

Family helps center that helps their son

DONATION: They set up a \$350,000 matching grant for a Corona home for the developmentally disabled.

BY JERRY SOIFER
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CORONA — The Peppermint Ridge home for the developmentally disabled and the parents of a resident have formed an alliance to help the Corona facility deal with an aging clientele with increased medical needs.

Last year, Bob and Peggy Dudley, of Laguna Niguel, hunted for a group home for their developmentally disabled son, Robert Dudley Jr., 35. The Dudleys moved their son to Peppermint Ridge four months ago from a facility in El Toro.

The Dudleys liked the care their son has received in Corona so much, they formulated a plan to provide \$350,000 for a matching grant for Peppermint Ridge to acquire homes for the older clients who need more medical care than the average client.

The Dudleys have already given \$200,000 for the nonprofit agency to buy additional homes for those clients. The Dudleys

will give Peppermint Ridge an additional \$150,000 if it can raise \$350,000 by March 31.

Peppermint Ridge serves more than 40 men and women at its main campus on Magnolia Avenue and 54 more in six homes around Corona. An additional six live independently with intermittent care provided by Peppermint Ridge's staff of 160.

John Garrett, Peppermint Ridge's executive director, said that when the facility opened 48 years ago, the life expectancy of the clients was a lot shorter than it is now.

For instance, the average life span of an individual with Down syndrome, a developmental disability, increased from 9 years in the 1920s to 65 or more by the end of the 1990s, according to Jeffrey H. Minde and Andrea R. Friedman. Minde is the president of National Special Needs Network Inc. Friedman is a Medicaid waiver coordinator.

They said 12 percent of people with developmental disabilities are older than 65. The average age of Peppermint Ridge's clients is 45.

Garrett said the Dudleys will
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be the catalysts for the plan to help older clients. Garrett said the recent decline in real estate prices will help the facility acquire homes.

Bob Dudley, 64, is a tax accountant. Peggy Dudley, 67, is a retired nurse. Robert Jr. is their only child.

When he lived in a facility in Orange County, their son often would spend weekends with his parents and would not want to return to the group home, his father said. Now his son likes Peppermint Ridge so much he rarely comes home.

"He's so thrilled to be there," Bob Dudley said. "He didn't have too many of his peers to interact with (in El Toro)."

Dudley said his son had a wonderful time when 40 residents of Peppermint Ridge attended his birthday party there on Dec. 9. His son also enjoyed the Christmas party in Corona, Dudley said.

Waiting periods to place a person at group homes can be as long as 20 years. Dudley said he and his wife feel very fortunate to have placed their son in Corona so quickly. "Rob seemed to fit in," he said.

Dudley has been impressed



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Robert Dudley Jr., a resident of the Peppermint Ridge for the developmentally disabled in Corona draws under the watchful eye of Tracy Mauser, director of development. Dudleys parents have offered a matching grant of \$350,000 to Peppermint Ridge to acquire more homes for its residents.

with the staff at the Peppermint Ridge. "It's not a job, it's an avocation," he said, adding that the residents "are given so many opportunities to have weekends out."

Bob and Peggy Dudley attended meetings for parents about the medical needs of the residents.

"My wife and I decided to help some of their dreams come true," he said.

Peggy Dudley said some clients have lived at Peppermint Ridge for up to 40 years. "As a parent, you hear something like

that, it perks your ears up," she said.

"We've been blessed," she continued. "We've worked hard. We've made a few bucks. ... We decided to donate the money and have a matching fund in the hopes there will be other kids who benefit like our son. We can have some peace of mind when it's time to go to the other side."

People interested in helping Peppermint Ridge can contact Tracy Mauser, the director of development, at 951-273-7329.

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