

# Helping seniors beat depression

*Community Connection of Northeast Oregon provides program to help seniors engage, take action*

**By Dick Mason**  
The Observer

This Community Connection of Northeast Oregon service for seniors has a relatively short history, but no shortage of success stories.

PEARLS — Program Encouraging Active and Rewarding Lives — helps individuals who are at least 60 years old and have symptoms of mild depression. During a six-to-10-week period, those in the program complete six to eight in-home and in-office visits with a PEARLS counselor. Participants during the sessions work to find solutions to problems they are facing. They also make plans to participate in activities in their communities.

PEARLS has been shown to effectively reduce participants' depression symptoms by more than 50% and improve participants' functional and emotional well-being, according to Community Connection of Northeast Oregon.

"We have been able to help a lot of people. We have had a lot of success stories," said Kathy Ganung, senior service manager for Community Connection, La Grande.

They include a retired man in Union County caring for his wife who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. The man had to take on many household responsibilities, including cooking and housekeeping his wife once did in addition to serving as a caregiver. The new responsibilities and the condition of his wife put his life in a tailspin.

"He had to do it all. His life was in chaos," Ganung said.

PEARLS counselors helped the man learn how to better take on and more efficiently handle his responsibilities. Seniors in rural areas far from communities is an important demographic for the program because they are

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