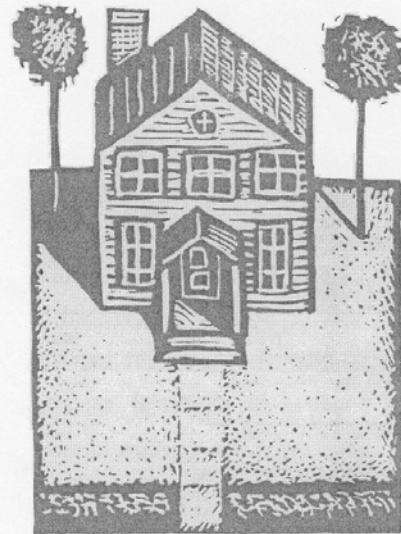


WHEN HOME CAN'T BE WHERE THE HEART IS... FINDING THE NEXT BEST THING Adult Foster Care: Housing Options for Vulnerable Adults



by Mindy Johnson

Guardians, conservators, family members, and professionals are often overwhelmed with the responsibility to seek housing for vulnerable adults. Sometimes these individuals need to be moved to a less restrictive setting due to the closure of a facility. The closing of state hospitals that served mentally ill and developmentally disabled are examples of the shift in societal thinking about what is best for vulnerable adults--and "de-institutionalization" is the philosophy driving that trend. Another scenario is that of a vulnerable adult who has lived all his/her life with relatives who are no longer able to provide the care needed. Perhaps a senior whose health has been deteriorating is no longer able to live independently. In all these cases, alternatives to nursing home care should be considered, and adult foster care may be the best choice.

Adult Foster Care: What Is It?

Adult foster care as a housing option for vulnerable adults is relatively unknown. Most people have heard about child foster homes, but what is an adult foster home? The State of Minnesota has adopted legislation and rules that define an Adult Foster Home and its services. In short, it is a safe, healthy home with qualified caregivers who provide a bedroom, meals, and overnight supervision for up to four carefully screened individuals. A home can be licensed for five individuals if they are all over age 60 and none of them are developmentally disabled or mentally ill. Foster homes typically are single-family dwellings or apartments and are located in residential neighborhoods. Licensing social workers are responsible for training of family foster care providers and monitoring/ supervising providers to assure that they continually meet licensing requirements. Licensers are also involved in the "matching" of vulnerable adults with family foster homes that can best meet their individual needs.

What Is "Family" Adult Foster Care vs. "Corporate" Adult Foster Care?

A "family" foster home is the personal residence of the license-holder. A "corporate" foster home is a home where the license-holder does not reside, and where staff is hired to care for the residents. In both cases, licensing standards are essentially the same.

What Type of People Are Placed in Adult Foster Homes?

Individuals placed in adult foster homes have varying diagnoses, and in fact may have a combination of diagnoses. Foster homes can serve individuals who are developmentally disabled, mentally ill, physically disabled, elderly and sometimes persons who are chemically dependent (if they have maintained a significant period of sobriety). These individuals must have a social worker/case manager involved in their lives who will assess the need for placement, structure the terms of placement, and follow-up to determine if the placement is suitable.

What Services Do Adult Foster Homes Offer?

In addition to room and board, an adult foster home provides services as stipulated in the Individual Resident Placement Agreement. Overnight supervision is perhaps the most critical feature of adult foster care, which distinguishes it from other residential settings in the community. Depending on the vulnerable adult's particular needs, other negotiable services typically include the following: medication administration or monitoring; assistance with activities of daily living, prompts for personal hygiene, assistance with managing cash resources, arranging for medical appointments, transportation, meal preparation, shared dining, etc. Adult foster care licensers and case managers carefully match residents with providers whose skills and/or willingness to provide various services are in keeping with the resident's needs.

How Does Payment Work for Adult Foster Care Placements?

The State of Minnesota legislates that rates paid for adult foster care through Group Residential Housing (GRH) funds must not exceed the rate paid by an individual not receiving a GRH rate. Essentially, no individual placed in adult foster care (whether public or private pay) can pay less than the State-established base rate, also known as "room-and-board" (currently \$621.00 in Hennepin County and for most counties throughout the State). The actual reimbursement for the care of a resident is set on a case-by-case situation (in family homes), or facility costs (in corporate homes). Some individuals pay privately, if their assets do not allow them to qualify for public funding. More commonly, residents qualify for public funding--at least in part. Some residents receive multiple sources of public funding which supports their placement (i.e. GRH, SSI, Social Security Survivor's Benefits, RSDI, etc.). Some residents have employment income or other assets that are evaluated in order to determine whether they qualify for public funding, or whether they must either "spend-down" or contribute partial payment from these other sources of income/assets.

Some residents also qualify for "waivered services" funding under the federal Medicaid program. Examples of such waivers include: Home-and-Community-Based Waivers for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (HCBW), Community Alternatives for Disabled Individuals (CADI) Waiver, Elderly Waiver (EW), Alternative Care (AC) Waiver, and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Waiver. Waivered services funding pays for services to the individual resident.

What Other Placement Options Exist for Vulnerable Adults?

Aside from Adult Foster Care, there are several other housing options for vulnerable adults. Such settings include, but are not limited to, the following:

Board & Lodge: room-and-board (with meals); some facilities offer 24-hour staffing and services--others do not

Board & Care: room-and-board (with meals); some medical services provided

Assisted Living Settings: with meals, homemaker and/or personal care services available

Apartment Training Programs: specialized housing and services for persons with different disabilities

Semi-Independent Living Services (SILS) Programs: apartment programs for developmentally disabled individuals; individuals who reside in these settings tend to be higher functioning than those who reside in adult foster homes

Who Should You Contact for More Information on Adult Foster Care, or to Refer Someone for Placement in an Adult Foster Home?

The State of Minnesota has designated county agents to carry out the licensing function for Adult Foster Homes. County social service departments throughout the State therefore are available to provide you with further information on Adult Foster Care and to assist you in finding an appropriate placement setting. County licensers are aware that the array of placement options available for vulnerable adults can be confusing and overwhelming. For that reason, licensers are available to help you sort through the options. Now that you are aware of Adult Foster Care and its diversity of services, which are tailored to individual needs, you will view it as an excellent placement alternative for vulnerable adults. We look forward to hearing from you!

Mindy Johnson, MSW-MPH, is a Senior Social Worker for Hennepin County's Adult Housing Program. She licenses "family" foster homes. Prior to her tenure as a foster care licenser, she worked for approximately ten years in the Child Protection system for Hennepin County. While there, she served in the capacity of intake social worker, ongoing case management social worker, and wrote legal petitions for Child Protection cases. She finds her work as an Adult Foster Care licenser to be gratifying in that it is heartwarming to witness and be a part of a system that provides for alternatives to "institutional" care.

MAGIC Mission

Statement

All persons are entitled to independence regarding their quality and style of life. Vulnerable individuals, however, may require assistance with decision making while respecting their dignity, autonomy, and well-being. The Minnesota Association for Guardianship and Conservatorship (MAGIC), is a membership organization to explore substitute decision-making. MAGIC brings together and supports professionals who are committed to insuring that the appropriate level of quality substitute decision making is applied consistently. The organization provides education and communication for those interested in guardianship or less restrictive services.

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Rice County has a well-developed adult foster care program, with 83 licensed adult foster care homes serving individuals with developmental disabilities, mental health issues, and frail elderly. If you are interested in providing adult foster care or utilizing adult foster home services, please contact Kate Hanson, Adult Foster Care Licenser at 507-332-6255 or khanson@co.rice.mn.us for information.