Carmen Del Valle recalled the day she learned she had cancer. “To tell you the truth, there was no surprise,” the Grand Forks resident said. “I mean, I knew I was sick.”

She had been vomiting frequently and struggling to rise. A family member took her to the hospital emergency room, which led to examinations and some tests — and a physician’s diagnosis. “I just asked him, ‘How long do I have to live?’ He says, ‘About six months.’ I said, ‘OK.’”

The matter-of-fact tone in Carmen’s voice betrayed no hint of sadness, anger or frustration. But then, her 74th birthday on April 21 will mark three years since the native Puerto Rican received her first chemotherapy treatment for diffuse large B cell lymphoma. It’s the most common of non-Hodgkin lymphomas — a fast-growing, aggressive form with much greater survival odds if caught early.

Carmen’s cancer fight included a stem-cell transplant last winter at Mayo Clinic facilities. Through the North Dakota Organ Transplant Fund, which NDAD administers, Carmen received help with multiple trips to and from Mayo in Rochester, Minn., including gas money and a share of 42 days of lodging costs at Gift of Life Transplant House during her transplant. Gift of Life provides supportive accommodations for transplant patients and their families. “Really, it had saved my life,” said Carmen, who worked with NDAD client services representative Jeri Hietala. “If she didn’t help me, I probably wouldn’t have

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Remembering Faye

NDAD constituted such a huge part of Faye Gibbens’ life because she brought so much life to NDAD.

Gibbens died at age 70 on Feb. 1 in Grand Forks. Her legacy continues.

Faye and her husband, Ron, co-founded the charitable nonprofit nearly 40 years ago to help their son, Mike, born with cerebral palsy, and others like him with disabling circumstances that challenged their ability to be mobile and live with greater independence.

The rural Harlow, N.D., native — born Faye Lavonne Lynse — pressed forward despite her own health challenges. Death came about 11 months after a near-fatal heart attack, about 10 years after a kidney transplant and decades after readjusting to a life with type 1 diabetes.

“We wouldn’t be where we are without Faye’s positive influence,” said Ron, Faye’s husband of nearly 50 years, in a Grand Forks Herald Page 1 feature obituary.

“She was always all about the client,” Leslie Stastny, Faye’s successor as client services director, told the Herald. “She loved this organization. This was her baby.”

Faye Gibbens retired in the spring of 2013 from her job as NDAD chief program officer and her concurrent job as executive director of Citizens Assistance Programs, a separate nonprofit that identifies and extends services to mentally, physically or otherwise disadvantaged people who are likely to become victims of neglect or exploitation. She also provided assistance and input for NDAD’s charitable gaming operations, which debuted in 1982.

“I think she brings a passion to what she’s doing,” Ron Gibbens said once about Faye. “For her, it’s not a job.”

“We are all just workers,” Faye insisted in 2012, noting her dislike for titles.

That said, nobody ever worked for NDAD like Faye Gibbens.

Carmen Del Valle / Continued from Pg. 1

Carmen narrowly qualified for a stem-cell transplant program limited to participants 72 or younger, said her daughter-in-law, Judy Del Valle.

Still, Carmen’s age limited the pain meds she could take. “She went through a tougher time than what some others could have,” Judy said. “She has taken this extremely well.”

As of early March this year, Carmen’s cancer was in remission. “I feel great,” she said.

“Little things can get me soo00 upset. But things like this? I mean, what else can I do? “ she said. “I ask the doctor, and it’s just in his hands and in God’s hands.” She paused a moment. “I think my mother was kind of like that.”

A native of Puerto Rico and a former New York resident, Carmen came to North Dakota in 2006 to live with and care for ailing brother Frank after their mom and another brother, Martin, died in Florida. When Frank was moved to the Good Samaritan home in Larimore, N.D. (he died at Fargo’s VA hospital in 2012), Carmen — a single woman and family caregiver since her childhood — found herself living alone for the very first time.

But this former telephone company worker hasn’t been idle. She happily serves part time at the Grand Forks YMCA in its Foster Grandparent Program. She holds, feeds and otherwise assists with babies up to age 1. “I love it,” she said.

“You see them grow. You see their character, the things they do. Sometimes it’s funny to see how fast they learn.”

Her health woes limited her YMCA hours and wages, which in turn strained her budget. That made NDAD’s help invaluable, Carmen said. She would recommend NDAD and client services rep Hietala to anyone who encounters major health and financial challenges.

“Sure. But Jeri might not like it. I know too many people. I have too many friends,” Carmen said teasingly, with a laugh. “Jeri might not like that.”

Call (800) 532-NDAD for information about the North Dakota Organ Transplant Fund.

About NDAD Insider

Mike Brue - Editor & Communications Director
mbrue@ndad.org | (701) 795-6605
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Q&A with NDAD’s Leslie Stastny

Flexibility a major plus with NDAD Financial Loan option

Leslie Stastny is client services director for NDAD.

Q. For what type of assistive technology has the program probably been used for most?
LS: By far accessible vehicles. People have really taken advantage of our low interest rates in order to purchase a vehicle with a ramp or a lift or hand controls or whatever it might be that makes it accessible for their disability.

Q. How else has it been used?
LS: We’ve had individuals use it for home remodeling to make their homes accessible. It could be something like a hearing aid. A lift chair. Scooter. We’ve done a laptop. It would be nice to get the word out that it can be used for these other things as well. . . . Of course, it would need to have something to do with their disability and be an assistive device for them, not just, “My laptop broke down and I need another one at a good price.”

Q. What’s perhaps the most overlooked advantage of NDAD’s Financial Loan Program?
LS: I think people expect that we’ll have a decent interest rate, and we do. But we can also extend it out over a longer period of time to make it more affordable for an individual. And you don’t have to have perfect credit in order to qualify. Now, that being said, you do have to be able to show the ability to repay the loan. There has to be some income available. If an individual perhaps has a poor credit history due to medical expenses, we can take that into consideration. If it’s a poor credit history because someone just didn’t pay their student loans or their credit card bills for other purposes, we’re still going to look at that as poor credit when looking at an application. But we do like to give people a chance.

Q. One program provision allows purchase of used assistive technology equipment. How does that work?
LS: We can approve used equipment in certain circumstances. We’d want a professional to look at it and tell us that it’s worth purchasing. We also need to look at the length of time of the loan on something that’s used. Obviously, if it’s already several years old the life expectancy may not be much longer. We may still be able to consider the loan – just not for an extended payback period.

Q. How much time is there to repay the loan?
LS: It depends on what they’re purchasing. We’re probably going to give a vehicle a much longer period of time than a hearing aid or a scooter. Each one could be different. There’s some flexibility.

Q. Does it take long to apply? How much time does it take to get a decision?
LS: It doesn’t take long. I don’t think the application is cumbersome at all. It can be accessed through our website, NDAD.org, or by calling any of our offices, so we can mail it out if that’s more convenient. We have toll-free numbers and we’ll get one out in the mail the same day.

IN SUMMARY . . .
NDAD’s Financial Loan Program, in association with North Dakota bank Alerus Financial, provides low-interest, flexible-term loans ranging from $500 to $50,000. It can be used to obtain:
- Modified vehicles
- Modifications of a residence that you own
- Hearing aids
- Wheelchairs, walkers, scooters and other mobility items
- Voice-activated appliances and other environmental control devices
- Adaptive fishing and hunting equipment and other types of recreational / leisure items
- Used equipment (requires professional evaluation, in writing, of device’s value and condition)
- Device training
- Device repairs and warranties
- Computers and adaptive hardware / software

Call (800) 532-NDAD or visit NDAD.org for details.

Get Dealin’ today

Wheelin’ & Dealin’ online advertisements, courtesy of NDAD, provide a forum for people to buy or sell new or used assistive equipment. Ads are listed at NDAD.org. To place, remove or extend an ad, please call (800) 532-NDAD.
NDAD is a nonprofit, charitable organization founded by concerned citizens to assist mentally and physically disadvantaged people in North Dakota, many of whom are not eligible for services from other agencies.

Disabling conditions often are very costly. NDAD was founded on the belief that people with disabilities, when given the opportunity, can live more satisfying, productive lives — and NDAD has helped thousands do just that since its creation in 1975. This often requires the purchase of specialized equipment, medical treatment, or other services.

NDAD provides financial assistance through funds generated by both the organization and community projects. NDAD also provides information and referral services to help people receive assistance through other agencies, when possible.

It’s AMAZING what people can do when there’s help.

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