



Expert in the field: Kathy Petersen of Adult Foster Care Homes

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When I met my first client, she was in an assisted living center. She had dementia and no family left to visit her. She was unhappy, not able to advocate for herself, and was a very private person. I heard about a foster care home in Ashland that sounded perfect for her. Kathy Peterson was the Adult Foster Care Homes owner, and I was fortunate this was my first experience with this type of facility. My client lived the rest of her life with this group of caring individuals.

Kathy has lived and worked in Ashland for 20 years, and owns and operates two AFCH here. In California in the late 1980s, she was the administrator at a residential community, where she worked in mental health services. She has years of experience in caring for those who need it the most.

What is an AFCH and how is it regulated?

AFCH (not foster care for children) is licensed and inspected by the state of Oregon. Licenses are issued according to three levels of care. Each level needs more help with activities of daily living, such as dressing, bathing, and medication management.

You are allowed to have a maximum of five residents. It can look like an average home on a street with people in easy chairs, drinking tea and watching TV, if they like.

Providers of AFCH must take a training class and their experience must be substantiated. After a license has been issued to a home, the state can pop in to inspect anytime. One inspection per year is required. They will look at each resident's charts, medications, the physical home itself; a full-on inspection. There is at least one caregiver on duty round-the-clock. Employees need to pass a state mandated criminal background check and they must be specifically cleared for an AFCH.

All inspection records are available to the public. You need to schedule an appointment with Senior and Disability Services (541-776-6222) to see the full records all the way back to the first day. It will detail any violations and how they were resolved.

What population of people does it serve?

It is there for people who need assistance with their daily care needs. Families might be unable to provide this. It's a lot of work and they have their own lives. Popping in four times a day is not always enough to ensure their safety. Memory loss is a huge part of this, but some just can't physically take care of themselves. This is 24/7 care, plus it provides the residents a sense of community. Even if they are safe at home, they might not be doing much during the day or interacting with others. They can be very lonely and frightened. In an AFCH, we can share stories and history, and feel valued and validated.

How do people find an AFCH?

Go to the state website: HomeCareChoices.org. All homes listed have been checked out and cleared. The site is not always up to date on how many openings the home may currently have. It will also tell you what level of care their license is for.

What do you like about your work?

I was always attracted to working with seniors. I began in Ashland with the care of my own mother. We had a family meeting and we all wanted to do this. I was able to provide a home to those who might otherwise be in situations they would not enjoy. Maybe a retirement community is too big for them or they are afraid of a nursing home. They want a place that's small enough to make friends in. I like to see them in my home sharing stories and feel glad that I can provide that.

What do families tell you about your home?

Families appreciate having their loved one in an AFCH so they can relax and know they are being taken care of. Many times I've had people whose family was quite worried, especially about medications. They like having a watchful eye on their loved one in a community of their peers.

How fortunate that there are people who extend their hearts to our frailest members of our community. To AFCH owners and the caregivers who work there, a great big thank you.