

## Elders in need sometimes reject help from family

*By Ellen Waldman  
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Years ago, one of our local elder law attorneys made an interesting comment. I had asked for his advice regarding an older person who refused the help and support their family was trying desperately to provide. It was clear that this person could no longer manage on their own, and still, they made the choice to refuse this help. The attorney said, “Ellen, people are allowed to make a bad decision unless they are deemed incompetent”. This stunned me and has stayed with me all these years later.

Here are some local examples of this exact situation. One woman who had high needs was moved into a lovely assisted living community. To her family’s disappointment, she took a cab back to her home the next day and refused to leave again. Another family was very concerned about their parent living alone in Texas, and took the long drive there and back to move him to Jackson County. But once here, he proclaimed he’s going back to Texas, and that ended the plans for getting him the care and community he needed.

We have this idea that we alone know what’s best for ourselves, and maybe that’s true. But when it gets to the point when everyone, except yourself, thinks you need help, why turn it away? It might be possible that parents resist help from their adult children because they fear aging, debility and their own mortality. They might feel they’re no longer in control, which may also be true. If adult children find themselves in this role, they might need a different way to approach this situation. Most of all, they need to recognize that controlling a parent is never going to work.

As the aging adult, there are two factors that impact the wish to “have it your way”. One is the housing itself, and the second is the care you might need to receive in your home.

Starting with care in the home, there are a large number of caregiving agencies in Medford to choose from. Some of these agencies, such as Right at Home (541-414-0800) and Interim Health Care (541-779-0054), also have certified Aging Life Care Managers on their staff. The care managers work with families to provide realistic planning which will help guide this transition. Family members often need their own support team as they navigate the more fragile years of a parent’s life. A professional care manager can provide this guidance as well.

When making sure your home is a safe and accessible option, there are many resources available to assist. Here are several.

- The Lifetime Home (<http://lifetimehome.org>) from the USC School of Gerontology provides “an interactive resource for older adults, families, and professionals to learn how to make the home a safer and more supportive place for a lifetime”.
- AARP has a great deal of info. One is: How to Make a Home Safe for Your Aging Parent (<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/home-care/info-2019/safety-tips.html>). They say, “Small changes — and big ones, too — can be put in place to accommodate your loved one”.

- Locally, the Rogue Valley Council of Government's Lifelong Housing Certification Project <https://rvcog.org/home/sds-2/lifelong-housing-program/> is a voluntary certification process for evaluating the accessibility and/or adaptability of homes. It's designed to help meet the growing market demand for accessible housing in our region and to enable older adults and people with disabilities to age in place safely and independently. They also offer the Oregon Lifelong Housing Checklist on their site which you can use to assess your own home.
- This winter, check out the OLLI at SOU class (<https://inside.sou.edu/olli/index.html>) called, Preventing Falls and Staying Safe in Your Home. Become a member and take this and other classes.
- If home modifications are needed, you might consider hiring a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS). Here are the local contractors listed on their site:
  - James Pierce, Jr., GoodWork Handyman Company ([Jim@goodworkhandyman.com](mailto:Jim@goodworkhandyman.com); 541-210-5060)
  - Benjamin Treiger, Ben the Builder ([bentreiger@gmail.com](mailto:bentreiger@gmail.com) ; 541-621-7862)

Finally, it might be useful to remember the attorney's words from the beginning of this column. Allowing people to make a "bad decision" is hard to watch, but in some cases, it's the only option, for now. Things will continue to change and then hopefully, you'll be ready with another plan of care.