

Home Away from Home Adult Day Center

Today about one person in every eight is an older American, and Illinois ranks seventh in total number of older residents in the United States. As the Baby Boom generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) become caregivers to their aging parents, they are seeking new ways to allow their parents to remain at home and independent for as long as possible.



One concept, called an adult day center, is aimed at assisting seniors to maintain self-sufficiency and providing a cost effective alternative to nursing home placement. These centers are for older people who want to remain in the community but cannot be home alone during the day due to physical, social and/or mental impairment. An adult day center provides respite for family caregivers, especially those employed outside the home, and socialization for isolated adults. Services include health monitoring, nutritious lunches, medication supervision, personal care, recreation and therapeutic activities.

One entrepreneur who has seen the need for these centers first hand is Rena McNeil, a registered nurse and founder of Home Away from Home Adult Day Center in Cahokia, Illinois. Home Away From Home Adult Day Center opened in February 2004, and is one of the few providers available in Southern Illinois. The company is a minority and woman owned firm.

Clients are dropped off for all or part of the day, and receive nutritious meals at Home Away from Home. Most of Mrs. McNeil's clients need "reality orientation," often a group discussion about events of the day to assure that the client is connecting with the present rather than the past. Clients also participate in games including bingo, word games, low-key exercises and outings during the week. As a registered nurse Mrs. McNeil, makes sure clients take their medications. She checks vital signs and will consult with the client's caregivers and doctors if behavioral or health changes are noted.

"Many of our clients before they came here, spent their days at home alone, waiting for their adult children to return home from work. I hear all the time from their caregivers, that after a little while at our center, that a spark of life has returned to their Mom or Dad."

The first part of opening her business was developing a business plan and meeting Theresa Ebeler, Director of the Southern Illinois University—Edwardsville Small Business Development Center at East St. Louis. Southern Illinois University—Edwardsville Small Business Development Center at East St. Louis is partially supported by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Mrs. McNeil says she “had no clue” what a business plan was, but felt Ms. Ebeler’s “warm and friendly professional approach” really helped her complete her business plan for Home Away from Home. Mrs. McNeil worked with Ms. Ebeler one-on-one and over the phone over several months on her “state of the art business plan for an adult day center. It really is my bible” she said. Once the plan was completed Mrs. McNeil began to look for the right location to open her center.

As a result of investing time in developing the business plan, Mrs. McNeil was able to get a grant of \$11,500 to pay for renovations to her center, a 5000 square foot building which was an old medical center. Vacant for four years, the center needed considerable renovations and the grant from the local Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district helped pay for part of the renovations.

The Home Away from Home Adult Day Center is open from 9AM to 3PM, and offers extended hours from 6:30 AM to 6PM. Mrs. McNeil is considering expanding her services to include respite care for the weekends so that caregivers can have a break from their round the clock care for their parents.

While Illinois does not regulate adult day centers, the Illinois Department of Aging through their Community Care Program to subsidize adult day center costs through Medicaid, does have strict certification requirements on staffing levels. Mrs. McNeil in developing her business plan, organized her center with these guidelines in mind. The Illinois Department of Aging offers four-year provider contracts to adult day centers and Mrs. McNeil has been anxiously waiting for the opportunity to apply for certification from the state.

With a capacity to handle up to 50 clients, Mrs. McNeil opened her doors with four clients. Mrs. McNeil believes that becoming eligible to receive subsidies the Department of Aging will help her fill her center. Currently the staff consists of two “earn fare” workers and Mrs. McNeil. Another staff member will be added once the roster reaches six clients.

Mrs. McNeil is marketing her business through flyers, ads in the newspaper, the yellow pages and cable public access channel. Because this is a new concept in downstate Illinois, she has gotten very good newspaper publicity which has helped increase the number of calls from potential client’s caregivers.

Mrs. McNeil says that she is always amazed at all of the “nuggets of wisdom” she gets from her clients. One client noticed that a carpet strand had become unraveled and suggested a simple remedy that worked immediately. “I receive so much more from them, than I give. It is a joy. I cannot believe that what I do is work, this is so much fun” said Mrs. McNeil.

The Southern Illinois University—Edwardsville Small Business Development Center at East St. Louis is a member of the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network working in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the U. S. Small Business Administration.