

Placement services help families find the right care

By Michael Shapiro

It can be one of the most difficult transitions in life: moving from one's home to a senior care facility. Leaving one's house or apartment can be physically challenging, emotionally wrenching and intellectually dislocating, especially for older adults dealing with cognitive decline. Fortunately, there are placement services that can help older adults and their families find care facilities best suited to their needs.

Based in San Bruno, Neighborly Senior Placement assesses the needs of older adults and helps them locate assisted living or memory care that's right for them. Founded by Anita Varelas, 37, who has been working with older adults since she was a 15-year-old "waitress" at an assisted living community, Neighborly Senior Placement is typically contacted when someone needs immediate placement.

"Maybe the person had a fall and they can't go home because of stairs, or there's a decline in their cognition or their home is just too big to manage," she said. "So I go over what their current needs are and who they are as a person. We also go over their financial situation, what their income and assets are and find out what they would be able to comfortably afford."

Varelas notes that many older adults and their families are unaware that placement counselors can help them find a place to live for the next stage of their lives. She said she's been to 90% of senior care facilities in the Bay Area so she is well positioned to recommend the right setting for each client.

"Having accumulated all of this knowledge, I felt that I could use this to help make this an easier process for people," she said.

Part of the challenge is the sticker shock that occurs when older adults learn how much most assisted living facilities cost — in the Bay Area, the typical range is \$7,000 to \$20,000 per month.

"Most people are not prepared to hear that number," Varelas said, noting that her company does not charge a fee to its placement clients — the facility pays her



Founder of Neighborly Senior Place Anita Varelas, right, connects with a senior living resident. Varelas started a business that helps older adults find care facilities best suited to their needs.

company a referral fee if a client moves in.

Which raises a question: Does this lead placement services to recommend only facilities that pay them? Varelas said most facilities do pay, and that even if one didn't, she'd still recommend it if it's the best place for a client.

Marcy Baskin, an eldercare consultant who is vice president of franchise support and training at Senior Care Authority, employs the same financial model and also said she recommends the best facility for her client, regardless of whether she receives payment. Baskin became interested in eldercare advice when her parents were suffering from cognitive difficulties in the early 2000s.

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Marcy Baskin, an eldercare consultant who is vice president of franchise support and training at Senior Care Authority

"Both of my parents were very ill: My mom had Alzheimer's, and my dad had everything but dementia," she recalled. "I couldn't find care. I had no idea what I was supposed to do. I owned a business. I owned a house. I had a lot of experience in many areas, but I was lost." It's a common refrain.

After learning how to help her parents, Baskin opened an agency to help others and soon joined forces with Frank Samson, who

founded Senior Care Authority in 2009. Baskin said they're experts at helping people find the right facility, "based on their care needs and budget."

The process begins with a "detailed phone assessment," Baskin said, noting that often the older adult being interviewed isn't yet ready to move.

"In most circumstances, it has to be a very delicate, sensitive process to get them to under-

Details

Neighborly Senior Placement: 650-825-6148, www.neighborlyseniorplacement.com

Senior Care Authority: 888-809-1231, www.seniorcareauthority.com

stand why it is in their best interest," she said.

Baskin seeks to find activities they enjoy, like bingo, and then will tell them that bingo is available at assisted living communities. Varelas concurred: If an older adult loves swimming, for example, she'll recommend somewhere that has a pool or easy access to one nearby.

Part of the assessment, Baskin said, is considering how to pay a facility whose annual bill could exceed \$100,000. This could entail selling one's home or investigating other sources of income such as insurance or veterans' benefits. Baskin works through various options with her clients and their families to ascertain what's in their budget.

Senior Care Authority also offers advocacy services for older adults. For example, an advisor will go to medical appointments to advocate for them if a family member isn't available. This is a fee-based service.

"A lot of seniors don't have anybody to advocate for them," Baskin said. "With our medical system the way it is now, it's very hard for seniors. So they need somebody to advocate and keep them organized and make sure that their questions get answered."

Neighborly Senior Placement also provides complementary services — their staff includes real estate agents who specialize in home sales for older adults and the company partners with moving companies.

"The majority of my clients are not physically able to move their belongings, and oftentimes their adult children are not able to as well," Varelas said. "So I tried to make Neighborly a one-stop shop to really help you through the entire process."

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