

An Interview with Derek Wilson of Silver Key



By Rick Sheridan

Silver Key was founded in 1970 here in Colorado Springs by a group of concerned citizens who wanted to improve the quality of life for older individuals. Since then, services, programs, staff, and volunteers have continued to expand to address the rapidly growing needs among older adults.

Each year, Silver Key serves more than 11,000 seniors in the Pikes Peak region with a wide variety of needs. For example, nearly 2,000 seniors use Silver Key's food pantry every month. Silver Key employs 80-plus staff and is supported by more than 600-plus volunteers.

Pikes Peak Senior News reached out to Derek Wilson, MEd, the Chief Strategy Officer for Silver Key. Here is a summary of what Derek told us.

Pikes Peak Senior News (PPSN): How is the new housing project coming along? Any other new projects that our readers should be aware of?

Derek Wilson (DW): Our Housing Initiative continues to gain momentum and community interest. We held an invitation community conversation and support launch event at the end of September. This well attended event helped us to gain even greater clarity on this important community health issue. Social Determinants of Health start with safe and stable housing. Silver Key serves seniors who face unique challenges and barriers that we are distinctly best suited to lead and serve on making a difference. Silver Key plans to submit a LIHTC (Low-Income Housing Tax Credit) application to CHFA (Colorado Housing Finance Authority) in February 2022. Current building projections are to begin in late 2022 or early 2023. We are proud of our 50-unit housing complex, the Senior Heritage Plaza, near the Patty Jewett neighborhood. For decades we've been providing housing navigation, assistance, and we're collaborating on a returning home modification service.

Another exciting project is our two new Service

Extensions! With funding from El Paso County (CDBG grant) and in a unique partnership with the Pikes Peak Library District. Silver Key is initiating two "pop-up" service extension sites in the Falcon/Peyton and Calhan communities. These sites allow for expanded and extended services to better meet the needs of our growing eastern community! With this initiative we will better serve the needs of a growing area and bringing needed services to diverse seniors with innovative methods. We are filling in service gaps from our current meals delivery grant by reaching additional COVID-19 impacted seniors who are living in rural El Paso County. Additional select services will be added in the coming weeks. These pop-ups will last as long as financing is available and as long as the need is there.

PPSN: How successful has Silver Key's approach to the Five Wishes legacy planning and informed organizations been? Any current examples that you would like to share?

DW: It's been a tremendous success. We've held nearly 200 sessions (seminars) with nearly 1,700 individuals in attendance. There's been a number of takeaways, but the single biggest one has been the use of this easy to use and easy to understand tool for starting conversations around end-of-life care and planning. As one of our services, we offer a full medical power of attorney service (both pro-bono and for fee). We've incorporated the Five Wishes document as part of that service. We recently had a husband and wife complete their Five Wishes document and discuss legacy giving. They were so relieved to have this process completed so that they could get back to life without the "worry" and know that with legacy gift planning their cherished values would live on. This story isn't an isolated one, and we are building upon this so that even more can testify to the benefits of this type of proactive preparation. We have had more people (clients, staff/volunteers, and

community members) share with us that this program and our promotion of it has had a profoundly positive impact on their life. Specifically, they almost universally express feelings of “relief” and a reduction in anxiety/stress. Moreover, there’s been tremendous interest in the program and with that our gift planning program has also seen an increase in interest. The long-term impact of this will likely not be felt for years, but as the quote goes: “Wise is the person who plants trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.”

PPSN: Tell us more about Silver Key’s Porchlight Technology.

DW: Silver Key is elated to have partnered with Porchlight! Porchlight’s unique combination of technology and services creates solutions that enable all seniors to stay connected with family, friends, and community and healthcare resources. All from the convenience of their home. Porchlight comes standard with our Reassurance+ service, and this allows us to provide enhanced contact with family and friends through the Porchlight digital platform. It’s HIPAA

compliant, and cutting-edge technology to better serve today’s senior community. Lastly, with the need to pivot during the pandemic, and Porchlight brings the opportunity for telehealth options to our clients.

PPSN: Finally, tell us about your Reassurance+ program.

DW: Reassurance+ provides a sense of social connectedness. This really helps the seniors’ cognitive abilities to remain high. The pandemic was so insidious to seniors because it cut off many of the typical social interactions that were going on before. As part of the Reassurance+ program, we provide an hour or two visit and bring along a nutrient rich meal. We also help with light daily tasks quick errands to the store, a safety check of their house or apartment, including observations about the senior’s change-of-condition. We check in by telephone periodically, provide nutrition education through handouts and monthly newsletters, and we bring unmet needs to the attention of community services and/or Silver Key staff.



 **Silver Key™**
Reassurance+

Reassurance+ provides ALL seniors a hot meal, 1-2 hours of companionship and Porchlight digital connections, to help them remain independent with dignity, in their own home for as long as possible. Affordable rates and no minimums. Learn more:

silverkey.org/reassurance
or call our
Silver Line: 719-884-2300