

# F D for TH UGHT



Dealing with life-altering illnesses, navigating care needs, or just sorting out everyday ups and downs can be difficult for anyone. But, for the elderly, especially those with memory loss or other cognitive or physical disabilities, these tasks can be debilitating.

That's where Donna Dahlquist comes in. As the Helpline House new Community Care Coordinator, Donna supports clients that may benefit from a more flexible and intensive approach when facing aging or injury challenges. She even makes house calls, helping clients identify and obtain critical services.

She recently worked with a couple to help the 80-year-old wife prepare for her upcoming surgery and respite care for her husband, who was physically and mentally unable to take care of her after the operation or remain at home alone.

"It's easy to become confused and overwhelmed when faced with a serious illness that needs immediate treatment," Donna says. "The husband had a difficult time remembering details of a complex and rapidly changing situation, but he could remember his long history of partnering with his wife to create a stable life. They were doing fine right up until they weren't."

She and the couple weighed the pros and cons of a risky situation and came up with a recovery plan that fit their needs.

Helpline House hired Donna, who has a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Washington, in June in response to community surveys that pointed out the need for more senior support.

**"We heard from the community,  
and we responded,"**

Donna says, adding that providing this type of care is one of Helpline House's strategic steps.

"As our community is getting older and older, a lot of people have never needed supportive services before and don't know where to turn to navigate issues with aging and memory loss."

Her new position is a natural extension of her years of managing and providing job-skill building to adults with cognitive disabilities at Helpline House's Community Access Program. She did her practicum at Helpline House in 1998 while attending the University of Washington School of Social Work and remained on staff until 2014. She served on the boards of One Call for All and Housing Resources Bainbridge, among other community volunteer activities.



## Navigating the Medicare Maze

BY KAREN WEST

Most people don't pay attention to Medicare until they turn 65. That's when your mailbox starts overflowing with more than just birthday greetings. You receive mountains of mail from insurers pitching Medicare plans in addition to a government-issued 132-page "Medicare & You" book.

Navigating through the alphabet soup of health care options is daunting. Helpline House Social Workers Marilyn Gremse and Janel Bedell are here to help. They provide free, unbiased, and confidential education assistance with initial enrollment for people new to Medicare as well as those retiring and losing health insurance.

**"The common belief is those turning 65 magically get Medicare and that it is free, and once you have it, you don't need to change anything,"**

says Gremse, who along with Bedell, is a certified Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisor known as (SHIBA). "Nothing could be further from the truth."

Helpline House has offered Medicare education as part of its social work services for a decade

but has expanded this service in the last five years. You can get Medicare counseling by appointment and community outreach seminars regardless of income every other month through July 2024.

The next Helpline House's "Welcome to Medicare" presentation will be March 21 from 2:30 to 4 p.m. at the Bainbridge Public Library.

**"We give people a basic understanding of how Medicare is structured, and we help them understand what kind of choices they have to make,"**

Gremse says. "It's a complex world to navigate."

She says learning the basics of Medicare can save you money and help ensure that you get the health care you prefer. Gremse adds,

**"We have helped about 200 people (low income or not) in 2023 and have collectively saved those folks about \$235,000,"**



## Together We Can

Over 350 households have shopped weekly since November. Gratefully accepting most needed items :

**Peanut Butter  
Jam/Jelly  
Canned Fish & Meat**

**Gluten Free Items  
Canned Chili  
Powdered Milk**



## Thank You Supporters!

BY KAREN WEST

Santa arrived early this year at Helpline House. For two days in December, the lower barn was transformed into a wintery holiday shop stocked with new books, stuffed animals, toys, cozy PJs, warm gloves and knitted hats and games for kids.

Thanks to donations from Rotary, community members and local businesses, kids (18 or younger) were able to receive a \$25 gift card and parents could pick out holiday gifts for free, during the Dec. 14 and 15 Kids Holiday Giving shopping days. Nearly 100 kids from 50 households participated in this year's event. Popular items included no-sew blankets, stuffed animals, hats and gloves and even holiday decorations.

**“Our thoughtful community made the holidays very memorable for local kids and their parents,”**

says Helpline House Volunteer Services Manager Kerry Lavigne, who, along with her daughter, Chloe, decorated the lower barn for the event.

**“To make the experience even more special, volunteer, Deb Krieger, provided shoppers the gift of beautifully wrapping their presents.”**

Thank You  
*Bainbridge Islanders and*



Seniors (55+) also were treated to holiday gifts between Dec. 18 and 22, 188 local gift cards were issued. “Each senior received a \$25 gift card when they arrived to shop for groceries,” Lavigne says.

**“We are so thankful to the generous business, church and community members who help make the Senior Holiday Giving program possible every year.”**

## A Special Note

A heartfelt thank you to Karen West for her continued interviews, writing and contributions! We greatly appreciate her dedication and collaboration that go beyond her retirement as a Helpline House board member.

## What's Next?

**Feb 19 - 23/April 1 - 5**

**Kids' Pantry Mid-Winter/Spring Break**

Kid-friendly foods for every child.

**March 21**

**Welcome Back to Medicare**

Bainbridge Public Library, 2:30-4 pm

Compare Medicare Plans Side By Side To Find The Right Plan For You

**April 16**

**KitsapGreatGive.org**

A 24-hour “give-day” event that unites our community through a special online donation.

**April 21 - 27**

**National Volunteer Appreciation Week**

A celebration of volunteers' contributions to the community and the world.

# WE ARE HIRING Social Work Case Manager

Your purpose would be to coordinate and provide services and referrals in a safe, timely, effective, efficient, equitable, and client centered manner.

## JOIN OUR TEAM

We are Bainbridge Island's Social Services

Visit [HelplineHouse.org](http://HelplineHouse.org)  
A full range of cost-free services

- Case Management
- Counseling/Therapy
- Resources/Referrals
- Food Bank

**HELPLINE HOUSE** | Food Bank | Social Services  
For a Healthy & Whole Community  
Submit your resume through [Indeed.com](https://indeed.com)  
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Helpline House has a policy of non-discrimination regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, sexual preference, age, disability or veteran's status, and is in compliance with all requirements of law and regulations with respect to employment, volunteer participation or service delivery.

Go Green   

Subscribe to our e-newsletter at [HelplineHouse.org](http://HelplineHouse.org)  
Stay Connected to a Healthy & Whole Community.

# Welcome!



## Olivia Durel, LSWAIC (she/her) Clinical Social Worker

In awe of the community here at Helpline House, and the island at large, Olivia just moved to Bainbridge in June of 2023. Originally from New Orleans, LA, she pursued her

Masters of Social Work at Tulane University. With a special interest in relational psychotherapy and ecological systems theory, she also pursued a certificate in disaster resilience and collective trauma from Tulane's Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy. She is grateful to the invaluable clinical, case management, and research experience she gained while interning in the psychiatry department at Ochsner Hospital, and is grateful for the opportunity now to support the people and connections of Helpline House. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from The Boston Conservatory at Berklee College of the Performing Arts in 2017, and in her free time has enjoyed getting to know the art scene here on the island and in Seattle.



## Volunteer at HelplineHouse.org

Rising freshmen and high schoolers are welcome - Help Helpline House make a Healthy & Whole Community!

Student Volunteer Opportunities:  
year-long after school, Winter Break, Mid-Winter Break, Spring Break, and Summer vacation.