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Helping seniors and their families

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We've all heard many stories about coping with the recent storm and about neighbors helping neighbors. This one is a little different because it's an example of people within institutions making small, but sensible decisions that help others, and "spending smart" in ways that our government leaders might well emulate.

"Mary," is 89, her husband "Bill," 88. She is very, very fragile and stooped; she stands with difficulty because of the pain. Mary has many bruises from falling, and is confused and sometimes mentally fragile as well. Bill takes loving care of her, every day, as best he can. They don't have a lot of money, and their only family lives far away. But they make it, because they always have.

When the storm hit, they lost power, and Bill had heart trouble. When help came to take him to the hospital, caring EMS techs took one look at Mary and despite all the rules, knew she couldn't be left behind in the cold. They wrapped her in a blanket and brought the couple to a local hospital.

The hospital couldn't admit Mary; she didn't qualify. Even if she was admitted, she would be somewhere else in the hospital, even more confused and alone. She couldn't go home to no heat and no one to take care of her. Bill needed oxygen, and had trouble speaking. Mary said she had been in a nursing home two months ago; it turned out to have been two years ago.

The hospital reached out to ElderServe for help. Everyone felt that that the best plan for Mary was to let her stay with her husband, and sleep on a cot in his room, technically a violation of the rules.

ElderServe agreed to provide a homecare specialist to stay with Mary. KIPDA, the area agency on aging, paid for the care using a very limited pot of in-home services funds. Barbara Gordon, KIPDA's Director of Social Services said simply "There was no other option. Although our budget has been cut and some of our programs are running at a deficit, this was a crisis situation. Mary needed the care."

Meanwhile, ElderServe managed to reach Bill and Mary's 66-year-old son, over 1,500 miles away. Battling bad weather, he set out for Louisville to help his parents.

Bill soon improved enough to get off oxygen while Mary was cared for. The couple dipped into their meager savings to provide for more help until he was discharged. The power is back on at their home, and their son will be here soon.

Thanks to caring and compassionate professionals who looked for common sense solutions, Bill had time to get better, and Mary was saved from an expensive trip to the emergency room and separation from her husband.

The non-profit community is constantly being told to "spend smart" "do more with less," and "act more like a real business." I challenge this community, and our local, state and federal officials, in this time of budget-cutting, to continue to provide non-profit agencies, especially those of us involved in basic social services, the tools and resources we need to help the most vulnerable in our community. We can save the taxpayers money, because "spending smart" is something we're already doing.

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