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Local company helps families choose options for aging parents

Beach Glass Transitions helps people navigate the emotion-charged world of elder care.

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PORTLAND - When Diane McNally was told her elderly mother needed to be in an assisted-living facility, McNally went into a tailspin.

She didn't know any of her options and most places she looked into had waiting lists of two to three years. She often had to leave her job as an elementary schoolteacher early in order to attend meetings about her mother's future.



Then someone suggested Lynn Peel's business, Beach Glass Transitions in Portland, to help her manage the senior care search process.

"I said (to Peel), 'I'm falling apart emotionally I don't know what to do,' " said McNally, who lives in Limington.

That was in March. Since late June, McNally's mother has been at the Portland Center for Assisted Living where she rooms with another woman with mixed dementia.

"It would've thrown me over the edge emotionally" if I had to do this alone, McNally said.

Peel started her business after [eight] years of working in senior care communities and realizing that many people weren't asking the right questions or were making decisions that were driven purely by emotions.

"The adult child is usually the decision maker, and I feel like that person is overwhelmed by trying to get educated on something they've never planned for," Peel said.

Beach Glass Transitions will go on tours of facilities with clients, take notes and help them navigate through their finances and insurance paperwork. Peel also creates a social profile for her clients, a scrapbook of sorts for facilities to learn more about the patient, such as work and family history, that makes the client more of a person and less of a number or a diagnosis.

Peel and her two employees have helped about 100 clients so far and have roughly 15 active clients now. The company also deals with clients with family members out of state.

The lack of preparation and knowledge for the transition to elder care leads to high stress levels that affect happiness and work performance, Peel said. Many businesses are finding their employees need to take time off work to find care for their elderly parent, she said.

And as baby boomers age, this is an issue that will only continue to grow.

Beach Glass Transitions was awarded a grant on April 30 by the Libra Future Fund to expand and help keep young entrepreneurs like Peel in Maine. She said her goal is to have Maine companies add her services to their benefits packages.

"It's not something people like to talk about. They wait until they're in crisis, changing roles from daughter to caregiver," Peel said. "The majority of people are going to need some form of long-term care."

Susan Tufts, wellness program manager at L.L. Bean, said this is an issue many of her co-workers are facing or would be dealing with soon. She invited Peel to [eight] lunch-time sessions last winter and spring to tell employees about planning ahead for their parents' futures, and about a dozen came to each.

"It was so comforting to know that there was a resource out there that could not only help you with the transition but could also provide you with information you might not have," Tufts said.

McNally said that working with Peel was worth the roughly \$2,500 she paid to find her mother a place where she was happy and cared for.

"It sounds like a lot of money, but then I realized how much of my time it takes to do things and the frustration level," she said. "It's well worth it."

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