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Local Organizations Assist Seniors Through Rough Times

By Abigail R. Ortiz*Journal Staff Writer*

Abel Baca, an Albuquerque resident, said he was just looking for a little extra help after his surgery when he stumbled upon Jewish Family Service of New Mexico.

"I had an incident where my health condition was really bad and had an operation because my kidneys went out and I was under dialysis," Baca said.

Jewish Family Service, a nonprofit organization, helped Baca pay his light and gas bills and sent groceries to his home, but Baca said that's not all.

"They gave me inspiration and encouragement," he said.

Baca said he didn't know that there were organizations in the community offering different forms of assistance to individuals in his situation.

Carrie Hamilton, director of programs and services at Jewish Family Service, said the organization is the best kept secret in the city. The organization offers a variety of programs for the elderly in the community.

Services include emergency utility assistance, grief and loss support groups, medication management services, senior transportation, home-delivered food boxes and housekeeping and companion services.

Those in the community must apply and meet eligibility requirements to participate in the programs.

Always willing to help

Lala Esquibel said Jewish Family Service is always willing to assist her and hasn't refused to help her in the more than four years she's used their services.

Esquibel said she calls the organization when she needs a ride to and from

doctors' appointments or the grocery store. The organization also delivers a box of food containing canned and frozen goods.

"I know that there's more people out there with children that need the help more than I do and more people out there that are worse off than I am, but I do need their help," she said.

The organization even checked up on Esquibel after she hadn't used their services for a couple of months.

"(My husband and I) would go to the pantry and they would give us food ... After he died, they came to my house to find out why we hadn't gone by and I told them, 'I don't drive well,' and they said, 'Well, we can bring it to you,' and they have for about 4 1/2 years now," she said.

Baca said receiving help from others is new to him because he is used to doing things on his own.

"I feel young at heart but can't do the things that I used to do. I was able to pick up refrigerators and put them on a truck, and today I can't do anything without losing my breath," he said.

Jewish Family Service helped him in his time of need, he said.

"I'm still in the process of making it day by day, and if you give up then there is plenty of help for you," Baca said.

Baca said he always calls on Jewish Family Service when he needs help here and there, but he's trying to do the best he can to provide for himself now.

Playing Santa

As the tough economy continues, one organization is trying to help seniors receive a Christmas present.

The Be a Santa to a Senior program gives seniors who otherwise wouldn't receive a gift this year the opportunity to get what they want for Christmas, said Mary Martinez, owner of Home Instead Senior Care.

"Most people aren't aware that there are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of seniors in every community who have no family and are alone," Martinez said in a press release.

Home Instead Senior Care works with nonprofit organizations throughout Albuquerque and surrounding areas to create a list of seniors who will be alone for Christmas. Home Instead placed their names and wishes on paper ornaments hung from Christmas trees in some Walmart stores until Dec. 10. Gift wrappers are needed Dec. 14, and monetary donations are always welcome.

Home Instead Senior Care also offers services, such as companionship, personal services and respite care.

A Christmas party

Another Albuquerque organization tries to bring the holiday cheer to residents who live in supervised care homes and in low-income public housing facilities throughout the city.

Silver Horizons New Mexico pairs up with local businesses, churches and other organizations to adopt an in-care home or a housing facility to throw a Christmas party for the residents, said Lori Feibelman, executive director.

Along with a hearty Christmas dinner, residents also receive a gift from their wish list.

"We don't want them to be lonely during the holidays," Feibelman said. "The holidays are hard on everybody, not just seniors."

Monetary donations to help pay for the Christmas parties are appreciated, too.

Silver Horizons also offers emergency utility bill assistance, materials and personnel for home repairs and household chores, and honors seniors for their community service with its Senior Hall of Fame awards.

Adult day services

Keeping families together is what Share Your Care and other local organizations are trying to do this holiday season.

Share Your Care is one of many that offers adult-based day services as an alternative to institutional care.

"We want to keep families together by offering a place where family members can bring the elderly to participate in safe day services," said Bill Keisel, chief operations officer.

The nonprofit Share Your Care works with elderly and disabled adults to help them connect with the community and decrease feelings of loneliness. The organization increases the number of activities it offers, including going to the zoo, movies or bowling, during the holidays.

If families can't afford to pay for these services, the organization works with the family to receive monetary donations from the community, Keisel said.

How you can help

Jewish Family Service of New Mexico 5520 Wyoming NE, Suite 200 291-1818
jfsnm.org

Home Instead Senior Care 585 Osuna NE 884-0353

Share Your Care P.O. Box 35101, 87176 Diane Daley, volunteer and marketing coordinator 298-1700, ext. 31

Silver Horizons New Mexico Inc. P.O. Box 6879, 87197-6879 Lori Feibelman, executive director 514-7776

These organizations all need:

- Volunteers
- Monetary donations
- Home Instead Senior Care also seeks volunteers to help wrap gifts for seniors on Dec. 14 at Agave del Sol on 7500 Montgomery NE.

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