

Sequoia Senior Solutions meets rising demand for homecare within five North Bay counties

BY GARY QUACKENBUSH FOR SEQUOIA SENIOR SOLUTIONS

As a growing percentage of the North Bay population reaches retirement age, demand is increasing for quality senior homecare. Petaluma-based Sequoia Senior Solutions, Inc., the largest provider of in-home senior care in Marin, Sonoma, Napa, Lake and Mendocino counties, has anticipated this need by taking personal service to a new level.

"We focus first on meeting client needs and ensuring their safety," said Gabriella Ambrosi, co-owner and CEO of Sequoia Senior Solutions with husband and chief financial officer, Stanton Lawson.

Sequoia Senior Solutions has grown its business from a single-client startup to a multi-county business employing more than 230 certified and bonded caregivers in less than six years. "We place equal emphasis on caregiver professionalism and in providing consistent, compassionate, one-on-one care in the comfort of our clients' homes. The standards we set for employees are among the highest in the industry."

Sequoia Senior Solutions offers a variety of personalized and affordable services available seven days a week ranging from a few hours a day to 24-hour and live-in care. Services include: caring companionship, meal planning and preparation, incidental transportation and running errands as well as light housekeeping and medication reminders.

SAFETY AND INTEGRITY

Sequoia Senior Solutions is very particular about who it hires. "We take care of our people and promote from within. Our caregivers are employees, rather than independent contractors, and they are covered by workers' compensation and insurance programs," said Ms. Ambrosi.

Recently, Sequoia Senior Solutions re-

ceived employment applications from 175 people. Only 10 were hired after checking 14 personal and professional references of each applicant, and also after carefully screening police and driving records.

"We want to assure clients that we operate with integrity," she added. "We never handle our client's money. Instead, we purchase cash cards from banks to go shopping and pay for incidentals. These bank cards are bought with our funds, and we always give clients receipts for what we spend on their behalf and provide them with bi-weekly invoices so they know we stay within their budget."

Recording accurate caregiver time reports is critical. Using an electronic system provided by "Home Track," each Sequoia Senior Solutions employee dials a special number when entering a client's home and again when leaving to mark the time. "This is good for clients as well as for our payroll and invoicing system. It also informs us when a caregiver should have arrived or when delays occur so we can immediately provide coverage," Mr. Lawson said.

PROFESSIONALISM

Sequoia Senior Solutions is certified by the California Association of Health Services at Home. The company is also affiliated with The Senior's Choice, a national leader in senior care, enabling it to share resources, training materials and best practices to help improve its services.

Company caregivers also benefit from continuous training that includes the certified Companion Aide program that is exclusive to Sequoia Senior Solutions. Each employee receives more than 30 hours of training during the first 60 days along with periodic follow-up sessions. "Training really pays off. We have an 'A'

rating from the Better Business Bureau and have never had a client complaint," Ms. Ambrosi said.

When there is need for other senior services, Sequoia Senior Solutions works with recognized experts in the fields of reverse mortgage consulting, VA benefits, legal counsel as well as hospice care and other categories, as required.

CONSISTENCY

Every prospective client receives a free two-hour lifestyle assessment. "This in-home interview enables us to better determine the type of assistance needed that will help them remain independent at home. We listen to our clients. If they want someone who is talkative, quiet or has other personality traits, we make every effort to comply. We list the skills and characteristics of our employees with the help of Home Track so we can appropriately match our caregivers to each person. The same caregivers are committed to stay with them as long as they are needed. This ensures continuity of care and establishes long-term relationships," Ms. Ambrosi said.

Every month a significant number of Sequoia Senior Solution's clients are randomly surveyed by Pinnacle Consulting to monitor and grade the company on the various services it provides. For three years in a row the company received the "best in class" Pinnacle Quality Certificate in recognition of consistency in excellence, achievement and commitment to high levels of service and customer satisfaction.

"We want to know how we are doing so we can make continuous improvements," Mr. Lawson said. "Using an independent third party helps us monitor our services and continue to provide high quality care." ■