

Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

Program helps seniors transition to home environment

By Daniel Casciato
For Pittsburgh Senior News

Penn Hills resident Vella Teasley, 82, is like many seniors in the county who would rather live in a home environment where she can live independently instead of a nursing home or similar facility. "You just feel so confined living in a nursing home," she commented. "It's nicer being in a home environment. You're more comfortable in a place you can call your own. You can't beat it."

Vella transitioned to an independent living facility a couple of years ago after spending some time in a nursing home. Seniors like Vella who wish to return to their homes or live independently in an apartment or house now have support from the Nursing Home Transition Program. This program offers seniors and people with disabilities who currently live in a nursing facility the alternative to live in a home environment with the assistance of home- and community-based support services. "I think it's a wonderful program and I hope it helps many seniors who want to go back to living on their own if they are able to," said Vella.

Many people are not aware of services available to them or who to contact in their community to receive help. One of the program's goals is to educate them about available living options, how to access services and support so that they are more comfortable and confident about their choices and preference for community living. "This program will connect consumers with the services they need in order to live safely in their own homes," said Lynn Buccilli, manager of the Nursing Home Transition Program. "The financial and communal support helps to ease barriers and assist in making the move a reality."

According to Lynn, these combined efforts will make transitioning a possibility for qualifying seniors and people with disabilities in Allegheny County nursing facilities and six surrounding counties that partici-



Photo provided by Margaret G. Stanley, Allegheny County

Vella Teasley enjoys living in her own home once again.

pate in the program. An initial outreach to 163 nursing home facilities generated 160 referrals to the program; about one-third (46) of these individuals were assisted in transitioning from an institution to their own home.

The project was implemented last year by the Pennsylvania Departments of Aging, Health and Public Welfare in collaboration with the Governor's Office of Health Care Reform, local county assistance offices, local area agencies on aging, local centers for independent living, home and community based providers, and organizations representing nursing facilities. In Allegheny County, the program is available through Three Rivers Center for Independent Living (TRCIL), The Allegheny County Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging (ACAAA) and Community Living and Support Services (CLASS).

The program's goal is to educate seniors and their families about available living options and how to access services and support so that they are more comfortable and confident about their choices and preference for community living. The program receives about \$1.5 million a year in state and federal funds. Through a program called "Money Follows the Person," it provides up to \$4,000 per

individual to help with first-year costs such as security deposits, home modifications for accessibility, essential furnishings and other moving expenses.

The program utilizes agencies across Pennsylvania, such as Three Rivers Center for Independent Living, to visit nursing homes and confer with the facilities' social workers about which individuals might be capable of leaving the homes. Those who are eligible to transition receive visits and information about what funding and community resources might be available to help them, as most of them need ongoing support.

Although 24-hour care is not available, a free personal emergency response system can be provided and used to call for help in serious emergencies.

To qualify for the Nursing Home Transition Program, you must be:

- age 60 or older;
- age 18 or older with a physical disability that is expected to last for at least 12 months;
- able to either independently or with support: direct your care and handle your financial and legal matters.

Plenty of help is available in the community for those who want to live independently. Services may include but are not limited to:

- Adult day services
- Advocacy
- Affordable housing
- Assistance finding or accessing social and recreational opportunities
- Equipment not available through health insurance
- Home-delivered meals
- Home modifications
- Information and referral
- Peer support and skills training
- Personal assistant services
- Personal emergency response systems
- Respite for caregivers
- Transportation

For more information about the Nursing Home Transition Program or to obtain an application, contact Three Rivers Center for Independent Living at (412) 371-7700; TTY: (412) 371-6230; Community Living and Support Services at (412) 683-7100 or ACAA at (412) 350-5460. *PSN*



Photo provided by Margaret G. Stanley, Allegheny County

Consumers and providers from Allegheny County attend a program to learn more about the Nursing Home Transition Program.