teamwork. Eventually they also became housemates, when Marilyn moved in to Jeanne’s family home. But when Jeanne began showing signs of Alzheimer’s, some aspects of their daily life started to change.

“The first time I really noticed a problem was during a job bid several years ago,” Marilyn recalls.

“Jeanne went back three times because she couldn’t keep track of important details for the quote.”

Eventually, Jeanne had to close the business, and with it went Marilyn’s livelihood. In its place came a new role: caring for Jeanne.

As Jeanne has become more dependent, she has also become reluctant to discuss her changing condition. Her big personality now sometimes comes out in angry outbursts, which Jeanne forgets minutes later. “I just remind myself that it’s not her fault,” Marilyn says. “But sometimes with all the juggling - it feels like you’re just a raw nerve. And on top of everything else, I have the financial challenge of no longer having a job.”

Getting Jeanne a diagnosis helped because doctors were able to point Marilyn to resources, although even that sometimes felt like “drinking from a firehose,” both because the system is fragmented and because it’s hard to follow up on help when you are overwhelmed. One recommendation that got Marilyn’s attention was Springwell’s Consumer Directed Care option for In-Home care. In this program, some caregivers can be compensated under the MA Home Care Program. After an initial assessment, Jeanne was approved and Marilyn began receiving compensation for two hours of paid care per week. Jeanne was also put

on the waitlist for the Enhanced Community Options Program (ECOP), which would allow for a higher level of care. When a slot opened, she was able to move off the waitlist relatively quickly, and Marilyn is now able to receive nine and a half hours of pay each week for the caregiving support she provides.

Marilyn is still struggling in her role as a caregiver. But now, with Springwell addressing her most pressing need, she has both a path and a partner going forward. Marilyn hopes that Springwell can provide more guidance on things that might help. She looks forward to learning more about the caregiving resources Springwell can provide to help ease her way so that she can continue to be there for her friend.



Assisted Living Ombudsman Program

resident rights



Springwell's Community Services Director, Donlyn Canella, welcoming volunteers at a recent Ombudsman appreciation event (left), and Springwell's Ombudsman Program Managers with Carolyn Fenn, MA State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (right).

Moving into an assisted living facility is a major life change. Residents leave behind the comfort of home and step into a new environment where it can be difficult to have their voices heard. Springwell's Assisted Living (AL) Ombudsman Program ensures those voices are heard by offering residents support, guidance, and advocacy.

This work builds upon the deep history of the Long-Term Care (LTC) Ombudsman Program, which began as a demonstration program in 1972 and currently operates nationwide. The program, coordinated statewide by the MA Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), uses highly trained and supervised volunteers to effectively and consistently advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. In 2023, Springwell's AL Ombudsman Program began piloting the use of volunteers, bringing the same program principles to assisted living residences and also operating under the umbrella of EOHHS.

Program Manager Maura Donahue joined Springwell right around this time, bringing three years of experience as an LTC Ombudsman. Transitioning from LTC to AL highlighted similarities and important differences. While LTC tends to be more highly regulated, AL residences operate with more flexibility, focusing on independent daily living, which creates different challenges for volunteers.

"Patience is very important," Maura says. "We let residents share what's going well and what's challenging, and we make regular check-ins to maintain a presence." This lays the groundwork for strong, trusting relationships. Maura recalls a time when a resident returned home to find staff had removed some of her belongings. Rather

than stepping in herself, Maura arranged a meeting between the resident and the staff. "They agreed to help her decide what to keep and what to get rid of," Maura explained. "It's important that residents still feel independent."

AL volunteers maintain their presence with regular visits, focusing on one to three residents at a time. Continuing education, through both online and in-person training, ensures volunteers communicate, listen, and advocate effectively during these visits. It's simple, but consistently showing up and making an effort to listen can make a lasting impact on residents' lives. Springwell is currently accepting volunteers for our AL Ombudsman Program. No special experience is needed – just patience, empathy, and a willingness to commit an hour a week. With every new volunteer, another voice is amplified.

did you know?

- Ombudsmen volunteers are certified by the state. The training is comprehensive and includes shadowing in facilities and residences.
- Monthly Ombudsman volunteer meetings provide support, networking, and opportunities for discussions about residents' issues, and can include guest speakers on topics such as: residents' rights, working with legal services, understanding Medicaid, learning about hospice, and other subjects related this important role.

• To learn more about becoming an Ombudsman, email volunteer@springwell.com.

CEO Notes

our upcoming move



Since Springwell merged with BayPath Elder Services in the summer of 2022, we have served an expanded service area of twenty-two primary communities: Ashland, Belmont, Brookline, Dover, Framingham, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Marlborough, Natick, Needham, Newton, Northborough, Sherborn, Southborough, Sudbury, Waltham, Watertown, Wayland, Wellesley, Westborough, and Weston. While our geographic footprint has grown significantly, we remain committed to ensuring ease of access to all the communities we serve. That's why we have maintained offices in both Waltham, where Springwell has been headquartered since 2012, and Marlborough, where BayPath Elder Services had its offices. With the lease for our Marlborough office up at the end of September of this year, Springwell is maintaining its presence in the MetroWest community by moving just around the corner to an office building at 290 Donald Lynch Boulevard in Marlborough. Our new location will be open starting in mid-to-late October, providing a home base for approximately half of our staff and a convenient location for residents to stop in for appointments or to request services. In the meantime, Springwell's office in Waltham remains open and available for any of your in-person program needs.

-Trish Smith, Springwell CEO

Martha Connors: Ombudsman Volunteer

in a position to help

Springwell volunteer Martha Connors brings empathy, compassion, and extensive experience with caregiving to her role in our Ombudsman program. In fact, she began helping people who are old or ill when she was in middle school. But her comfortability with helping others became personal during her twenties when her father was diagnosed with cancer. She moved home to care for him and later her mother as she grew older and entered hospice. "Not everyone is comfortable around seniors and those who are ill," she reflects. "So I'm in a position to help them."

Although Martha spent most of her career working in media, she knew she was meant to help others. When she was laid off, Martha saw an opportunity to follow a calling as a caregiver, leading her to volunteer in hospice. This pivotal moment resulted in Martha leaving her part-time consulting job to join Springwell's Ombudsman Program. As an Ombudsman, she visits residents weekly, building trust and acting as a confidential advocate for their rights and well-being.

One moment that sticks with Martha is helping a nonverbal resident who was confined to her bed or stationary chair. Unable to express verbally, the resident had difficulty conveying what she needed, but after spending time with her, Martha learned that she simply wanted a wheelchair. Martha brought her request forward and convinced the nursing home to allow her to have it. "Next thing I know, I'm walking down the hall, and there she was wheeling down the hall, waving at me," Martha says with a laugh. She calls this one of the most impactful moments during her time as an Ombudsman.

Martha believes that her work as an Ombudsman has been just as meaningful to her as it is to the residents she supports. "While advocating



for the seniors, I've matured in my ability to help solve problems. I've even found myself using skills I didn't even know I had!"

Being an Ombudsman takes a lot of effort, but Martha finds it incredibly rewarding. She hopes to continue supporting residents and growing alongside them. If you also find fulfillment in helping others feel heard, respected, and supported, consider becoming an Ombudsman.

Falls Prevention Awareness

stepping up



Springwell staff from across the agency are part of this year's team who are getting out for regular walks both at home and at work to contribute to a statewide goal of more than 75 million steps for Falls Prevention Awareness Month.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 36 million older Americans experience a fall each year. Among older adults, one out of five falls cause a serious injury such as broken bones or a head injury. As a result, falls are the leading cause of injury and death among people over age 65. For this population, falls and resulting injuries also can increase the likelihood of nursing home admission.

In Massachusetts, the Executive Office of Aging & Independence (AGE) reports that last year, of the 71,267 older adults assessed by an aging service access point agency (ASAP) like Springwell, 80% identified as having a potential fall risk because they either felt unsteady, worried about falling, and/or had had a fall in the past six months. In fact, nearly 40% reported having had one or more falls in the past year.

Since 2018, in coordination with National Falls Prevention Awareness Month each September, AGE holds a statewide event in which members of the ASAP network invite staff, family, friends, and colleagues to a month-long Step Challenge to raise awareness about the importance of falls prevention. The Annual Step Challenge provides an opportunity for community connection, falls education, and promoting bone and mental health.

The good news is that anyone can take action to reduce their risk of falls. National Council on Aging's (NCOA's) Falls Free CheckUp is a 13-question online screening tool that individuals, family caregivers, or service providers can use to help determine a person's risk of falling. The questions address factors that can lead to falls, such as medications and recent history of falls. No personally identifiable information is collected. The tool, which is available in both Spanish and English at www.ncoa.org/tools/falls-free-checkup/ provides a personalized report that the respondent can share with their healthcare provider to discuss options for reducing risks.

Falls prevention is an important part of any Springwell assessment and care plan, and often home modifications – including something as simple as removing rugs that can create tripping hazards or something more substantial such as installing grab bars in bathrooms – can be a part of the help that Springwell provides, either through a care plan or funded through donations to our Ken Alpert Elder Independence Fund. If you have concerns about your fall risk, talk to your healthcare provider and consider reaching out to Springwell or your care manager.



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Solutions in Support of Health and Independence

Springwell is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to helping people who need long-term services and supports to remain independent and healthy in the setting of their choice. Services are made possible in part by contracts with or grants from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Aging & Independence, the Federal Administration for Community Living, MassHealth, insurance providers and health care entities. Generous philanthropic support from individuals and institutions is also critical to our success.