

PRESS RELEASE



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Two Waushara County Business Owners Educate Policy Leaders in Washington DC

(Washington, DC)—Two leaders of Cooperative Care, a Waushara County business that is Wisconsin’s only home care cooperative, were in Washington DC last week to talking with policy leaders about an innovative solution to the caregiver crisis in the United States.

Tracy Dudzinski and Debra Schultz are members of Cooperative Care, a democratically run, 40-member Wautoma business that provides in-home care to the elderly and disabled in Waushara, Winnebago, Green Lake, Adams, Fond du Lac and Marquette counties.

The member-owners of Cooperative Care have been providing care for area seniors and the disabled since 2001, when the business became the first rural home care cooperative in the United States.

Home Care workers are among the country’s lowest paid and the work is physically demanding and emotionally taxing. Dudzinski and Schultz told Washington leaders and decision makers that when home care businesses are organized as cooperatives, workers experience improved job satisfaction and seniors receive better care.

In Washington, Dudzinski and Schultz’s perspective is of particular interest because they are experts with a working solution to a problem that is growing in the United States but is already a crisis in Waushara County.

Waushara County is aging at a faster rate than the rest of the country -- 20 percent of the population is over 65, compared to the national average of 12 percent. Trying to provide in-home care, recognized as the best care option, has been a struggle for county managers for more than 20 years.

Policy makers in Washington understand the urgency of Waushara County’s problem. Nationally, the number of people needing care is expected to double in the next decade, and demand for home care services already outpaces available workers. The imbalance is particularly acute in rural areas.

Last week, the United States Department of Agriculture convened an inter-agency working group to discuss the problem and invited Dudzinski and Schultz to attend. Dudzinski and Schultz also participated in the annual Cooperative Issues Forum on Home Care Cooperatives, organized by the Cooperative Development Foundation. Dudzinski is Human Resources Coordinator and Schultz is Finance Coordinator at Cooperative Care.

“Having representatives from Cooperative Care participate in the working group and forum was essential,” said Leslie Mead, executive director of the Cooperative Development Foundation. “Decision makers in Washington benefit from learning from the real experts about the cooperative solution to the care giver crisis.”

Forum participants included cooperative development experts from Washington, New York, Massachusetts and Wisconsin. The interagency working group included policy

leaders from USDA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Small Business Administration, the Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

“I was honored to speak on behalf of caregivers and home care cooperatives,” said Schultz, who also serves on Cooperative Care’s board. “I hope that we are planting seeds that will encourage meaningful change in the future.”

Cooperative Care, which provides supportive care to more veterans in the area than any other agency, is growing, “We are excited with the four new hires we made last month. This will allow us to serve more members of the community by providing high quality home care services,” said Dudzinski. “The positions we offer provide meaningful work with flexible scheduling and the opportunity to become an owner of the business.”

Currently 40 Cooperative Care employees care for about 160 Wisconsin clients. Workers come from Waushara, Marquette, Green Lake and Fond du Lac counties.

The Cooperative Development Foundation promotes community economic and social development through cooperatives. CDF is a thought leader in the use of cooperatives to create resilient communities, including the housing and care needs of seniors. Through its funds, fiscal sponsorships, and fundraising, CDF provides grants and loans that foster cooperative development domestically and abroad. CDF’s Cooperative Hall of Fame recognizes the accomplishments of outstanding cooperative leaders at the National Press Club in Washington, DC each year. <http://www.cdf.coop/>

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