



Meeting the challenge

Bridgewell is meeting the unique needs of Alzheimer's patients

BY PAUL HALLORAN

When direct care staff noticed an increased number of their individuals being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, particularly those with Downs Syndrome, Bridgewell developed a long-range plan to respond to their needs and address the challenge.

That forethought and planning is paying dividends for several members of Bridgewell's family, including five individuals who now call Wedgemere Road in Beverly home. This very special modular home was designed and built to meet the specific needs of people with developmental disabilities suffering from Alzheimer's.

As a custom-build, this single-story residence features a large, open floor plan with plenty of natural lighting. The light-colored wood flooring is the same in every room in order to minimize some of the depth-perception issues caused by Alzheimer's. Each room is wheelchair-accessible and can accommodate larger medical equipment. Doors are equipped with alarm announcers that alert staff when anyone enters or exits.

"About eight years ago, we had identified a real need to develop special services for the increasing number of individuals we support who are being diagnosed with Alzheimer's," said Robert Scholz, Bridgewell director of residential services. "We had envisioned what a house like this would look like. We're very happy with how it turned out, and the folks who live here are doing quite well."

According to Justin Devoe, program director for the Wedgemere Road home, there are three Bridgewell staff on duty during the day and two overnight. Some of the residents also have personal care assistants who come in. A nurse consultant spends 10 hours a week there as well.

"The residents are getting the same range of services that people in our other residential facilities receive," Scholz said. "They get a significant amount of medical attention."

Some of the residents attend day programs run by



A staff member for Bridgewell's house in Beverly for Alzheimer's patients helps a resident back inside.



Bridgewell's Carmen Jimenez uses sign language with Rosemary O'Brien at the Boston Street Center.

Bridgewell in other locations, including a specialized day habilitation program at the Boston Street Center in Lynn for individuals with developmental disabilities and Alzheimer's. There are currently eight people in that program, which is



A staff member assists a resident of Bridgewell's house in Beverly set the table.

staffed by case manager Donna Lucier and aide Carmen Jimenez.

This service is overseen by Bridgewell's program director Vicky Macciarone, while Susan Scott Craven, clinical director of day services, provides counsel on a regular basis. Since attending a train-the-trainer program sponsored by the Alzheimer's Association four years ago, Craven has become one of Bridgewell's resident experts in dealing with individuals with Alzheimer's.

"We've done a lot of research and the staff has been highly trained," she said, noting that she and other Bridgewell staff serve as trainers for the Alzheimer's Association of Massachusetts. Based on some assessments and programs implemented by Bridgewell, the Alzheimer's Association will be adapting some of its training for the developmentally disabled population.

Craven said the philosophy behind the Boston Street program is simple: stay positive.

"We want to make every day a positive experience for them," she said. "We want to maintain the skills that people have as

long as possible. The program is focused on independence and positive feelings."

The Boston Street program, which runs Monday-Friday from 8:15 a.m. to 3:15 p.m., provides participants with a variety of services, including occupational, physical and speech therapy, nursing, and behavioral intervention. Pictures and objects are used to enhance communication skills.

"We do a lot of sensory work," she said. "We have them make choices whenever possible, to inspire independence within each individual."

As evidence of the close association and productive working relationship Bridgewell has developed with the Alzheimer's Association, Craven will be among the team of Bridgewell clinicians presenting at an Alzheimer's Association conference May 5 in Marlborough. She will speak about providing clinical supports in a day program for individuals with developmental disabilities who have a probable Alzheimer's diagnosis.

For more information about Bridgewell visit www.bridgewell.org or call 781-593-1088.