

Certificate of Need Ad Hoc Committee  
October 21, 2014  
HOME HELPERS OF BLUFFTON TESTIMONY

Ted Cooley and I are business partners with almost 10 years of experience as the owners of Home Helpers, a home care company. Since April 2005, Home Helpers has provided services to more than 800 elderly or disabled clients and their families, primarily in Beaufort and Jasper counties.

Our Home Helpers business is a locally owned company that supports about 100 jobs. We have, twice, been awarded the rating of Provider of Choice and Employer of Choice by Home Care Pulse, a national home care surveyor. We were honored to be named the 2013 Franchise of the Year by the International Franchise Association.

We believe in investing in our business, our staff and our community. In our effort to provide outstanding care from the best caregivers, we opened a school, the Home Health Academy. With our school, we provide hands-on training and education to our staff and have extended the opportunities to the community by offering certified nursing assistant and home health aide trainings. We require more continuing education hours than other home care agencies and provide incentives, including scholarships, to our dedicated employees.

Our goal at Home Helpers is to provide our clients with the highest quality of services along a continuum of care. We want to respond to the requests from our existing clients to continue to be their care provider when they are faced with a new and disabling challenge. Home Helpers wants to respond to the growing trend of aging adults choosing to remain in their homes to "age in place."

With that motivation, as business partners, Ted and I made a thoughtful decision about when to expand our home care company and provide home health services. We started the decision-making process in October 2013. We did not apply for a South Carolina Home Health Agency license until January 2014. During our three-month decision period, we attempted to seek counsel and direction from SCDHEC, and we reviewed the State of South Carolina's demographic information relating to the elderly. We vetted and then hired an experienced home health consulting firm. We expanded our office space and invested additional funds into expanding our technology. Then, in February of this year, DHEC awarded us our South Carolina Home Health Agency license after finding we met all standards and requirements and are qualified to provide home health care.

As business owners and care providers, we continue to try to better understand the needs of the elderly and disabled residents of Beaufort and Jasper Counties and how our home care and home health businesses can benefit our community and the people we serve.

As a care provider, Home Helpers knows the power of home care and home health services. We recognize the national trend of increased home and community based services and the value of home health care as an alternative treatment option to re-hospitalization or admission to a facility.

- As of 2013, 23 percent of Beaufort County residents are older than 65 (SCDHEC)
- As of 2013, 14 percent of Jasper County residents are over 65 (SCDHEC)
- The South Carolina population over 65 exceeds the national average (SCDHEC)

- Between 2010 and 2013, Beaufort County's population increased 5.9 percent (SCDHEC)
- Between 2010 and 2013, Jasper County's population increased 7.5 percent (SCDHEC)
- Population growth in Beaufort County exceeds the state average (SCDHEC)
- Population growth in Jasper County exceeds the state average (SCDHEC)
- In 2005, 2 percent of Beaufort County residents were over the age of 85, with a projection of a 50% increase in 85+ residents by 2025. (The Human Services Alliance of Beaufort County).

According to the South Carolina State Plan on Aging, "South Carolina must work with the federal and state government bodies to use the Medicaid and Medicare programs in the most efficient manner possible .... All of these initiatives will be focused on providing incentives for remaining in the community."

The second of five goals, established by the South Carolina Office on Aging, is to "enable older South Carolinians to remain in their homes with a high quality of life for as long as possible through the provision of home and community based services." We believe in those goals. Home Helpers is prepared to be a part of the solution in meeting them.

During the public forums on the State Plan on Aging, home-based care was identified as one of the top three key preventative services for the elderly. Despite that, to our knowledge, only one new CON, for a home health agency to serve Beaufort and Jasper counties, has been awarded in the past nine years.

As a small business, we made strategic decisions and investments to expand our services to include home health care. In the process of becoming a home health agency:

- We were determined to do things "right"
- We hired a home health consultant to walk us through the process of licensure, Medicare certification and CHAP accreditation
- We expanded our staff and hired an RN and an LPN and contracted with a local rehabilitation company for therapy services

Per CMS requirements, we fulfilled our capitalization requirement, in April 2014, and placed into a separate account \$ 188,000 that must remain untouched for at least another six months. We have accepted 14 pro bono cases, also required by CMS, and have provided those patients with skilled nursing and therapy services. A conservative estimate would be that, beyond the capitalization requirement, we will have invested approximately \$75,000 to obtain Medicare certification, CHAP accreditation and be able to begin the Medicare billing process.

### **The Value of Continuity of Care**

- Home Helpers expanded our services to include provision of home health services after having to refer our long-time clients to other agencies for health care. Our experience is that two agencies providing services in one home often results in client confusion and duplication of services.
- In over nine years, Home Helpers has provided support and service to more than 800 individuals and their families. We know the relationships that are formed between the family, the caregivers and the administration. Those relationships help with care and case management.

- With expanded services, Home Helpers will be able to meet the needs of our clients longer.

## **Patient Rights**

- Patient choice of medical provider is a key component of patient rights. Patients have the right to choose the agency that best meets their service and delivery needs. Each home health agency has its own culture of care. With only three home health agencies issued a CON to serve Beaufort and/or Jasper Counties, patient choice seems unnecessarily limited.

## **Improved Quality of Care and Services**

- When we opened our business in 2005, there were only a handful of home care agencies in the area. Now, there are probably twenty. With so many agencies competing for the same business and caregiving staff, we have found ways to differentiate ourselves.

Home Helpers:

- Requires our caregivers to complete more continuing education than our competitors do.
- Increased the base hourly wages for caregivers
- Offers incentives to employees that are with us 6 months or longer.
- Established our own Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) school for training of home health aide skills
- Requires our staff to wear uniforms and ID
- Performs in-house pre-employment and random drug screening of all employees.

We believe that all of these differences lead to increased skills and professionalism in the caregivers and are the result of increased number of providers. Increased home health providers would also bring service-quality and service-delivery improvements. And an increase in home health providers is needed for the state to meet goals for serving the disabled and growing elder populations.

Clearly, Home Helpers did not merely apply for a license to be a home health agency. We embarked on what has become a 10-month journey of acquiring a license, providing pro-bono care, being surveyed and accredited by CHAP and certified by Medicare.

Today, Ted and I are here to say that Home Helpers has worked diligently and with good intentions to be a quality provider of home health services. We did not take advantage of a situation. We sought the counsel of SCDHEC and tried to make a thoughtful decision about expanding our client services. Today, we are not able to apply for a CON since there are none to be awarded to providers in Beaufort and Jasper counties. We are asking for the opportunity to obtain a CON.

Respectfully,

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President, CEO  
M & C Group, LLC dba HOME HELPERS of BLUFFTON

