



# OCCOA

## OTSEGO COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING

120 Grandview Blvd., Gaylord, Michigan 49735

*We Help.  
We Care*

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Submitted by  
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RESEARCH &  
VOLUNTEER  
COORDINATOR

## Adult Day Services ~ Putting Purpose back into Life!

Nestled in the west wing of the health department building on Livingston Blvd. in Gaylord, a cozy haven awaits older adults in need of a place to spend the day. Known as the Otsego Haus, it has been a second home to 175 older adults over the past ten years. Sponsored by the Otsego County Commission on Aging (OCCOA), the Otsego Haus is one of only 4,000 adult day service facilities in the nation. Here in rural Northern Michigan, it fills a much-needed niche for older adults, when living full-time in a nursing home or staying at home alone all day are not an option.

Otsego Haus Coordinator Chris Holewinski shared with me that the program was originally established to serve older adults (age 55 or older) who were living with some form of dementia. She noted, "We also welcome those folks who have become homebound or who are in need of company or social activity."

The facility is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and one staff person is on hand for every three people who participate in the program. Holewinski noted, "There is always an LPN present, and when medical advice is needed, our RN and Medical Resources Coordinator, Pamela Carlson, is available."

### A Typical Day at Otsego Haus

For most participants, a typical day starts off with a warm greeting by staff and other participants, followed by a small breakfast. Holewinski detailed, "We offer foods such as oatmeal, toast, cereal, breakfast bars, coffee, tea, or juice."

Activity time starts at 10 a.m., after most participants have arrived. Holewinski outlined, "Some people choose to do a craft, while others might work on a puzzle or play a game. At 11 a.m., we all gather as a group to reminisce, talk about trivia, sing some 'old time' songs, and do chair exercises." She continued, "Afterwards, it is time for lunch. Most days, we have a hot lunch that has been prepared by the agency's kitchen staff, but on special occasions, we prepare meals in our kitchen here." Smiling, she shared, "We try to make holidays and birthdays special for everyone."

After lunch, participants might elect to take a nap in one of the many recliners spaced around the living room area or watch a movie. Around 2 p.m., participants who are not napping or watching a movie get together to play games, work on puzzles or cut out materials for crafts. During this time, a snack is always offered. The program starts to wind down between 3 and 4 p.m. as participants begin leaving for the day. Some participants elect to come to Otsego Haus once a week, or for 2 to 3 days, while others come every day.

OTSEGO HAUS COORDINATOR  
CHRIS HOLEWINSKI WITH LILLIAN,  
A LONG-TIME PARTICIPANT

### Interaction with different generations adds additional social opportunities!

Holewinski shared that the children from the Headstart Program come once a week to visit their "grandmas" and "grandpas" and to read a story. She observed, "Our participants really get a lift from being around those young children and all the energy they bring with them. There are always lots of hugs and smiles to go around!"

Participants also have a chance to interact with students from the Gaylord High School Medical Occupations class (MEDOC). Holewinski explained, "Four days a week, twice a day, a couple of students come over to visit and help us with our activities and games." She observed, "There is always a lot of camaraderie between them, and the elderly just lighten up when they are here."

### Other Services and Activities!

For a small additional fee, hair care, foot care, and assistance with showers, are offered on a scheduled basis. The group sometimes goes on outings to the Gaylord Meal Site, or picnics at the County Park. Holewinski shared that participants will soon be under way with their annual gardening program. She shared, "We grow both flowers and vegetables, from seeds. Not only do they get to watch everything grow, but they get to enjoy a lot of different colors, textures, and smells."

### Participants Regain a Sense of Purpose!

Holewinski reflected on the impact the Otsego Haus has made on the lives of the participants, "When they come here, it helps them put purpose back in their lives and gives them something enjoyable to look forward to. Over time, they develop close friendships with the other participants and the staff. Many of them see this as a type of club for themselves and their friends." She added, "It is a safe environment and they get a warm sense of 'coming home' when they arrive. When we are together, we share a lot of stories, reminisce and laugh a lot. Even if they can't do all the things they used to do, they find great joy in each of their days here!"

### Caregivers get a Much-Needed Break!

For the caregivers of the participants, the Otsego Haus provides them with a much-needed break from their caregiving responsibilities. Holewinski observed, "Being a caregiver for someone living with dementia is never ending and one of the most difficult jobs in the world. Being able to bring their loved one to us, provides them with a much-needed break from that role and allows them to have time to themselves or to do things they wouldn't normally be able to do." She added, "Because we are also caring for their loved one, they can relate to us because we know what they are going through. As we come to know their loved ones, we can support them by sharing ideas or strategies that will provide the best possible care." She observed, "The caregivers find that they need us as much as their loved ones do!"

**A CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP IS AVAILABLE FOR THOSE CARING FOR LOVED ONES LIVING WITH DEMENTIA. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT IT OR THE OTSEGO HAUS PROGRAM, PLEASE CALL (989) 732-1122 OR LOG ONTO OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.OTSEGOCOUNTYCOA.ORG.**



**PARTICIPANT DONNA PAYNE ENJOYS DOING JIGSAW PUZZLES**



**THE GAYLORD HIGH SCHOOL MEDOC STUDENTS ENJOY ASSISTING PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS**

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