

ElderCare Inc.

Supporting Health and Independence for Seniors



When the topics are Friendship Meals and Meals on Wheels, Brandi Gruber explains that the services are two sides of the same coin. Gruber is executive director of ElderCare Inc., which serves more than two dozen counties from its office in Great Bend. In addition to meals, it offers home services designed to allow people to stay at home for as long as possible.

Friendship Meals

"ElderCare prepares and serves Friendship Meals five days a week at 39 senior centers in our 28-county area," Gruber said. "Those who cannot attend lunches at these centers count on Friendship Meals being delivered to their private homes. This is where all the great Meals on Wheels volunteers come in."

ElderCare, 5611 10th, provides 28,000 meals a month in its territory, which stretches from Great Bend south and west to the Oklahoma and Colorado borders. "Sometimes it can be overwhelming," Gruber acknowledged. "But between Tina Mingenback and me, we travel to all 39 senior centers about every six weeks. As our dietary services manager, Tina ensures the meals we prepare are tasty and nutritious."

The time on the road pays dividends because cooks and other senior center workers want and deserve to talk with ElderCare administrators in person, Gruber noted. "Yes, we rely on phone calls and emails for a lot of day-to-day issues but we learn more when we meet face to face," Gruber said. "Our valued employees count on us and we will do anything we can to accommodate them."

Expenses incurred for Friendship Meals continue to climb but funding remains fairly stagnant. Some of the financial gaps are filled by businesses and individuals who sponsor meals in a variety of ways. "We are always looking for people to help with meal costs for a day, a week, a month," Gruber said. "This sponsorship program is crucial because it helps offset the costs. In addition, some local seniors want to socialize at lunch but they can't afford the small price of a meal. This leads to concerns about poor nutrition and isolation."

Those 60 and older can eat for \$3.50 per meal at a senior center, while those under 60 are asked to pay \$5.75. For more information about how to be a sponsor, contact Gruber or Mingenback by calling 620-792-5942.



Home Services

Anyone looking for in-home caregiver employment is encouraged to contact ElderCare. Home Services personnel serve families in Barton, Pawnee, Rush, Stafford, Pratt, Kiowa, Edwards and Ford counties. "We recruit employees who have a genuine passion for working with the elderly," emphasized Gruber, a Great Bend native. "These valued employees visit elderly people in their homes to offer a wide variety of services."

"We collaborate with clients and their families, as well as their primary-healthcare providers. Our medical services are varied and tailored to the individual."

Some, but not all, ElderCare staff members have healthcare-related credentials. The non-profit entity relies on registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, certified nurse's aides and certified medication aides. "However," Gruber noted, "some clients need other kinds of services, including housekeeping, meal preparation, laundry and personal care; respite care for families also is available. These caregivers don't need a medical background but are a vital part of ElderCare."

New employees receive hands-on training by visiting clients side-by-side with a seasoned caregiver. Quarterly training sessions help employees enhance their skills and keep up with new practices. "All our caregivers learn at the outset they must be polite, professional and compassionate," Gruber said. "The services they offer, whether medical and/or personal, are extremely important to seniors. They deserve to maintain as much independence as possible for as long as possible."

"We also know that seniors' families want and deserve to be kept up-to-date," she continued. "They feel more at ease and have peace of mind that ElderCare is helping with daily activities for their loved ones."

While ElderCare is supported, in part, by tax dollars from the Southwest Kansas Area Agency on Aging, it also relies on private donations. "Since we are a member of United Way of Central Kansas, we encourage the community to support it," Gruber said. "We are always grateful for whatever United Way can do for seniors who need anything from a hot meal at lunch to an in-home professional caregiver. And anything in between."

Home Services are available 24/7 and a physician referral is not necessary. ElderCare accepts Older American Act funds, private pay, long-term-care insurance and Medicaid. It also collaborates with the Veterans Administration. Of its 130 employees, about 70 serve clients in Barton County.

"All of us want to tend to medical and nutritional needs," Gruber summarized. "But equally important, we want to help lift our clients' spirits. Our visits let people know they are valued and we genuinely care about their physical and emotional well-being."

