

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GOOD MORNING SUNSHINE . . . WHY MEMORY MATTERS

ST. GEORGE, UT — DECEMBER 28, 2016 — “Good Morning Sunshine”, are the words heard each morning, Monday- Friday, by many area seniors who are dealing with memory loss issues. These words are the greeting shared by Memory Matters Utah/Nevada volunteers as part of their telephone reassurance. Good Morning Sunshine is available to seniors who live alone, are age 55 or older and have memory loss issues or seniors with health issues caring for someone with memory loss issues. A trained volunteer calls each day at a predetermined time to check on their wellbeing. In addition, there is a protocol in place to have an emergency contact come check on a client if they don't answer or if there is cause for immediate concern. The goal is to ensure that if there is an emergency, there will be a positive outcome.

This was the case earlier this week. It started with a Memory Matters Utah/Nevada Good Morning Sunshine telephone call and ended at the ER at DRMC.

A trained volunteer made their usual call to Rose (name changed to protect privacy) yesterday morning. The volunteer found her in a crisis situation. The woman, who has health issues, cares for a husband with dementia. They keep to themselves and live in an isolated area in a rural part of the county. They have family who live far away and are unable to provide much assistance. They don't have any close friends that live nearby and they don't belong to a church community. They are isolated by both geography and personality.

Rose was one of the first caregivers signed-up as part of Memory Matters telephone reassurance program six months ago. For the past two weeks, most every call to Rose has been characterized by anxiety, crying and panic attacks. Some of her distress stems from her need to have shoulder surgery but unwilling to leave her husband in a care facility while she attends to her needs. Over the past 6 months Good Morning Sunshine calls have come soon after her husband fell and then the week later after she had fallen. Because they are hesitant to seek help on their own, Memory Matters helped them find home healthcare services. Memory Matters has also been working with the Area Agency on Aging to connect with Rose for additional support and services. As you can see, people like Rose are truly in a vulnerable position.

Yesterday, a Good Morning Sunshine volunteer called to find that Rose and her husband have been without water for three days because the water line into the home froze. Rose contacted 3 plumbers but they were all out of town for the holidays. She had been shoveling and melting snow for them to drink and to bathe in since Christmas. Their long dirt driveway had a foot of snow on it; keeping them from being able to leave the house and making it difficult for others to come to help them.

During the daily telephone call, the volunteer noticed that Rose's speech was slurred and she was having difficulty making decisions. The second call, a few minutes later, found her somewhat improved. Her condition could have been due to dehydration or stress, but it was determined that someone needed to get to their home to see her before 911 was called; something that the client did not want the volunteer to do.

The Executive Director of Memory Matters Utah/Nevada followed up by calling the emergency person on the client's contact list. They were not able to help. Next, calls were made to the nearby fire station to see if they could help clear the drive in this emergency, but they were unable to help. Then calls were made to the client's home health agency. Unfortunately, they could not make a visit until later in the day.

Finally, she was able to call personal friends to drive over and plow the road to check on Rose and her husband. They brought along a nurse with her medical kit and discovered that Rose's blood pressure was very high. They transported the couple to the DRMC ER and stayed with them while she was evaluated and subsequently placed under observation overnight for her heart condition.

While they were at the hospital, calls to a local church resulted in finding a plumber who was willing to come out that day to fix the water line; and a friend of Memory Matters Executive Director, Luann Lundquist came 8 miles with his backhoe to speed up the repair on the broken pipe.

As a result of contributions to Memory Matters and through the support and compassionate service of volunteers and friends, a life was most likely saved. With Good Morning Sunshine, Rose has a daily lifeline in these telephone reassurance calls. She has someone who cares and visits with her for about 15 minutes each business day.

Nine years ago a very similar dementia caregiving situation happened about a mile from Rose in this rural area. The personality, family situation and resources were very similar. There was no lifeline for this couple. The caregiver felt hopeless and would not reach out because of the stigma of her husband's dementing disease. She lost hope and felt there was no other option for her. She ended her husband's life, called the sheriff to report it and asked him to come and find their bodies as she ended her life as well. Hopefully something like that will never happen again.

Memory Matters urges you to check in on your neighbors from time to time; especially those in remote settings. Good Morning Sunshine is just one of many local programs and services Memory Matters Utah/Nevada provides. Boots on the ground local programs like this are vital to our community. Memory Matters believe in passionately empowering individuals, families and caregivers who face this journey with information, resources and guidance.

Memory Matters Utah (formerly the Alzheimer's & Dementia Society) is 501(c)(3), nonprofit organization. Our mission is to reduce isolation and improve wellness for individuals with dementia and their caregivers through activities, support, education and consultation. Learn more at: www.memorymattersutah.org

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