

# Volunteer shoppers hit aisles for elderly HomeCare program

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Madeline DeLotto doesn't get out much. At 90, the Clifton woman has trouble walking and had to give up gardening and trips to the supermarket.

But thanks to a Fair Lawn teenager, she won't run out of food.

Kaitlyn Clausell and her mom, Lina, show up every other Saturday to pick up a grocery list, coupons and money from DeLotto, then head to a local store.

Kaitlyn is one of 68 volunteers who grocery-shop for homebound people through HomeCare Options, a non-profit based in Passaic County. She says being around DeLotto has helped her look at life with a new perspective.

"Madeline isn't like other older people, she's so hopeful about life," Kaitlyn said. "I just have this amazing feeling when I walk out of her house — she has impacted my life so much."

Many of the volunteers form similar, enduring bonds with the residents they help, said Virginia Statile, who gives her time as the director of the grocery shopping program at HomeCare.

"The volunteers tell me they feel the residents have become a part of their family," Statile said. "And the residents are happy — many of them tell me the volunteers are better at shopping than they were."

The shopping program started about 10 years ago with one or two volunteers, expanding, despite or maybe because, no money ever changes hands.

"I tell everyone, the volunteers and residents, no tipping, no money involved at all," Statile said. "It's such a wonderful, different feeling to work with people



KEVIN R. WEXLER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Kaitlyn Clausell, right, and her mom, Lina Clausell, go shopping for Madeline DeLotto to help her stay independent.

## To learn more

Anyone interested in the shopping program at HomeCare should call 973-523-1224.

who give so much of themselves."

But Kaitlyn's mother believes they are getting paid. Just in a different currency.

"We get so much more out of this than Madeline does," Lina Clausell said. "It has been such a great experience for my daughter and Madeline is just such a joy to be around. We look forward to seeing her and have come to care for her a great deal."

Clausell said her daughter has become a savvy shopper in the nearly two years of volunteering they've done. And it was Kaitlyn's

idea to find a way to help the elderly after seeing an older woman in New York City struggle to carry groceries down the street.

Two other teenagers are involved in the HomeCare program, Statile said. "Our volunteers range from a nurse to a landscaper, a stay-at-home mom to someone from the prosecutor's office," she said. "They come from all walks of life and some shop for more than one resident."

Statile matches the volunteers and residents based on personality and the needs of the resident.

"I tell them both that if they aren't comfortable with the other person, I will switch them right away," she said. "That rarely happens."

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