

About Dignity. About Compassion. ABOUT CARE.

By Sean Donovan
Community Focus



Old age is an inevitable aspect of the human condition. For some, it lurks so far in the future as to seem little more than a vague concept, a situation that surely never shall hobble youthful exuberance. For others, its shadow grows closer daily, existing as a nagging concern of which aches, pains and wrinkles are a constant reminder of things to come. For many more, it already has arrived, having forced its way in through barely noticed cracks in the walls,

and now sits uninvited yet immovable in the flesh and bones.

As parents and loved ones grow older and become more reliant on the care provided by others – the same care that they once provided to their own children – quality of life can easily deteriorate both for the aging themselves and also for those who find themselves suddenly thrust into the role of caregiver.

Care of the elderly is a growing concern,

especially amongst America's estimated 77 million baby boomers for whom aging parents is an impending, if not current, worry. With the high cost of health care and nationwide shortage of qualified health care workers, families for whom a two-salary income is a necessity are forced to consider options besides providing that care themselves.

Nursing homes are certainly an option, but many now-grown children are loath to place their parents in one, fearing that it

represents a form of abandonment. Many aging people are similarly unwilling to leave their own homes, where, surrounded by a lifetime of cherished memories, they feel safe, comfortable and happy. Between the two options, however, exists a happy medium.

Organizations such as About Care, Inc. are dedicated to providing quality in-home care for the people fortunate enough to be at the receiving end of their helping hands. Their vision is "independence," and their stated goal is "to allow the frail, elderly and physically challenged to remain in their homes and live with self respect and dignity." In many instances, goals, however well-intentioned, remain just that – goals – and not actualities. Not so with About Care. They've made their goals a reality, and in turn have made the hopes of families throughout the Valley a reality as well.

Some of the services About Care offers its clients include transportation, shopping and errand running, business help, casual friendly visits, minor home care and the opportunity for the families of the client to take business trips or vacations without having to worry about the welfare of their loved one.

About Care was the creation of Buzz and Barbara Bradley, who in January 2005 decided to retire from their careers and put their combined 55 years of community service to work in its formation. A quote from Mother Theresa that helped inspire the vision and inception of About Care is one that modern society would do well to heed. "We can do no great things; we can do small things with great love."

With that credo as a driving force, About Care was created just seven months later and has been providing its services to the Chandler and Gilbert communities since then. In this short time, the difference About Care has made has been palpable to providers and recipients alike.

A perfect example is found in Sara Martin, 29, a Gilbert-based volunteer whose feelings echo those of About Care itself. "We do our best to treat each and every client like they are part of our extended family," she said. "Because they are to us." The "us" that Martin refers to is herself and her 2 ½-year-old daughter, Maddie Grace, who as-

sists her during her client service calls.

Martin has a special insight into the needs of the homebound elderly, having been cared for extensively by her paternal grandmother, Edna McElroy. "She was the biggest inspiration in my life," she said. "My grandmother was a beautiful person who was homebound for over 30 years without any extended family in the area while taking care of my grandfather who had brain surgery and became paralyzed for over 30 years. She never had any respite until he died. She had glaucoma and about lost all her vision. But she never gave up on her will to live independently, [which] she did until the last year of her life."

It's no surprise that this astounding woman passed along her strength to Martin, who speaks almost as if her work with About Care is a calling of sorts. "I wanted to give something back to the elderly community," she explained. "I wanted Miss Grace to know how much they mean to us. Their wisdom in life is something truly invaluable and an asset that society often doesn't realize today. Their stories always help me realize that life really is as simple as it was back in their day. We just can't see it sometimes with all the technology and development that has encroached upon us."

Through the eyes of a child difficult things often can seem much simpler, and it is perhaps through Maddie's eyes that

the true joy of caring for others can most clearly be seen. "She really enjoys seeing them and talking to them," said Martin of her daughter. "She helps pick things up that they drop, she helps get things off the shelves in the stores and she helps open doors and retrieve things off low shelves. She really has a beautiful little heart already and wants to help whenever she can."

Martin said she wants to encourage mothers at home with small children to volunteer and make a difference in someone's life. "Get out there and take the kids with you," she said. "About Care is a child friendly organization that encourages people of all ages to volunteer. Children will not hamper your ability – they will only enrich it for you and for the clients."

About Care Community Outreach Coordinator Peg Shermer agreed. "The clients really enjoy this intergenerational visiting," she said. "As we know, but sometimes need reminding, you are never too old or young to reach out to someone else in need."

And as we sometimes need reminding ourselves as we tromp and trudge our way through our daily lives filled with their commutes, careers, bills and other inherent worries, it is most often through our relationships with others that we truly learn who we are and subsequently, the true meaning of living.

For more information or to learn how you can volunteer, visit www.aboutcare.org. □



About Care volunteer Sara Martin and her daughter, Maddie Grace.