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Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower Cape

Housing Rehab: Making a Family Home Accessible

“It was such a good experience and we are forever grateful.”

Avis Kaeselau

HR Client, South Dennis



When Avis Keaselau called the contractor to pump out her septic last spring, she was totally unprepared for the news that her septic failed and needed to be replaced with a new Title V system. Avis, who is 82, lives in a small ranch in South Dennis with her 50 year old daughter Grethe, her son-in-law Ron, and their two teenage children. The financial implications were more than the family could manage.

Avis and her husband moved into the house with their four children in 1999. Avis recalls that “We were able to afford it because it was a fixer-upper and my husband was going to do all the work.”

Less than a year later, Avis’s husband was diagnosed with cancer and died, leaving Avis alone to manage the house and help support her family.

Grethe, who is the youngest of Avis’s children, was diagnosed with Rheumatoid arthritis at the age of 2. Over the years it has required numerous surgeries and, as a result, many of her joints have either been replaced or fused. Both her ankles are fused which necessitates walking with a cane and walking upstairs is a real challenge. Despite her chronic pain and discomfort, Grethe is incredibly vibrant and upbeat. Grethe has been on disability for much of her adult life and over the years medical bills have added an additional burden on the family’s finances.

Avis, was the first female EMT and CPR instructor in the state, but is now retired and works part-time as a caregiver for seniors. So when the septic failed, Avis did not know how they would pay for it. The family had benefitted from a housing rehabilitation program soon after Avis’ husband died to help with some critical repairs, “So when we received the postcard from the CDP in the spring about their HR program, we assumed we couldn’t apply,” says Avis. Grethe encouraged her mother to reach out

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to the CDP anyway and they were thrilled to learn that they were not disqualified because of the previous work.

“The staff was so helpful,” says Avis. “While the staff from the CDP was at our house, I asked them if they could install a step or two so Grethe could get in and out of the house.” Instead, it was determined that an entire ramp should be installed, equipped with grab bars and a few steps for Avis. Grab bars were also installed throughout the house, including the bathroom, to make it easier and safer for Grethe to get around. “The CDP staff also discovered that my front door was warped and was allowing heat to escape, so it was replaced as well,” says Avis. Work also included fixing broken tiles on the bathroom floor and mitigating a mold problem in the bathroom.

“Mike Ferrullo was our contractor and he and his crew were polite, courteous and listened to all of our concerns, and they asked us for feedback throughout the process,” says Avis. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that the rails of the ramp and the grab bars were specifically fitted to Grethe’s needs.

“It was such a good experience and we are forever grateful.”

In 2019, the CDP has funds available for Housing Rehab projects for homeowners residing in Eastham, Harwich, Provincetown and Truro. To learn more about the program, visit the CDP’s website at www.capecdp.org.