

# So You Want to Own Your Own Business Ever Consider In-Home Care?

by Joe Schaffner

*Small Business Administration statistics indicate that over half of new businesses disappear within the first five years. Other sources estimate that the number of failed new businesses is closer to 90%. With odds like that, it seems that starting and maintaining a new business can be a real challenge. You may be able to tip the odds in your favor by considering a franchise.*

My 2008 *SilverLink* article entitled “Boomer-Care, the In-Home Non-Medical Industry,” focused on in-home care as one of the fastest growing industries in the world. In-home care franchises are designed to fill long-term care needs within the marketplace. As a direct result of longer life spans, senior care franchising has grown and, in response, franchise organizations have created solid business strategies and a proven blueprint for success.

## **Homecare means just that**

At some point, it may become necessary for a family member to leave his or her long-time residence. For many, however, remaining at home is now possible with the emergence of in-home care services. The ultimate goal of in-home healthcare is for recipients to continue living in a safe, familiar, healthy environment and, in many instances, to have more independence than they did before. In-home healthcare can also allow exhausted family caregivers to focus on other responsibilities. A wide range of homecare personnel is available, including registered nurses, therapists, homecare aides and companion/homemakers who provide a variety of services, including the following:

- Meal preparation
- Light housekeeping and laundry
- Companionship
- Grocery shopping and errands
- Bathing, toileting, feeding and other personal services
- Walking and ambulation assistance

## **Ask the experts**

Many franchise owners begin their careers as hands-on caregivers and evolve into managers of their own businesses. Owners who have a service background are sensitive to client needs and, depending on those needs, offer a wide variety of services, custom-designed to provide the most value for each client. Most have extensive experience working with those whose advanced age, illness or disability requires additional help for activities of daily living.

*When asked what inspired her, Homewatch owner Belinda Gordon, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, responded, “My mother was afflicted with Multiple Sclerosis. She had home health aides coming in to care for her in her later years, so I had experience with home care. I was excited about bringing these services to other people. On the business side, with the baby boomers just hitting their senior years, it had to be a growth industry with a big future.”*



Although service experience can be a helpful tool for franchise owners, possessing a firm grasp on business know-how is equally important. LaShelle Fuller-Chapman, Vice-President of Franchise Support for Denver-based HomeWatch Caregivers, described what she looks for in potential new business owners. "They need to possess strong business...skills that allow them to stay focused on working on the business, not necessarily 'in' it. We help with tools, training and resources that support their marketing/sales and operational efforts."

Alicia Junghans, President/Owner of a ComForcare franchise in Grand Rapids, Michigan, indicates that her passion for business is built on personal experience. When Junghans' mother became ill with cancer, Alicia moved to Kansas to provide full-time care for her mother. An overwhelming mix of emotions ensued, including anger, frustration and stress. Working through this difficult situation ultimately inspired Alicia to open her own franchise.

The desire to give back, combined with personal experience, is a common thread among those considering the purchase of an in-home care franchise. "I wanted to do more to help people. I was 25, young, idealistic and ready to make the world a better place," said Jennifer Berryman, owner of a Comfort Keepers franchise in Fremont, California. In addition to personal experience, successful owners often bring a balance of traditional business knowledge combined with hands-on care giving expertise.

Eric Little, Vice President of Franchise Development for Omaha-based Right at Home, described the perfect owner as "someone who has a passion for the business" and is dedicated to helping people. He added, "You need to have an owner with the ability and willingness to follow a proven system. The most successful franchisees will tell you they just followed what the operations manual said."

Comfort Keepers owner Cary Rotter from Memphis, Tennessee articulated his decision to purchase an in-home care franchise:

I wanted to do something that would make a positive difference in the lives of others, something that my children would be proud of. My parents were older and on the verge of needing help, so I could see firsthand the business potential of home care for older adults. Given the well-publicized data on the demographics of an aging America and the preference for seniors to remain at home, non-medical home care clearly represented an ideal opportunity for a business, with long-term growth potential virtually assured...

### Choosing to franchise

Opening a new business can be exciting and challenging, and franchise operations have the advantage of proven success combined with highly organized business strategies. A franchise purchase, however, may not be the right choice for everyone. Before you make a final decision, ask the following questions:

1. What services would you enjoy providing?
2. How much can you afford to invest?
3. Will this amount cover the total cost?
4. How well-established and stable is the franchise system you wish to buy?
5. What training and continued support will be available?

If the time comes that a loved one needs additional help, many issues should be considered before a final decision is made. The first step is to ensure that both the family caregiver and the care recipient are comfortable with the idea of in-home care. Homecare workers are prepared to offer professional, sincere answers to hard questions asked by potential clients. Second, parameters for the actual level of care required must be discussed and determined. This needs to be a frank and open conversation among the homecare worker, the family of the recipient and, most importantly, the care recipient. Once agreement is reached, further discussion can solidify plans regarding the best way to access services, costs involved and whether the care will be covered by insurance, government funding, a long-term care policy or will have to be privately subsidized.

It is evident that the in-home care industry is one of the fastest growing, most cost-effective opportunities currently available. If you are considering a franchise purchase, be sure to develop a network of advisors and experts to guide your choice and help you get started.