

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) strives to forge natural human connections to boost county residents in need. The Area Agency on Aging’s Domiciliary Care (Dom Care) program is a stellar example of where those connections are maximized.

With Dom Care, people needing the basics of shelter and food are provided for by those with the desire and means to offer help. Using a model similar to foster care, Dom Care matches adults who cannot live on their own – seniors or those over the age of 18 with a disability – with those who have space in their home and hearts to take them in providing shelter, support and companionship. The result is that, often, strong relationships akin to family bonds are built.

For more information on Dom Care, contact the AAA Senior Line at 412-350-5460.

Marc Cherna
Director, Allegheny County
Department of Human Services

DHS MAKING AN IMPACT

Dom Care



Some of the names in these stories have been changed to protect privacy.

Elizabeth and Alice

For Elizabeth, becoming a Domiciliary Care (Dom Care) provider through the Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging didn’t take a second thought. “I have always had this natural care giving spirit, so Dom Care fell into that care giving desire I have.” That has been fortunate for Alice, one of two women who

share a room in Elizabeth’s East Liberty household, which also includes Elizabeth’s husband and a granddaughter. Alice was in a nursing home for more than two years, having suffered a multitude of health problems. When it came time to leave the nursing home, administrators referred her to Dom Care.



Rich Fitzgerald
Allegheny County Executive

She tried out two homes – trial stays are encouraged and are often a part of entering Dom Care to ensure a good fit for both provider and consumer. Alice thought the first home was in a section of the city that was too isolated. But Elizabeth’s home is close to the amenities she needs.

“And Elizabeth is an excellent cook. We really enjoy our meals,” Alice said.

Besides meals, Elizabeth takes care of the larger part of household work; Alice takes care of her own room. Elizabeth additionally ensures that Alice takes her medication and helps

her make and get to appointments. And importantly, Elizabeth and Alice are companions.

Alice has been with Elizabeth for a little more than two years. Neither pretends that the arrangement didn’t naturally require some adjustment. “It was a little difficult for me at first,” Alice said. “I had my own house for 12 years but when I became ill, I lost it.”

But now the two are companions, and Alice said she recognizes the natural caregiver in Elizabeth.

“We’ve become compatible with one another,” Elizabeth said.

are over age 60 and cannot fully take care of themselves. Most need to take medication and must be compliant with that.

Brendan Hanley, Supervisor of the AAA’s Dom Care Unit, said while Dom Care consumers are in the program because they need assistance, they must have a level of functioning above the need for nursing care. “They need to be mobile. They just need help with the daily activities of living,” he said, adding that some consumers have part-time jobs and take public transportation on their own.

An AAA care manager oversees a consumer’s transition to Dom Care. Consumer and provider alike fill out forms that match living styles – what times each likes to turn in for the night or get up in the morning, as examples.

Location is also a consideration. Often, the consumer and provider will meet and if all goes well, the consumer stays in the provider’s home for two or three days. If, after that, both agree to a permanent arrangement, everything moves forward.

Once a provider and a consumer are matched, it’s typical that connections grow. Shelter and food aside, one of Dom Care’s primary benefits is the building of relationships.

“Truly, for many of our consumers and providers, Dom Care is like living with family,” Brendan said. “They form a special bond.”

Nina and Marie

Nina has been a Dom Care provider for 20 years, starting after her husband died, when Nina faced having a mostly empty house. She needed something to do, so she contacted AAA, who linked her with two women in need of a home. One passed away recently; Marie, who has mild intellectual disabilities, remains with Nina. She is in her late 80s now, having moved into Nina’s house when she was in her mid-60s.

“Marie always tells me, ‘I take care of you and you take care of me,’ “ Nina said. “I just enjoy taking care of her.”

Marie said that Dom Care has allowed her to have as much independence as she likes. The pair go out to lunch. And both Nina’s and Marie’s family incorporate her into special occasions and family events.

“Marie is like part of the family,” Nina said, adding the benefits of Dom Care extend to her. “I probably would be in a senior citizens apartment otherwise, because the house would be too big for me.”

How Dom Care works

Although administered by the Area Agency on Aging, the Dom Care program – also sometimes called adult foster care – is suitable for anyone age 18 or older who is unable to live independently. Financial arrangements vary. Some Dom Care participants receive a federal supplement that pays for their care while others are able to pay privately. Dom Care consumers are generally those who have a mental health diagnosis, an intellectual disability or who