

Friends

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area individuals and their families over the years.

For 77-year-old Florence Churchill and her husband, Dale, 79, the programs have been a huge help. Her husband's dementia, first identified in 2010, has progressed to the point that she can't leave him alone safely, afraid he'll wander out the door of their Bangor apartment and disappear. He needs help with every task, from choosing his clothes to remembering to eat. A referral from the Eastern Area Agency on Aging brought them to My Friend's Place in February 2015.

"I came with him the first day, thinking it would be hard for him to be left here with people he didn't know," Churchill said. "But by noon, he was so content and comfortable I just went back home."

Now she brings him twice per week, one day for My Friend's Place and one for Memory Joggers, and says he looks forward to it eagerly.

"It changes every week," Churchill's husband said, searching for words to articulate the experience. He said he enjoys the group interactions, the games and puzzles, the opportunity to

go outside in good weather. "The people are all great," he said. "They do everything they can to help you."

Churchill usually goes back home after dropping him off.

"I take a long shower and shampoo my hair," she said. "Sometimes I do my nails. I call it my spa day." The short breaks in their weekly routine help restore her equanimity.

"I am just now getting to the point where I don't feel like I'm going over the edge," she said.

Different models serve different levels of need

My Friend's Place, with its group-oriented activities and a largely volunteer staff, operates under what's known as the "social model" of adult day services, according to Anne Ossanna, director of the Maine Adult Day Services Association. Typically housed in a church or public space, these low-budget, grassroots programs offer valuable support for clients with a high degree of independent ability who are nonetheless unsafe on their own.

Ossanna also is the site manager at Friendship Cottage, a free-standing "health model" adult day program located in Blue Hill. Unlike My Friend's Place, Friendship Cottage, a program of

the Washington Hancock Community Agency, is staffed by health care professionals including a registered nurse, a nursing assistant and a social worker. Each client has a customized care plan on file that identifies specific goals and activities appropriate to the client's abilities and needs. In addition to meals and activities, clients are assisted with personal needs as needed, including eating, toileting and bathing.

Because Friendship Cottage provides more comprehensive care, is open six days per week for six hours per day, and provides transportation to and from clients' homes, family members can often work at a full-time job, knowing their loved ones are safe and well-tended, Ossanna said.

The out-of-pocket charge is \$14 per hour, although some clients are covered by Medicaid — called MaineCare in Maine — the Department of Veterans Affairs or other public programs.

In contrast to freestanding facilities such as Friendship Cottage, some adult day programs are housed within a nursing home, where shared professional staff, equipment and services offer operational efficiencies.

Frequently, these programs serve as an introduction to the residential facility,

Ossanna said, as clients with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia become more debilitated and can no longer be cared for safely at home.

Compassion and practicality

Statewide, there are 26 adult day programs licensed and regulated by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. The need for these programs will rise with the aging of the baby boom generation, according to Adam Lacher, director of communications and advocacy for the Maine chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

"In Maine, currently there are 26,000 people living with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, and about 37,000 if you include other forms of dementia," he said. "By 2025, we expect to see about 35 percent growth, or about 35,000 people with Alzheimer's and more than 47,000 including other forms of dementia."

The incidence of Alzheimer's is grossly underreported, Lacher added.

"Only about half the cases [of dementia] are ever diagnosed," he said.

As communities across the state develop "aging in place" strategies for keeping seniors safe in their homes, Lacher said it is essential to

factor in the needs of older residents with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

"These programs bring people together, build a sense of solidarity and show them they still have a place in their communities," he said.

Home- and community-based care for Alzheimer's disease is far less costly than residential care provided in a nursing facility, Lacher said, but family caregivers — there are an estimated 68,000 unpaid caregivers tending to loved ones with dementia in Maine — must be supported as the disease progresses.

Nationwide in 2016, total payments for health care, long-term care and hospice are expected to be \$236 billion for Americans with Alzheimer's and other dementias, with almost half of the costs borne by the taxpayer-funded Medicare program, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

In Maine this year, the MaineCare program will spend \$180 million on Alzheimer's care.

Responding to a growing need

In Bangor, My Friend's Place founder Barbara Fis-

ter of Hamden directs the Memory Joggers program.

"My parents both had dementia in the 1990s," she said. "There were no services like this available. It was either keep them at home on your own or keep them in a nursing home."

She's grateful that awareness is growing of the profound challenge of caring for an aging parent, and of the societal value of keeping elders out of institutional care as long as possible.

As the baby boom generation ages, experts agree the need will grow for programs such as My Friend's Place and Memory Joggers, providing early memory-loss clients with a boost of stimulation in a safe environment and family caregivers with a much-needed break.

Neither Fister nor Valentine is interested in expanding the reach of My Friend's Place or Memory Joggers, saying the program is best suited to serving a small group. They are happy, however, to share their experience with others considering starting a program of their own. In addition, they have written a 235-page activities guide, "Field of Themes: 100 Theme Activities for our Senior Friends," available free of charge to interested groups.

Share

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of "carryover" funds later in the season, which should boost participation to close to last year's levels.

Ora Larrabee, 79, of Dover-Foxcroft has participated in Maine Senior FarmShare at the Stutzman farm since the program began.

"I always sign up," Larrabee said firmly.

She looks forward to the farm's sweet early-crop strawberries, and later in the season, cucumbers, tomatoes and corn. She'd shop at Stutzman's anyway, but the \$50 voucher is a draw.

"Every little bit helps," she said.

Rainie Stutzman said that

in addition to the vouchers provided through the Senior FarmShare program, the farm fundraises all year long to help more low-income seniors buy healthy produce. Local business and regular customers are encouraged to "adopt-a-senior" for a \$50 donation, which typically results in providing another 100 vouchers to redeem at the farm stand.

Meanwhile, she said, the growing season is already beginning. Early greenhouse plantings of spinach, lettuce and other early greens are almost ready to transplant to the farm fields. Other crops will be direct-seeded as the soil warms. "We're just waiting on the weather," she said.

For information, including a



LINDA COAN O'KRESIK | BDN

Sid Stutzman (left) helps Viola Woodard with her application for the Maine Senior FarmShare Program recently in Sangerville. Stutzman and his wife, who own Stutzman's Farm Stand & Bakery, participate in the program which connects low-income seniors with participating farmers.

list of participating farms, visit the website of the Maine Senior FarmShare

program or call your local Area Agency on Aging at 877-353-3771.

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