

Study after study shows that aging at home is not only good for people's health and emotional wellbeing, it's what most people would prefer to do.

The Aging Waiver Service Coordination Program, illustrated here through the stories of Steve and Sister Margaret and Sister Helen, is one way that county seniors can be healthy and happy in their own residences, with some helping hands.

The program, operated by the Area Agency on Aging, has 200 Medicaid-certified providers from which participants can choose. It is another example of how the Department of Human Services (DHS) responds to the needs of Allegheny County's most vulnerable residents, helping them through life's difficulties while allowing them to remain in familiar and comfortable surroundings.

To find out how to participate in the program, contact the AAA Senior Line at 412-350-5460 or 800-344-4319.

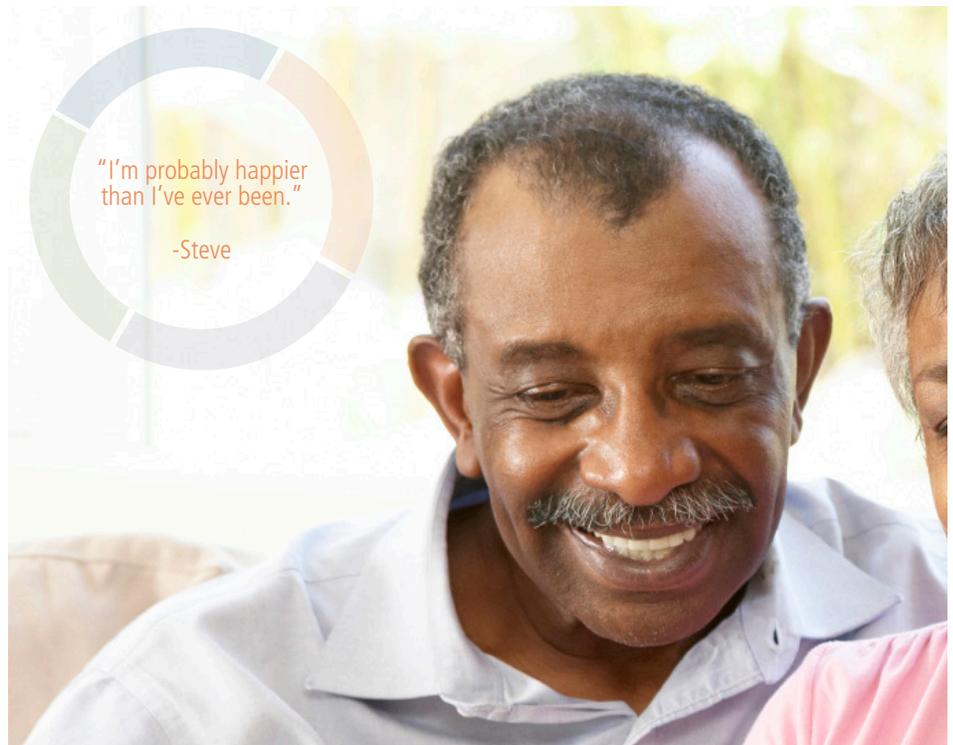
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DHS MAKING AN IMPACT

Aging Waiver Service Coordination



Steve

Steve suffered polio during the 1950s, before vaccines were developed. Now nearly 70, he has had one leg amputated and the other is weak, so his mobility is limited. Until five years ago, he lived with his mother and brother and the three of them supported one another. But then Steve's mother and brother died.

Steve had to enter a series of nursing homes, which didn't really suit his needs. "I really was not at all focused. I was on a 9-to-5 routine where I had to do everything at a certain time," he said.

A social worker saw Steve at a nursing facility and knew he didn't

continued on page 2

need to be there. He was told about the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Aging Waiver Service Coordination Program and soon moved into his own apartment near the neighborhood he grew up in.

The Aging Waiver Service Coordination Program dates to 1996 in Pennsylvania. It is called a “waiver” program because it “waives” payment for a bed in a nursing home and instead uses the funds for safe, at-home support.

AAA is the primary provider of the program in Allegheny County. After initial contact, individuals are linked with the AAA assessment unit. Trained assessors – either nurses or care managers – visit the person to determine if he or she is at a “nursing home level of care” – in other words, the person would be placed in a nursing home without service coordination and waiver assistance.

Then, to secure waiver funding, potential participants must fill out a Medicaid application that is reviewed by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services to determine income eligibility. Afterward the AAA enrollment unit registers the applicant and service coordination begins.

Service coordinators develop a needs-based plan after talking with the participant, family and friends – anyone who should be consulted. The plan includes a risk assessment for safety needs, back-up plans in case of disaster or if a service worker doesn't show up, and a review of medication. After it is developed, necessary services are found.

Steve's Aging Waiver Supports Coordinator helped him get an electric wheelchair and other aids, housecleaning service, physical therapy, and even told him how he could get a senior citizen bus pass to ride anywhere he wants at no cost.

The electric wheelchair Steve secured changed his life in an important way: It is so powerful he can ride it up the steep hills leading to the Veterans Administration Hospital in Oakland, where he volunteers.

For Steve, life now is as he wants it to be. Comfortably independent, he says he has the ease of mind he wanted at his age to reflect on his life. His health has even improved – he was less active when he lived in nursing homes, and so he became subject to pneumonia.

“I'm probably happier than I've ever been,” Steve said.

Sister Margaret & Sister Helen

Nuns spend their lives in service of others, but when it comes to aging, they can need help with the daily activities of living like anyone else.

For Sister Margaret, a member of an Allegheny County Roman Catholic order, the assistance found via the Aging Waiver Service Coordination Program helped her care for another member of her order, Sister Helen.

“I'm really grateful... The caseworker Sister Helen has now is wonderful.”

- Sister Margaret

With the personal care arranged by a AAA service coordinator, Sister Helen, who is in her mid-80s, can stay safely in the home she shares with Sister Margaret instead of being in a nursing facility. While Sister Margaret works as a retreat administrator, care attendants help Sister Helen with such tasks as showering, dressing, exercise and meals, and they keep her occupied and stimulated. Sister Margaret, consequently, has been able to continue her spiritual ministry for the people who seek retreats.

The Aging Waiver Service Coordination Program also covers respite care and provides some personal supplies that are needed by Sister Helen.

“I'm really grateful,” Sister Margaret said. “The caseworker Sister Helen has now is wonderful. If I have a need, she responds immediately by email. She's so respectful about time and scheduling. I'm so impressed with her professionalism.”