Strengthening Recovery for Vulnerable Adults After the Camp Fire through the Peg Taylor Center's Compassionate Care

Peg Taylor Center for Adult Day Health Care
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Our Distinguished History:

Named for a visionary public health nurse, the Peg Taylor Center was established in 1986 through a grass roots community effort. Today, the Center is still the only Adult Day Health Care program serving Butte and Glenn Counties. It has served thousands of low income families and been declared a "treasured community asset" by the City of Chico and County of Butte.

Our comprehensive person-centered care and supportive services strengthen health and improve quality of life. This includes nursing oversight and treatments; physical, occupational and speech therapies; social work crisis assistance, counseling and case management; dietary counseling; recreational therapy and individualized activities; therapeutic meals; and specialized transportation; as well as crisis assistance, respite and support for caregivers. Our program was named in Peg Taylor's honor in recognition of her pioneering role as a champion for preventive and rehabilitative care for the elderly and disabled. The California Poppy was chosen to symbolize the Peg Taylor Center because it blooms beautifully even under the most challenging conditions. As Peg shared at the end of her life, "It's all about love." This vision is being carried forward through the dedicated efforts of the center's staff, Board of Directors and volunteers. In March 2019, the Peg Taylor Center celebrated 33 years of community service.

Who We Serve:

The Peg Taylor Center supports the health, independence, and well-being of adults with chronic illness, to empower them to live and thrive in the community settings of their choice. This strengthens the ability of families to care for family members who have intensive care needs due to serious illnesses. Working in partnership with adults with disabilities and their families, we ensure continuing social connection and a higher quality of life and health. Seventy-five (75%) percent of the patients served at the Peg Taylor Center are 65 or older. About the same percentage served are women. Most participants are in their seventies, eighties and nineties, however our youngest participant was 18 and our oldest was 104. The first Camp Fire survivor we served was 103, had limited mobility, and was legally blind. Overall our participants have experienced a range of disabling illnesses or events, including car accidents, brain tumors, cancer, cardiac illness, cancer, and Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. Most have an average of 6 or more chronic conditions, for which they may take up to 30 different medications. The majority are extremely low income and would be isolated and vulnerable without our support, both on a daily basis and during disasters.

The Urgent Need

The Butte County Camp Fire disaster in November 2018 was the most destructive wild fire event in California history. Eighty-six individuals perished; most of them elderly, and over 50,000 people were evacuated from the Town of Paradise and surrounding areas. One fifth of our participants, staff and Board had to evacuate during the event; many lost their homes. The impact of the fire will reverberate for a long time to come.

On the day the Camp Fire broke out, our participants whose homes were under evacuation in areas such as Paradise and Butte Valley were safely sheltered at the Peg Taylor Center, and swiftly reunited with their families. We verified the safety of all participants and staff, then had to close for two days due to the dangerous air quality and unstable traffic conditions, after which we felt it was safer for them to reopen. We provided comprehensive services, including nutritious meals, nursing attention, social work, and full daily support, throughout the remainder of the emergency. New referrals poured in from impacted families, and we expedited new enrollments to enable caregiving family members to complete disaster-related tasks, such as securing housing while ensuring continuity of care for their loved ones. Overall, from November 2018 to present, we provided over 27,500 hours of direct care for medically fragile adults impacted by the event and fielded more than 400 calls seeking help with urgent needs and offered crisis assistance. Program referrals due to the fire initially increased by 35%; in July 2019 they increased even further.

A recent report from the North Valley Community and California Community Foundations has identified those most in need in the aftermath of the Camp Fire, stating "For Butte County, it appears that low-income seniors are the most vulnerable and underserved at this time." ("Strengthening the Safety Net in Butte County: Findings and Recommendations;" August 2019.) We have found that these older adults and their families need extensive help due to the trauma they've suffered. Many with the highest recovery needs are also impacted by memory loss and cognitive impairment. This complicates the ability to process grief; per mental health guidance for helping survivors cope after a disaster, "Complicated or traumatic grief is grief that does not end and does not help individuals to make progress toward getting back to their usual activities and routine. For most people, intense feelings of grief will lessen gradually over time, beginning to ease within 6 months of the loss. But those with complicated or traumatic grief may not feel any reduction of grief over many months or even years." (From SAMSHA Mental Health Services brochure entitled "Helping Survivors Cope with Grief After a Disaster or Traumatic Event.")

Comfort and compassion are essential to recovery in the aftermath of a disaster, especially for survivors with special needs due to medical conditions. Devastating loss, including the loss of one's home and pets, can overwhelm an older adult's coping capacity. These families were already in crisis due to their loved ones' needs for daily care. To address the wide range of needs that we are seeing, higher levels of assistance are imperative.