

DHS MAKING AN IMPACT

In 2006, Allegheny County was selected by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as one of two counties to pilot a one-stop call center that would assist older adults and persons of any age with disabilities in accessing needed services. The Link to Aging and Disability Resources has been fulfilling that mission ever since.

Each year, the information and referral specialists who answer the Link phones hear from more than 2,000 new callers looking for assistance that is person-centered, holistic and individualized. The Link staff has a variety of resources to help callers meet a full range of needs, from the basics like food, housing and utility assistance to specialized needs like in-home therapy and home modifications. A recent internal review of the service (www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/research.aspx) found that nearly 90% of the users rated their Link experience as above average.

The two stories included in this DHS Making an Impact piece highlight the value of a resource like the Link, which lowers barriers to services and brings resources within easy reach.



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**Allegheny
Link**
TO AGING AND DISABILITY RESOURCES

To contact the Allegheny Link to Aging and Disability Resources:

866-730-2368 or allylink@alleghenycounty.us

For more information: www.alleghenylink.com

“THEY SAVED MY LIFE.”

No hint of hyperbole was detected. It was a simple statement of fact. A statement that Reba would repeat until it was clear. “They saved my life.”

Reba’s life took a dangerous turn nearly one year ago when, just after the holidays, she fell and tore her meniscus in three places. She was living alone and the injury accentuated her vulnerability. Her situation worsened when none of her friends answered her calls for help.

“I went two weeks without adequate food and water. I could have died and no one would have known. No one would help me.”

Then Reba remembered that she had a phone number for a local human services provider. They were unable to offer immediate direct assistance, but they referred her to The Allegheny Link to Aging and Disability Resources. The Link is designed to be a full-service resource for persons over the age of 60 years or persons of any age with a disability. One phone conversation started Reba’s process of recovery.

The Link information and referral specialist requested some background information—what happened, what supports were already in place, what did Reba feel was needed?

The specialist went into action. Reba was connected to a home-health aide who came in to help Reba with daily routine tasks. She was connected with the food bank to secure an ample and healthful food supply. When a reduction in her SSI payments made paying her electric and water bills all but impossible, she was connected with help to meet those obligations. During the height of a winter snow emergency, help was found to do her food shopping and even to keep her sidewalk shoveled.

When Reba finally scheduled her surgery to repair her damaged kneecap, the insurance company balked at

providing her with in-home nursing and physical therapy aftercare. Aware of her limited mobility, the Link manager intervened and arranged for both.

“Shining stars, that’s what they are. They did all this for me and they didn’t even know me. Now I know that someone cares. If my home health aide calls and doesn’t reach me, she knows to call back in a few minutes – when I’ll be able to reach the phone. If I still don’t answer, I know she will come or send someone to check on me. I still have uncertainties in my life, but knowing that a Link specialist is there is just wonderful. I can’t thank them enough. They saved my life.”



SALLY HAS a confidence in her voice that nearly masks the trouble she has experienced since the events that changed her life forever. It took some time to realize things could get better. Unbeknownst to her, the family bills had gone virtually unpaid for more than a year. Her husband, the breadwinner and bookkeeper in the family, had chosen to pay only minimum amounts to keep utilities from being terminated and their rental contract intact. When he left suddenly, Sally, in her early 60s, was shocked, both by his leaving and the magnitude of the debt. At first she turned to her children for help. With families of their own, their contributions were generous, but not enough to balance accounts. And Sally needed more than just money; she needed a place to live. Sally had no choice but to seek help outside her family.

“I tried everything under the sun, [a local social services agency], you name it, no one could help. Then my son’s girlfriend gave me the phone number for The Link. When I made the call I was crying so hard [the Link information and referral specialist] couldn’t understand me. I was at the end of my rope. When I finally calmed down, I was able to answer her questions.”

Sally explained her situation and lifted the veil on how far in debt she was. “She was amazed at my situation. But that just seemed to inspire her. First of all, she helped me sign up for help paying my utility bills through LIHEAP, both the Crisis and Cash components (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program) and CAP (Customer Assistance Programs). That helped a lot with my bills. At the same time, she sent me listings of available subsidized apartments. I found a nice one in a high-rise and the Link worked with another program to obtain assistance with the first months’ rent. It’s where I live now. She even helped me work out a payment plan with [my natural gas provider] for my huge gas bill.” The Link specialist also helped in applying for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and medical and financial assistance to aid with the basic necessities.

With the crisis averted, Sally still receives support from her Link specialist. “Before Thanksgiving, she told us about a place downtown where we could get food not only for that meal, but for many others. It was amazing. If it wasn’t for her, I don’t know where I’d be. I’d probably be under a bridge somewhere or in a homeless shelter. I love her.”