

Online job board brings together care assistants, those with extra needs



Rewarding Work President and Co-founder Elenore Parker, right, with her son Matthew, left. Parker started Rewarding Work after experiencing the difficulty of finding personal care for Matthew, who has developmental disabilities. [Courtesy photo, Elenore Parker]



Every year five personal care attendants from Massachusetts are honored for their work. [Courtesy photo]

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Brookline-based nonprofit Rewarding Work is transforming how personal-care attendants and those with disabilities connect.

Rewarding Work, is a web-based service that helps the elderly, those with disabilities and their families find caregivers to help them safely live at home.

Last year, the organization launched an online job board that enables personal care attendants, or PCAs, to find the right job, and those with disabilities to find the right PCA to meet their needs. This month, a year after launching, the job board is expected to reach 2,000 job posts – far surpassing the projected number of 700 postings by the one-year mark.

The job board serves the best interests of both the PCAs and the consumers, or potential employers, according to Rewarding Work President and co-founder Elenore Parker. Through the site, consumers can post job openings and include specifics of what they need, allowing PCAs to search and find the best matches. Likewise PCAs post applications to the same site, allowing consumers to identify who might best meet their needs.

While this seems straightforward, the ability for both parties to find ideal situations had been much less direct. PCAs used to have to post applications and wait for consumers to read their descriptions and reach out to them, drawing out the process.

“They [would] put up their application and sit around waiting for someone to find them,” said Parker, a Brookline resident.

The online job board now allows communication both ways.

“It’s a lot faster and more direct than the other way,” Parker said.

According to Parker, there had long been a need for the online job board. Before launching the site, Rewarding Work ran a manual job board; it was useful, but cumbersome to manage and more limited in capacity.

“We could see there was a tremendous need just from the response we were getting from the manual one,” said Parker.

Recognizing the need for the site was one thing, but funding it was another. When the state Attorney General’s office advertised a grant for any initiative that would use technology and help those with disabilities, Parker and her team saw an opportunity.

“When we saw that we thought ‘wow, this is exactly what we’re looking for,’” she said.

Rewarding Work applied and received the \$10,000 grant.

Parker and her co-founder Jeffrey A. Keilson started Rewarding Work in 2004. They connected through Parker’s determined efforts to help her own son who has developmental disabilities, find suitable care for him.

“This work is not easy work,” Parker said of the responsibilities of PCAs.

Parker and Keilson realized that there was a need for a dedicated organization to help pair PCAs with those with disabilities living at home. Though the job of being a PCA is rigorous, Parker said, it is extremely important, and rewarding – hence the organization’s name.

“A lot of these people, if they didn’t have personal care in their house things would happen, they would end up in the nursing home or hospital,” said Parker.

Over the years Rewarding Work has expanded and now operates in several states including Connecticut, Kansas, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

The Massachusetts program, Parker said, remains the most robust for the organization.

“It’s the most engaged,” she said.

According to Parker, this is because throughout the state there is a general “excellence” in understanding what the needs are for people with disabilities and a willingness to meet those needs. The state also offers the best hourly pay for PCAs at around \$14.50 an hour, compared to other states that pay \$9 an hour, according to Parker.

“There’s a definite attitude that people who need the support should get the support they need,” Parker said.

Rewarding Work, and the job board is free for MassHealth PCA users and DDS participant-directed consumers and families needing respite, according to a written description provided by Parker. For those who are not covered, Rewarding Work offers a variety of subscriptions ranging from one month for \$10 to a year for \$90.

Parker and the Rewarding Work team is thrilled at the seemingly instant success of the job board. Several people, she said, have called and emailed unsolicited to share how glad they are to have the service.

“It’s an available program, it’s easy to use,” said Parker. “We do have a lot of consumers in Brookline who are using this successfully.”