

It's in our power to change.

THE INITIATOR

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Nursing Home Transition: The Road Back to Independent Living

It's never too late to be independent. That's the idea behind a new program that helps people transition from nursing homes to the housing of their choice.

As the new Community Transitions Coordinator for Disability Advocates of Kent County (DAKC), Erin Luttenton is eager to help people who are considering their options as they exit the nursing home. "Other areas in the State of Michigan have been doing this for a year or two," she says, "but we are very new to it. Right now, my goal is to let people know that we are part of the pilot project with the funds to help them get back into the community."

Consumers can access the program through Kent County's Single Point of Entry (SPE), created by the governor's Long Term Care Task Force. The SPE, which in West Michigan is called West Michigan Long Term Care Connections, offers one trusted source of information on long term care options and programs. Each nursing home in Kent County has one or two Options Counselors who work directly with the residents, nursing staff, and social workers to identify individuals ready to leave the facility. "They're my eyes and ears and a great asset to have," says Luttenton.

After confirming Medicaid eligibility, Luttenton and the Options Counselor meet with the individual. The initial interview is all about getting to know the person. "We talk about their life before the nursing home, their hopes and dreams, and even their fears about leaving—especially for those who have been there long enough

to become dependent on the nursing home," says Luttenton.

Throughout the planning period that follows, the Options Counselor stays involved to help create the individual's person-centered plan. "They're a great resource and advocate to the consumer for me," says Luttenton. Following the individual's lead, they address the services and personal items needed to make the move, including finding suitable housing, arranging transportation, and coordinating any special services needed. "The individual is at the center of the choices 100% of the time," she says. "When people have been living in a nursing home, someone else has been making all of the choices for them. It's exciting to give that power back."

After a successful transition, Luttenton and the Options Counselor will follow up with the person for at least six months. "We don't want them to give up and head back to the nursing home the moment something goes wrong," says Luttenton. "We want them to feel plugged in to the lifelong resources they need from the beginning."

While the process is new, several area residents are already working on their transitions. "We're telling more people about this all the time, and we can't wait to see the floodgates open," says Luttenton.



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-Erin Luttenton

Independence Starts Here

To learn more about nursing home transition in Kent County, contact: Erin Luttenton at 616 949 1100 or West Michigan Long Term Care Connection at 1 866 642 4582 or locally at 616 988 5079.

Maintaining Independence in Your Home

The ZeroStep program provides home assessment and adaptive equipment services to people with disabilities of all ages. A home assessment identifies barriers to independent living and recommends modifications. ZeroStep serves those with the ability to pay privately for services and those of low-income. Limited funding for persons of low-income is provided by the City of Grand Rapids, Kent County and the Kent County Senior Millage for home assessments and sometimes adaptive equipment.

To learn more, contact Lisa Nelson-Williams at lisa.n@zerostep.org or call 616 949 1100, Ext. 255.