

Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

Return to independent living is possible with Nursing Home Transition Program

By Daniel Casciato
For Pittsburgh Senior News

As soon as Roosevelt Franklin Copeland returns to living on his own again, the first thing he plans to do is cook a nice meal. "Eggs over light, bacon and toast - the whole shebang," he said.

Following a short hospital stay, Roosevelt was admitted to Highland Park Care Center for nearly 15 months. Now, with the help of the Nursing Home Transition Program, the 67-year old is finally able to return to the independent lifestyle he craves so much. By October, Roosevelt will be in a new apartment in Garfield.

"I'm just excited to get back to the real world," he said. "Although everyone's been nice here, I just want to have my privacy. And I feel that I'm up to the task to do this. I'm ready."

Transitioning to independent living can be complicated and frustrating but the Nursing Home Transition program makes it easier. The program offers help to nursing homes residents who want and are able to transition back into the community with support provided at home.

"This program is changing people's lives," said Darlene Burlazzi, deputy administrator of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging (ACAAA). "The coordinators could just see the joy in the consumers' faces when assisting them to return home."



Chuck LeClaire/Pittsburgh Senior News

Roosevelt Franklin Copeland will soon return to living independently.

Since January, ACAA - often with help from a strong collaboration of partner agencies such as TRCIL (Three Rivers Center for Independent Living) and UCP (United Cerebral Palsy) - has assisted about 38 seniors like Roosevelt to transition from a nursing home into their own place.

Darlene said the State Department of Aging has requested that all ACAA centers engage in more intense, long-term living counseling so people are aware of all options available to them. After learning about a resident who may be interested in transitioning, ACAA assigns a transition coordinator to contact the facility and verify information. They arrange to meet separately with the potential candidate and nursing facility discharge planner to assess the person's willingness to transition.

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According to Darlene, the goal of the program is to educate nursing home residents and their families about all available long-term 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. "We want to be able to sit down with the senior and the family to explain their full range of options," Darlene said.

Funding may also be available to help with one-time expenses such as security deposits, home modifications for accessibility, essential furnishings and other moving expenses.

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 TRCIL, ACAA and UCP's Community Living and Support Services (CLASS). The state-wide program receives about \$1.5 million a year in state and federal funds.

So far, the transitioning process has gone very smoothly for Roosevelt, who is grateful for the help he has received to return to independent living again.

"I've had no problems whatsoever," he said. "and it's because of ACAA, who has been extremely helpful throughout the process. It'll be nice to have my own place again." PSN

Training available for new voting machines

Training will be available on the new voting machines at local Senior Community Centers during October. If you did not receive training or would like a refresher on how to use the machines before Election Day on November 7th, check with your local Senior Community Center or visit the County website at www.county.allegheny.pa.us for the training schedule and additional information. PSN

