



Long distance family: How to find help

By Ellen Waldman

October 19, 2014

If you live in Ashland and your concerned family is scattered from the East Coast to Alaska, how can they find local help to provide support? This is what happened to one family in town.

Mary had five adult children, each with their own family, jobs and complex lives. They really did live from one end of this country to the other.

During one visit, the son from Alaska wanted to find some support help for his mom, knowing that family was not around should any crisis arise. Plus, he had a list of questions related to local services and needs, now and into the future. Being of the age that meant you went to the library if you had to research a question, that's exactly what he did.

Fortunately, the Ashland Library was open at that time and he was able to speak to the reference librarian. It so happens that I am also of the generation of people who thoroughly enjoys and utilizes the library. For the last 25 years, with or without my daughter in tow, I am there regularly. So when the son asked for a professional in town to support their mom and guide the family, the reference person knew about and recommended me.

That's one way to find help, but may not work for everyone.

Living at a distance is often stress-producing for adult children concerned about aging parents. They are looking for reliable and professional ways to ensure some safety when they are not around. Actually, even if they live locally, still, they are flat-out busy and might not have information on what is needed.

Here are some suggestions for finding reliable help, hopefully before some crisis erupts.

1. ADRC, the Aging and Disability Resource Connection of Oregon (ADRCofOregon.org; 541-618-7572 for Jackson County). From their website: "When you are looking for information about services to address aging or disability needs, we can help you learn about local public and privately paid options." Anyone can access this, regardless of income. They cannot offer long-term or ongoing support for years on end, of course. But they will certainly point you in the right direction and get things stabilized as much as possible. In a future column, I will speak to the director of this program in Jackson County, Dave Toler. He'll inform us on more of the details of how this program helps Oregonians.

2. I recommend that people ask the trusted professionals in their lives who are already familiar with the family. That might be a doctor, attorney, CPA, financial advisor, banker, etc. What I would not necessarily suggest is that you only take the advice of a well-meaning friend or neighbor. I have been witness to an older woman who took a neighbor's recommendation for a caregiver and it turned out to be a disaster. The caregiver seemed like a great person, until she didn't arrive at the appointed time to pick up her client at the hairdresser's. Instead, she left town with the older woman's belongings and car, and that was the last anyone saw of her. Especially if family does not live locally, someone needs to keep an eye on things, and thoroughly check out any providers.

3. Ashland Senior Center (ashlandseniorcenter.org; 541-488-5342) has a full list of local resources that might be right for your family's needs. From their website: "(ASC) provides a support system to the older residents of Ashland, helping to enable them to live more independently and to continue as contributing members of the community." Plus, they have all-around goodwill and kindness there.

4. One more option: National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (caremanager.org; 520-881-8008). I am disclosing that I am a member of this organization and not advocating for my business. But no matter where you live, you can locate someone who provides this fee-based service. I've heard it called "a godsend" and providing "real peace of mind" by family members.

That includes the son in the beginning of this column. He decided that I was really the "granny wrangler" (in his words) for his mom. After 5 years with this family, it's still a good fit for all of us.