



Neighbor2Neighbor: Napa Valley Hospice & Adult Day Services

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Years ago my husband, Leonard Zunin, M.D., and I traveled to Europe, combining business with pleasure. We had just signed a contract for a book on the art of condolence, and planned to interview staff in hospices in England, France and the Netherlands.

When we returned and friends asked about the highlights of the trip, we were of one mind. The museums were illuminating; the food was extraordinary; but the people who worked at the hospices we visited were truly remarkable. To a person, these immensely positive professionals exuded qualities of caring, kindness and compassion. They were devoted to and nurtured by the sacred trust that they had assumed: to serve those whose death was near.

Though the term "hospice" was first applied to a place for the dying in the mid-1800s, it is Dame Cicely Saunders, a British physician, who is credited with founding the modern hospice movement in England in the 1960s. Whether a physical site where terminally ill patients are cared for or a wide range of services offered in the home, the hospice concept has expanded. Hospice care addresses the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the dying. It supports their families through this challenging time and provides bereavement services long after. In the past four decades, hospices have burgeoned in the United States. It is, indeed, amazing work.

"The work we do touches so many," said Linda Gibson, president and CEO of Napa Valley Hospice & Adult Day Services. "I often have people in the community approach me with a story about how we helped their parent, sibling or friend.

"Death is an integral part of living, and our society has taken huge leaps to bring it into the open, to make passing a dignified and compassionate occurrence. Family members of people we have served tell us that the spirit and kindness our staff showed to their loved ones as they journeyed toward death is something that they will remember until their last moments. People want to die with peace. We do everything we can to help that happen."

What is your purpose or mission?

Linda Gibson: "Napa Valley Hospice & Adult Day Services provides exceptional professional health care and expert resources in caring for the individual and the family through chronic conditions, symptoms of aging, illness, death and bereavement.

"We are committed to: dignity and respect for the individual; quality of life, independence and well-being; innovative, professional and interdisciplinary team care; integrated approaches of caring for physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs; and timely and compassionate support for the individual, the family and caregivers."

In brief, what's the history of your organization?

"We originated in 1979 and now provide three core programs to the community — hospice services, adult day health care services and palliative care.

"Hospice professionals focus on providing comfort, symptom alleviation and specialized end-of-life services in a supportive and dignified environment with the goal of allowing the patient and family to experience the highest quality of life possible.

"Serving Napa County since 1998, Adult Day Services provides multi-disciplinary health care, rehabilitative and social services to individuals with chronic illness and conditions. We also offer comprehensive and free services to family caregivers in Napa County.

"In 2011, Napa Valley Hospice & Adult Day Services launched its palliative care program, Transitions. This program focuses on relief from the symptoms, pain and stress of serious illness, whatever the diagnosis. The goal is to improve quality of life for both the patient and family."

Who are the people you serve?

"Services are provided with compassion and dignity to the community of Napa County. Those services come in many forms.

"The hospice program serves those who have a life-limiting illness. Our team coaches the family on practical caregiving tips and provides medical, nursing, emotional, social and spiritual support in coordination with the family's wishes.

"Adult Day Services provides assistance for those who have a chronic medical, cognitive or mental health condition to help prevent emergency department visits, hospitalization, and to help the family provide for the participant in the home.

"Transitions seeks to focus on improving the quality of a person's life for any adult with a progressive, serious illness."

Is there an anecdote that illustrates the work you do?

"Recently, a major settlement was reached in a California lawsuit. The ruling ensures that elderly, chronically ill and disabled patients will be able to access care they vitally need. Throughout this year, our participants and their families have endured incredible uncertainty and fear. The relief in their faces is indescribable — everyone is extremely thankful to know that their loved ones will be able to stay in their homes and communities, and will continue to be well cared for.

"Kevin Horowitz, whose wife, Harriett, attends Adult Day Services, has spoken publicly about how devastating it would have been to lose these services. Harriett, who is in her 50s, suffers from dementia. Kevin said that the social contact provided at Adult Day Services is critical for her. 'There is no other place where I feel safe taking her where I don't have to worry about what she says,' he said. 'It's the only place she still fits in.'

"Coming to Adult Day Services provides many participants with a link to the outside world. For those living in board and care facilities, Adult Day Services provides a greater chance to socialize, receive needed therapies, and be involved in fun and meaningful activities. Others who live at home attend our day program, allowing their loved ones to work without worrying about whether or not they are safe and cared for."

What's a current need or upcoming project?

"We are incredibly fortunate to have the amazing support of so many talented and caring volunteers. We continually look to our community to help us with our work. Our volunteers fill a variety of roles, from visiting with hospice patients and helping out with Adult Day Services activities, to providing support at our events. Front desk greeters provide general office support and help out with small projects. Our fundraising events include an annual golf tournament and gala. We are always looking for volunteers who can bring their unique talents to our agency."

Neighbor2Neighbor is provided to the Register by Napa Valley CanDo. Founded in 2009, CanDo is a grassroots organization dedicated to "easing the path from intent to action." Each week, CanDo provides a profile of a Napa Valley nonprofit or service club — what the organization does, what it needs and most of all, how an interested person can get involved. For more information on the column, contact Hilary Zunin at CanDoN2N@gmail.com. To learn more about opportunities for community service, email NVCanDo@gmail.com, call 252-7743 or visit NVCanDo.org.