

Town explores options to keep seniors in their homes

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WILTON — A grassroots movement is emerging in Wilton to help residents live out their lives at home instead of moving to assisted living or nursing facilities. Sharon Bradley, CEO of Nursing and Home Care, a nonprofit, visiting nurse association based here, said she and local Kiwanis Club member Phil Richards are gathering ideas for the program, which is still in its early stages. "We feel we have a pretty solid infrastructure for the bones of it, if you will," said Bradley.

Nursing and Home Care already offers a set of programs for seniors, such as physical therapy and nursing services, and Bradley wants to tweak them to meet the needs healthy seniors. For example, physical therapy professionals can also provide exercise training, and occupational therapists can teach seniors how to free their homes from safety hazards. There are also some key services that Nursing and Home Care doesn't provide, such as chore and handyman service. "That's a need for people as they become older at home," said Bradley. "They can't and shouldn't be climbing up the ladder to change the light bulb."

Transportation services are also important, said Bradley, because elderly residents who don't feel comfortable driving may still want to eat out or catch a movie. Other possibilities include yoga instruction and meals. Each resident will have an individualized menu of services, with a sliding scale for payment based on need. "We certainly know that folks are getting older," Bradley said, "and while chronic disease is very prevalent, folks that we find who are very robust and very strong, can, with just a little help, continue to flourish well into their 90s."

The inspiration for Wilton's aging in place initiative comes from the Beacon Hill area of Boston. The nonprofit group "Beacon Hill Village" offers chore services, Social activities and medical care to residents ages 50 and over. The program has become the archetype for others around the country; its web site advertises a conference DVD and instruction manual for other fledgling organizations.

Closer to home, Staying Put in New Canaan is months away from unveiling its own aging in place program. Planning began about 18 months ago, according to Tom Towers, president of Staying Put's board of directors. The service will cost \$480 per year for couples and \$360 per year for singles and includes many of the same services as Beacon Hill Village. In addition, 10 to 20 percent of the program will be need-based.

Staying Put is raising money privately to help with its operating budget of \$125,000. "We're not seeking government help simply because we feel it's incumbent upon us to take care of ourselves," Towers said. Towers said these organizations are springing up because of both the aging baby boomer population and a longer life span of people in general. "It's kind of an idea whose time has come, if you will," he said.