

Hearts

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a heart. As the project progressed over the course of two years she started feel grateful for other people in her life, then for good things that happened to her throughout the day and the richness of the life she had.

“Nothing had changed in my life,” she said. “But the way I thought about my life was completely different, and that changed everything.”

The women featured in the project are an eclectic bunch, spanning relatives, friends, a running coach and a yarn shop owner. Several live in The Dalles, where Loughmiller currently makes her home, while others she met while living in Hermiston from 2002 to 2006.

One of the hearts is for Dr. Nancy Rudd-McCoy, who served as Loughmiller’s OB/GYN in Hermiston and delivered her daughter Anna. Loughmiller wrote in the note accompanying the blue and white heart that Rudd-McCoy had shared in



Contributed photo by Jenny Loughmiller

The Hundred Hearts project will be on display at the Good Shepherd Women’s Clinic starting March 12.

heartbreak and in joy with her.

“I’ll never forget the kindness and dignity you offered me,” she wrote.

When she got online to search for the doctor’s address to tell her about the project, however, she discovered Rudd-McCoy had died in 2016.

She also discovered that Good Shepherd Health Care System had named its new Women’s Center after Rudd-McCoy. She contacted Good Shepherd about showing the work at

the clinic, and they agreed to host the display.

Jessie Morrison, practice manager at the Good Shepherd Women’s Center, said she loved the idea behind the Hundred Hearts Project and felt that it was a perfect fit for a center that serves women, sometimes through times of heartache and sometimes through times of joy.

“It’s just heart-warming to know that she was touched by so many women,” Morrison said.

She said she is amazed



Contributed art by Jenny Loughmiller

Jenny Loughmiller painted this heart for Krista Westover, a friend from Hermiston.

how unique and detailed each piece is, based on images Loughmiller posted online, and she can’t wait to see them in person.

The artwork will be on display at the women’s center March 12-29 with a public open house on March 12 from 5-7 p.m.

Besides Rudd-McCoy, three other women in the Hundred Hearts Project were women that Loughmiller got to know while in Hermiston. Krista Westover and Kristi Anderson have since moved, but

Julie Puzey still lives in Hermiston.

Loughmiller described Puzey as a “mentor/best friend/mother/sister” combination.

“She’s just a phenomenal person,” she said.

In the painting for Puzey, hearts in various shades form a pink flower against a blue sky.

Each painting in the Hundred Hearts Project is one square foot. Some were created with acrylic paint and some are mixed-media. Loughmiller minored in art

in college, but described her past self as a self-conscious artist who hadn’t created art for public consumption before.

“It was really fun for me as an artist just to let the inspiration come and not question it,” Loughmiller said.

After being displayed in Hermiston, she will take the Hundred Hearts Project to locations in Oregon, Idaho and Utah throughout the year. When the tour is over, she plans to send each woman her painting and the accompanying note describing their impact on her life.

Loughmiller is also launching what she calls the Million Hearts Project, challenging other people to commit to 100 acts of gratitude in honor of 100 people who have touched their life.

“It could be 100 plates of cookies, 100 notes or 100 poems,” she said.

The power of gratitude is “phenomenal,” she said, and she wants to inspire others to harness it in their own life.

For more information visit hundredheartsproject.org.

Medicaid

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Long-term care for Medicaid patients isn’t cheap and the cost is rising. The budget for Medicaid for the 2017-19 biennium was set at \$2.7 billion, which includes both state and federal funds.

In 2017, the Oregon Legislature directed the state’s Aging and People with Disabilities program to rein in the rising costs to insure sustainability, said APD Director Ashley Carson Cottingham.

“Costs are continually rising,” Cottingham said. “We have an aging population, nationally and here in Oregon. The Legislature was concerned about costs increasing too quickly.”

Medicaid clients are assessed annually to see if they still meet requirements and to determine the necessary level of care. About 3,000 Oregonians are evaluated each month on the date they started service. A case-worker assessed Rhome on Feb. 5 by chatting with her about her challenges in such things as dressing, getting around and doing housework. The worker found Rhome to be independent in grooming, dressing and getting around, but deficient in meal preparation, housekeeping, shopping and other tasks. Rhome’s service priority level of 18, however, means she is too independent for the program. Anything above 13 is too high. A year ago, she got a 7. Individuals assessed at levels from 14-17 can hang on to their benefits if they can’t find safe housing.

Rhome is not a picture of health. She sat on the edge of her bed, skin pale and voice breathy. Chronic kidney disease has swelled her legs. Her left arm jerks as if it has a life of its own.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A nebulizer and inhalers sit on a night stand next to Jeanne Rhome’s bed in her room at Sun Terrace assisted living facility in Hermiston.

Near one wall of her room is a fleet of mobility equipment — walker, wheelchair and motorized chair. Trapeze grab bars hang above her hospital-style bed and toilet. She has a cache of ice packs and heating pads and a nebulizer at the ready. A Sun Terrace medication review report on Rhome’s table lists numerous diagnoses, including heart and lung problems, tremors and bipolar disorder. A list of Rhome’s medications is four pages long.

Despite her maladies, Rhome seems to appreciate the small things. She treasures her Yorkshire terrier, Ashley, who snuggles nearby. The word “Gratitude” is stenciled on one wall and “Blessed” on another. A vintage, well-thumbed King

James Bible sits atop the microwave.

Her positive nature and tendency to overestimate her own abilities might have been her undoing, said Rhome’s daughter, Heather Gilham.

“Mom likes to think she’s independent, but she’s not,” Gilham said. “She talks a good game, but she needs to be in an assisted living facility.”

Honest evaluation

Oregon’s long-term care ombudsman Fred Steele is wary of the evaluation process.

“I’m concerned about the level of subjectiveness from one case manager to the next in properly evaluating the needs of an individual,”

he said. “Individuals like to believe themselves to be more independent than they actually are. When it comes to toilet and bathing assistance, people might not want to admit they need help.”

Cottingham said 1,210 individuals out of 35,000 Medicaid long-term care consumers were determined to be ineligible.

“It continues to be a concern around the state,” Steele said.

Steele made his comment on Tuesday. On Wednesday, something happened that could rescue Rhome and some of the other seniors from losing Medicaid benefits. DHS filed a temporary administrative order adding individuals at service level 18 (such as Rhome) to those allowed to keep their long-term care housing while they look for safe replacement housing. This could take months or years.

Rhome has already appealed her loss of eligibility. She held up a quarter-inch-thick sheaf of DHS rules on the topic. Until the appeal is decided, Rhome will stay at Sun Terrace, but if she loses she must pay the benefits back. Her Social Security and Supplemental Security Income payments amount to \$791. From that, she pays \$615 to Sun Terrace as a copayment.

Gilham worries about how little time the seniors have to find new living sit-

uations. Her mom’s assessment happened on Feb. 5. She received the notice a week later saying she would lose benefits as of Feb. 28.

“How do you expect people to move 16 days after receiving a notice?” Gilham said. “The state hasn’t provided any support for looking for emergency housing.”

Steele said the ombudsman’s office helps people navigate the appeals process and deal with other issues.

‘I feel like I’m being judged’

Pat Williams, who moved from Sun Terrace to an apartment on Wednesday, said she will miss the facility’s medication management, meals and an environment set up for seniors. She’ll miss her good friend June.

“We play Yahtzee together and do beading,” Williams said.

APD’s director doesn’t conceal her distress about such situations. She got into this line of work because of an affinity for aging Oregonians.

“All of these changes are complex and difficult and hard,” Cottingham said. “We care so much. We want to help our state’s most vulnerable.”

However, she said, the pot of money is only so big. Spending wisely to make the least painful impacts on consumers is the goal. One strat-

egy to reduce costs involves increasing training for case managers to ensure policies are more consistently followed statewide.

Rhome will take her chances with the appeal. She can’t afford housing and her daughter’s home has hallways and doorways too narrow for her mobility equipment.

“I’m overwhelmed,” Rhome said. “I physically can’t take care of myself. I feel like I’m being judged.”

She swept her hand toward the window and the landscape beyond.

“I can’t be out there,” she said. “I’m very scared.”

Rhome will likely get to stay put, said APD communications officer Elisa Williams.

“We did a broad review of residents at Sun Terrace who have received their annual Medicaid assessments since the beginning of the year,” Williams said. “In this group, we cannot definitively state that the 2017 changes were a deciding factor however the consumers here will benefit from (extended waiver eligibility) and stay in their homes at Sun Terrace.”

On Thursday, Rhome got some good news. Her social worker informed her she is eligible to stay until August when she will be reassessed.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0810.

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