“I’m a nurse, and had never had serious illness in my adult life. Now that I was on the other side, I wasn’t about to relinquish control,” Ann O’Donnell explained as she sat next to Donna Tanner, her Iona care manager who had seen her through the darkest days of her life.

Ann had long had back issues that her doctor attributed to aggressive arthritis and tried to “suck it up,” as she put it. Finally, the sciatic pain was too much and she retired from the work she loved as a nurse case manager.

She began to fall in her apartment so she stopped going out alone, fearful that she would fall. She set about trying to find a home health agency to help her by finding a physician who made house calls. Her legs were too weak to walk and she had to care for herself. She thought that being over 65 and living alone without family would complicate how the medical community would respond to her situation.

Slowly, her world began to get very small. Friends brought her groceries and then began to bring her prepared meals. She left her apartment door opened for the few people who came and went.

Instinctively she knew that she needed an advocate before she could extricate herself from this difficult challenge. “I had done some research. I called Iona and spoke with Leland [Kiang, Iona’s Information and Referral Manager.] What an asset he is! So knowledgeable and he listened so well. After I called, Donna [Tanner, an Iona Care Manager] came into my life. She was everything I’d hoped I’d find in an advocate.”

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Control in a Challenge  cont’d from page 1

Ann pats Donna’s hand as she explains how Donna wasn’t shocked about Ann’s unusual way of dealing with her challenge. “Donna never pushed me,” and together they mapped out a way for Ann to contact a physician who could assess her at home to order the necessary tests.

“Donna gave me peace of mind,” Ann explains. From arranging for Ann to get a wheelchair accessible van for the ride to and from the doctors’ office, to helping Ann get her insurance paperwork done and taking notes during office visits. After an MRI was performed, Ann got a shock of a lifetime: “It was a benign tumor called a schwannoma that stretched from my lower thoracic spine all the way to my lumbar spine.” Surgery was performed in October, 2009.

Donna explains that Ann had the inner strength, resolve and skill to get through not only her initial challenge, but also the months of rehabilitation. When Ann got to occupational therapy, she knew she wanted to work on certain things, like reaching things from her kitchen cupboards.

“I saw that I could concentrate on things in the world again,” and she challenged herself to walk around her apartment building’s driveway circle five times every day and she set goals for herself like walking to and from the Mom and Pop store at the corner. “I kept a journal,” making sure to celebrate all the milestones along the way to her recovery. “I now take the 30 bus everywhere — to Tenley or to the National Gallery.” Ann stands to put on her coat, ready to walk to the Glover Park Village meeting on meditation — without a cane.

Although Donna’s official Iona duties with Ann ended with her recovery, Donna receives a Christmas card every year from Ann. “Ann is a marvelous artist, and I have treasured her handmade cards.” Ann explains that now her art has taken on a new role in her life as she works to give her art away to those she wants to reach out to with a special sign of healing and love. “I have such a deep satisfaction,” Ann says about her art making. Donna smiles broadly when she hears this, sharing the joy of this simple statement and Ann’s embrace of her life and her future now.
There is a saying at Iona that one can identify longtime Tenleytown/American University Park residents by hearing them refer to Iona as “Iona House,” as neighbors Shari and Chuck Pfleeger do. They moved to their house on Davenport Street in 1987, where they have remained steadfast in their support of local, community-based organizations.

Recently, they gave a generous gift to Iona after receiving the Catalogue for Philanthropy in the mail. “It was timing, really: Chuck’s mother had passed away, and we were in the midst of dealing with her estate. We wanted her legacy to make a difference to others. The Catalogue contained a lovely reminder of what Iona is doing in the community.”

Both Shari and Chuck have experienced family caregiving situations that have underscored the importance of education, support and planning in this inevitable journey.

After her mother had a stroke and was moved to a nursing home, Shari commuted from home to New York City, bookending a very long day caring for her father with four hours of work in the early morning and another four hours late at night.

“It wasn’t a healthy or sustainable situation, and luckily I had people who helped me see that.” Shari drew on the resources of Iona during this time, coming to a caregiver education program and receiving information and referrals to access services in New York that would prove to be helpful, not only for her parents but also for her. After Shari’s mother passed away, she helped her father, now 92, move to an assisted living home near her sister.

Chuck’s parents moved to an assisted living home in Florida ten years ago while they were still healthy. “It was the opposite of Shari’s experience,” explained Chuck. Although there wasn’t the crisis of illness and an unplanned move as in Shari’s family, Chuck needed to comfort his father as he aged and to act as an advocate for his mother after his father died at age 98.

Chuck’s mother had macular degeneration and memory loss, and the assisted living home suggested moving her to the dementia unit. But Chuck argued instead for having her continue to live in the apartment that was familiar to her, rather than move to an unfamiliar place. “I could see that she was able to navigate around the apartment well, even though she had low vision, and her dementia would only have made a move frightening and confusing to her.”

Chuck contracted with a home health company to provide companions for her during the day, and his mother lived comfortably in her apartment until her death. At the end, as her body began to shut down, the health care aides stayed around the clock, and hospice helped care for her physically and emotionally, as well as offering emotional support to Chuck.

After caring for their parents and experiencing Shari’s six-month recuperation from a serious bicycle accident, Shari and Chuck decided to plan proactively for their own aging. These plans are focused not only on end of life but also on aging well. Both Shari and Chuck look forward to learning more about Iona’s services for baby boomers who wish to age in familiar surroundings. They are especially interested in Iona’s community service programs. Steadfast, hard-working volunteers for a host of activities, they plan to use their retirement to incorporate all facets of life: physical, emotional, intellectual and communal.
Iona Receives United Way Community Impact Grant

In January, Iona was one of 20 Washington, DC charities to receive a Community Impact Grant from the United Way of the National Capital Area.

Over 175 charities applied this year for a grant of up to $25,000. “We are so excited to be chosen this year. It is a competitive grant because there are so many worthy causes in the greater metropolitan region,” says Meg Artley, Iona’s Director of Development.

The United Way Community Impact Grant proposals are reviewed by a volunteer, citizen-led task force which works together with area nonprofits, governments, and business leaders to determine where there are gaps in services and where the funds will have the greatest impact. Iona’s $20,000 grant will be used to continue to meet increasing and complicated needs of older adults through Iona’s continuum of information, education, counseling and direct care and services.

Last year, Iona educated over 16,000 people about aging well and made a positive impact on the lives of over 1,400 older adults through direct services such as exercise, support groups, caregiver education and mid-day programming. The Community Impact Grant will help Iona to continue to see the most vulnerable older people in our community. Last year, 410 of the District’s most vulnerable older adults were able to stave off unnecessary nursing home care, saving the community at least $9,000,000, with Iona’s cost-effective care management, volunteer support, meal delivery and adult day health care in the community.

Iona is thankful for the work of the volunteer task force which worked hard to make these decisions on behalf of United Way and all the tens of thousands of individual donors in the greater metropolitan area who support the United Way through their workplace giving programs.

CORPORATE PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Q&A with Maura Barillaro, RN
Director of Nursing, Home Care Assistance

What is the Home Care Assistance Hospital to Home Care program, and how does it work?

Home Care Assistance provides caregivers to clients throughout the Washington DC area. A year ago, we realized that we were receiving many inquiries from families struggling with loved ones returning from the hospital.

This led us to create the Hospital to Home Care program, a comprehensive support program for clients re-adjusting to their lives at home after a hospital visit. To help our clients learn more, we even wrote a book, “From Hospital to Home Care.” If you would like to receive a copy of the book for yourself, please give us a call at 301-654-1525.

How has the Hospital to Home Care program helped your clients?

Since we introduced the Hospital to Home Care program, we’ve been able to help several clients recover after major medical procedures. I remember the case of a gentleman who was discharged from the hospital with high blood pressure. Working closely with our staff, this gentleman started a low-sodium diet, and on his next check-up, his doctor was delighted to see such positive progress with his blood pressure readings.
Julia Louis-Dreyfus comes to thank you for your support

Last month, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, award-winning actress, comedian and producer known for her roles in Seinfeld, The New Adventures of Old Christine and her current series Veep, came to thank Iona donors for their support of an organization that she holds very dear to her heart. She attended the event with her mother and father, Judy and Tom Bowles, and her son, Henry.

Beginning in 1979, Julia’s mother Judy taught classes at Iona, including a poetry group and edited and published several books of their poetry. Julia remembers fondly the gatherings of the poets at her house as she was growing up. In her opening remarks, Julia chose to read Iona House Poets by John F. Graham from the collection her mother edited and published in 1983 because it speaks so beautifully about what she knew to be true of her mother’s work at Iona and, in her words, how aging is about the art of discovery.

Many thanks to Reed Smith, LLC for their generous lead sponsorship of this event, to Daniel and Jane Solomon for their warm hospitality, to past Board member Carole Cohen for bringing about this wonderful day of memories and appreciation for friends, and to Judy, Tom, Julia and Henry for helping us thank Iona’s loyal and generous supporters.
May is Art of Caring Month at Iona

May 5, 2013
Creative Connections in Caregiving
Iona, 4125 Albemarle Street, NW
1:30 – 4 pm
Free. Register by emailing registration@iona.org.

Caregiving. It’s not a just a job, it’s an adventure. Whether you are struggling to get through the day, or looking for meaning and hope, you can join us to receive practical tools, new ideas and inspiration to help you be an effective caregiver.

1:30 pm: Exhibition Opening and Community of Care Fair.
Join the participants of the Wellness & Arts Center and their families for the opening of an exhibition of their artwork, When Words Are Not Enough, and visit with home health agencies and other organizations working to support older adults and family caregivers in our community. (When Words Are Not Enough continues Monday – Friday, 9 am – 5 pm until May 30.)

2 - 3pm: Strategies for Effective Caregiving. Deb Rubenstein, a social worker at Iona, leads a workshop for family caregivers that will give you practical tools to help you cope – even thrive – during your journey.

3 pm: Break for conversation and refreshments

3:15 – 4pm: Healing Through Art. Iona Art Therapist Jackie McGeehan leads a hands-on workshop designed to help family caregivers practice self care and bring fresh eyes and new perspectives to their relationships with the people they care for.

May 3, 2013
The Fifth Annual Art of Caring Luncheon
Special Guest Speaker: Mark Shriver. Call (202) 895-9416 if you are interested in attending.
Mayflower Hotel Ballroom
12 pm

Iona salutes the following philanthropic partners for their support. (as of March 14, 2013)

- Capital City Nurses
- Clark Construction
- Arent Fox, LLC
- The Methodist Home of DC & Forest Side
- Home Care Assistance
- KPMG
- Giant Food
- Marshfield Associates
- NII Holdings
- The Residences at Thomas Circle
- Washington Gas
- Options for Senior America
- Five Star Premier Residences of Chevy Chase
- Care for You
- ASAP Services Corp.
- AARP DC
- Brighton Gardens of Tuckerman Lane
- Right at Home DC
- Reed Smith, LLC
- Wells Fargo Advisors