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By Lauren Hopkins

## Senior Management

### **With people living longer lives, the need for day care services for the elderly is on the rise**

Over the sound of sniffles and wailing, the nurses assured the mother of two, “Just keep bringing her. I’m sure as soon as you leave, she’ll be fine”

The mom, although fearful and full of doubts, turned and forced herself to walk out the door. Two weeks later, the tears were gone and replaced with games of bingo, new friends and a smile.

Believe it or not, the crier is not overcoming her terrible twos – she’s 78 years old. And this mom isn’t dropping her kids off, but her own mother.

What may seem like a typical first-day-of-kindergarten scenario is common at Daily Living Centers, an adult day health care center in Oklahoma City. The comparison is controversial but unavoidable.

More middle-aged children now find themselves the guardians of those who raised them, turning their parents over to trained caregivers. The daily activities are not unlike toddler’s play, either: arts and crafts, sing-alongs and visits from petting zoo animals. Day services provide a needed break for families of elderly, mostly with some form of dementia who don’t require a full-time nursing home but can’t be left alone.

Adult day care facilities are popping up across Oklahoma and the country to serve this growing group. An estimated 3,407 centers were operating in 2002, serving approximately 129,500 people, according to a study done for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. More than 25 percent of those had opened within the previous five years. Even then, the report estimated a need for 5,415 more centers to care for up to 305,770 more people.

Bill Weaver, president of Daily Living Centers, is seeing growth constantly at his facility.

“The older generation is coming soon,” Weaver said. “In the Eighties, there were only seven or eight (adult day cares) in the state. When I came 20 years ago, there were only about 15 participants per day. Now, we’re up to 135 per day.”

Today, there are 40 licensed adult day cares in the state, according to the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

Dr. Merle Griff, board chair of the National Adult Day Services Association, said families are moving away from nursing homes and gravitating toward home and community services such as adult day care.

“We see the trend in consumers, but also in federal and state government, to stop relying on nursing homes for as long as possible,

Griff said. “From the consumer standpoint, I think there's a feeling of, “I'd rather stay in my own home with my own family if I possibly can.” the government is looking at it from a financial perspective: Home and community services are much less of a cost for them.”

Weaver said the boost is in part due to advancements in medicine and longer life spans.

“As the baby boomers come along, they have more high-tech medications, they can stay healthier longer. Things have progressed rapidly. People are living longer,” Weaver said. “And baby boomers are different. They're used to making their own decisions and they want and expect services.”

Weaver said keeping services at a low cost is imperative. To stay at Daily Living Centers for one day cost \$45. The cost difference from a full-time facility alone makes it worthwhile for many families.

Carolyn Bryan's mom, Anna Goss, is 97 and has dementia. She is often hostile and sometimes a little violent.

“She understands a lot, but it's difficult for her to express herself,” Bryan said. “She gets frustrated with that.”

After a string of stays in a variety of assisted living centers and nursing homes, Goss found her best fit at Daily Living Centers. Low cost is a big factor, Bryan said, in addition to some needed free time.

“I feel like I have a little bit of a life now, whereas before, I was just so confined,” she said.

Her biggest motivation for staying with adult day care, though, is the compassionate staff.

“For her, they have just been more cooperative about trying to work with her with the condition she's in,” Bryan said.

“Whatever it is, they work with it, and they realize she's not herself.”

Sometimes families just don't understand, Weaver said, and it's difficult for older people to feel like a part of their communities. Most can't function in a normal social setting, but surrounded by their peers and an understand staff, they improve tremendously.

“People come in, who, for the most part, have just given up. They start communicating, and they just come alive again,” Weaver said.

Although some argue that ‘day care’ is an patronizing label, comparing adults to 3-year-olds, Donna Bowers, vice president of Daily Living Centers, said she believes adult day care gives dignity back to people who have lost it from being beaten down, embarrassed and dysfunctional.

“Here, you know, if you paint your duck greet, it's OK, because that's what you want to do,” Bowers said. “There's a freedom of expression and an understanding of what they can't do.”

The accolades for the nurses and staff don't end there. Charles Wood, an 87-year-old participant, cited the nurses as the reason he was there.

“The staff is tops. You can't find a better staff,” wood said. “They take extra good care of the people here.”

The baby boomers are coming and the aging demographic is only growing, Weaver said. At Daily Living Centers, funds are being raised for a new building to house a community of elderly who don't quite fit in anywhere else.

“The quality of life is what's most important,” Weaver said. “We've been able to help a lot of people, and that's the important thing.”



Anna Goss *left* is attended by Donna Bowers, vice president of operations at Daily Living Centers, as Bill Weaver looks on.