

A little Faith goes a long way

Faith in Action pairs volunteers with seniors

By Sandy Hadler
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KENYON

In 2010, thanks to a Community Service/Service Development grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Faith in Action of Dodge County partnered with Kenyon Sunset Home to extend services to senior citizens in Kenyon, Nerstrand and the surrounding areas.

In summer, Shari Haugaard, of Kenyon, became the director of what is now Faith in Action of Dodge County, Kenyon & Nerstrand.

Shortly before Haugaard was hired, she and her sister-in-law cared for Haugaard's mother-in-law, who was quite ill. Haugaard said that

supporting her mother-in-law as she moved from independent living to assisted living and then to hospice care sparked Haugaard's interest in the mission of Faith in Action. She said the career move "was truly a good fit for me. I love working with the volunteers and with our recipients."

Haugaard oversees 71 trained volunteers. The majority of them are empty-nesters.

The volunteers provide a number of services for the 92 senior citizens in the program. Services include friendly visits, providing transportation, doing housework, shopping, running errands, washing windows, doing lawn work and performing minor repairs.

"Our goal is to help recipients remain independent in their homes for as long as possible," she said.

Eleanor Trauvig, of Kenyon, is typical of those who use Faith in Action so she can continue to live indepen-

Faith in action

Senior citizens interested in the Faith in Action program may contact Shari Haugaard at (507) 789-8887.

dently. Trauvig had open heart surgery and was hospitalized during Christmas 2010. After returning home, she depended on Faith in Action volunteers for transportation. Volunteers also brought her books from the library, washed her windows and did some plumbing.

"I've really utilized the volunteers," Trauvig said. "I don't know what I would have done without them. My son is partially paralyzed and my daughters live far away. Faith in Action has been a life-saver for me."

Faith in Action recently has changed its focus and now serves only those who are 60 or older or need rehabilitation for a short-term physical

disability. Prior to the change, the organization also served younger people who had disabilities, but staffers found that the needs of the disabled are considerably different than those of the elderly.

Haugaard said Faith in Action was started by local faith congregations helping fellow members in need. That focus changed for a while but has once again returned to its roots, while also including the elderly who are not connected to a house of worship.

Haugaard is encouraged by the kindness and caring she sees in the volunteers and the success they've had in keeping local seniors independent.

The grant that funded the expansion of Faith in Action to the Kenyon and Nerstrand areas will end in 2013.

"We'll have to wait and see what happens then," Haugaard said.

Sandy Hadler is a freelance writer in Zumbrota.

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