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ON THE COVER:
Joe and Donna Elliott share how hospice care has helped them to have quality time together.
When Love Needs Caring Support

HopeHealth’s care team works with Joe and Donna Elliott to provide care that fits their needs.

Donna and Joe Elliott’s love story began 56 years ago at their bus stop when Joe, an avid baseball player, was just 13 years old and Donna, a shy young girl from Chepachet, was 11 years old. “I remember saying to Donna on our ride one morning,” Joe shares with a wink, “What would you say if I asked you to marry me?” Donna smiles at the memory. “Of course, I told him if he asked me I would say yes.”

“I thought hospice was a death sentence. But the care team explained that hospice is providing the best care for Joe and our family, whatever that means to us.”

Married right after high school, Donna and Joe were blessed with two sons and a daughter, and later, two grandsons and a great granddaughter. Their children live close by and visit often for dinner, to watch football, or just to spend time together.

Unfortunately, Donna and Joe’s love story has been challenged by ongoing health issues. Joe, whose heart was compromised as a child due to several bouts with rheumatic fever, has survived a sudden Cardiac Death and a heart transplant. Donna, legally blind since birth, has undergone three spine surgeries and four orthopedic surgeries.

Their love never wavered during these trying times because they focused on what mattered most—their time together. But, the couple, who still refer to each other as “darling,” “sweetie,” and “babe,” knew they couldn’t handle their health needs alone.
The Elliotts first reached out to HopeHealth in 2013 after Joe’s hip replacement surgery. The support they received from a HopeHealth Visiting Nurse therapist made it possible for Joe to leave the rehab center he was staying at, and move back home with his best friend, Donna.

“The therapist was a godsend and got him back on his feet. Not quickly, but slowly and steadily so that he truly healed. After that, I would not have called anyone else when I had my surgeries,” says Donna.

The Elliotts have continued to rely on HopeHealth as an essential support system to help them through every medical procedure and every health crisis they have encountered over the last six years. Donna explains, “HopeHealth has been with us for some of the most difficult times in our lives. They have given us complete emotional and physical support.”

Last year, Joe’s health took another drastic turn, including a rare deterioration of his trachea. The HopeHealth team met with the Elliotts and asked what their wishes were for Joe’s care and quality of life. Joe decided that he no longer wanted to endure life-saving measures. He and Donna agreed that unexpected trips to the ER, long waits at hospitals, and taking more than 1,000 pills a month was not how Joe wanted to spend this part of his life.

Donna shared with their HopeHealth nurse that she had promised to care for Joe at home, if possible. HopeHealth suggested that it was time to transition Joe from palliative support to hospice care at home. At first, Donna was crushed. “I thought hospice was a death sentence. But the care team explained that hospice is not just end-of-life care, but providing the best care for Joe and our family, whatever that means to us.”

“Now our time is us centered, so we’re able to do the things we’ve always done together—like watch our favorite TV shows and have dinner together.”

After so many years of support from HopeHealth, Donna continues to be amazed by the complete and heartfelt care. “Late one Sunday evening, Joe was in such a bad way, I had to call the HopeHealth 24-hour hotline. I figured I would get an answering service, but an actual HopeHealth nurse took my call. She walked me through everything, and she calmed me and Joe down,” Donna explains. She was even more impressed when that same nurse called her the next morning, with additional information and a follow-up plan. “It really helps to have that continuity.”

Donna and Joe know that some people might think hospice care means giving up control, but they view this very differently. “It was a great move,” Joe says, confidently. “Now Donna and I have more quality time together.” Donna agrees. “Now our time is us centered and not medically centered, so we’re able to do the things we’ve always done together—like watch our favorite TV shows and have dinner together. I can cook Joe’s favorite meals like shepherd’s pie and lasagna.”

As they sit in their living room holding hands, Donna and Joe smile contentedly. “When we had been married only a month, my husband said, ‘happy anniversary, love.’ We still celebrate our anniversary every month. It is the little things that matter most. Thanks to HopeHealth, we have each other.”
Kelly: As the leader of HopeHealth, how would you describe our mission to someone who knows nothing about us?

Franchitto: Having been with HopeHealth for 12 years, I see our mission as a journey with patients and families, a journey during a very difficult time. Whether it is a loved one recovering from an illness, or a friend in the last days of his or her life, or finding your way after you lose someone, our mission is to care for people while they are on their journey.

Kelly: That idea of journey is so powerful. Families can come to us for hospice care and then come back when they need grief support. Personally, I see my mission as Board Chair to be sure that everyone in our community knows about HopeHealth and knows about all of our services. Thanks to our exceptional care teams, end of life can be a story of caring and compassion for your loved one, for your family.

Franchitto: This is so important, and I hope every family can understand the breadth and depth of services—home care, palliative care, hospice, grief support. Families can count on us at any point in their journey. In fact, they can call on us before they need our care, for guidance on making important health decisions, or after a loss—even if they haven’t had a loved one on HopeHealth services.

Kelly: I think this challenge has inspired me, and so many others at HopeHealth to give of our “time, talent, and treasure.” We have this amazing care team that always goes above and beyond their job descriptions. We have hundreds of volunteers who have had a personal experience with HopeHealth and want to be part of providing that care to others. And we have thousands of donors who understand that every gift represents a person who will receive our care in the future.

Franchitto: People may come to us in their time of need and then, after spending time with hospice, they want to stay connected by attending bereavement programs, volunteering, and participating as donors. It is a relationship that lasts well beyond the loss of a loved one.

Kelly: Diana, I’m sure you know that our families remember every single person who provided the care for their loved one. It’s an incredible partnership, with compassion and dignity guiding all of our work.

Franchitto: It all goes back to our mission and asking what more HopeHealth can do to support our community. Every family will have a unique and very personal experience with HopeHealth, and we know that our compassionate, comprehensive care will help them through their journey.

“Families can count on us at any point in their journey.”
Compassion Remembered

After 57 years of marriage, Eunice and David Cuff had a painful decision to make. David’s health was failing. David wanted to remain at home, but Eunice, at 81, knew she could not keep her beloved husband comfortable without help. Fortunately, she knew of HopeHealth’s services and called on our care team for hospice support. David passed away peacefully at home, as he wished.

Eunice never forgot the kindness of the care team at HopeHealth. When she died in 2017, she left an estate with gifts for 30 beneficiaries, including HopeHealth. Eunice’s decision to remember HopeHealth in her will was more than a generous gesture. According to her wishes, her gift of over $40,000 was designated towards the Arthur S. Robbins Hope Fund, which supports patients who have no health insurance or are unable to pay for care. Her gift will ensure that every family can get the support they need at their most vulnerable time.

The Gift of Healing from Loss
A South County couple’s gift supports an impactful weekend retreat.

For over a decade, Sandi and Randy Gardner have been making annual donations to HopeHealth. “HopeHealth was there for our family when my mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer,” Randy shares. Randy’s mother wanted to be cared for in familiar surroundings at home. “Although my mother would not outlive this terrible disease, HopeHealth made it feel so different.” Comfortable at home, she was surrounded by her children and grandchildren. “HopeHealth really helped us focus on Randy’s parents and to talk about what all of this meant to them,” remembers Sandi.

The Gardners have generously supported many programs and events at HopeHealth, but last year, HopeHealth Philanthropy Officer Kathleen Bentley shared a special initiative: HopeHealth’s Weekend of Hope & Healing.

The Weekend of Hope & Healing was founded in 2015 at Camp Aldersgate in North Scituate, RI, as a welcoming and safe retreat for adults who have experienced a loss. Bereaved adults come together for an intensive weekend of workshops and lectures, healing therapies and creative outlets, walks in the woods or a quiet canoe on the lake. Yostena Makram first attended the camp after she lost her beloved sister. Two years later, her other sister joined her when they lost their mother. “The camp and the campus give us a place and time to get in touch with our feelings, emotions, and mental state. When I step on the grounds and smell the fresh air, I immediately relax,” Yostena remembers. “The Weekend is so nourishing for those who are in a fragile mental state. You just have to be open and take advantage of what it can bring you.”

The Weekend of Hope & Healing is supported in part by philanthropic gifts, like the Gardners. “Our 50 participants pay a nominal fee for the entire weekend, including workshops, activities, meals, and lodging,” explains grief support manager Diane Lambert. She also shares that the Weekend is run entirely by expert workshop leaders who donate their services and by volunteers. “This is an intense experience for everyone, campers and volunteers alike. But we all leave feeling so connected, so supported. I learn something new about my work and myself every year.”

“You can donate to a lot of causes and never feel connected or that you really had an impact,” admit the Gardners. “This is not the case with HopeHealth. It is amazing to know that our gift helped a special group of people who needed healing. We are honored to be part of this process and make sure that HopeHealth can bring in the right staff and right support to everyone.”

“It is amazing to know that our gift helped a special group of people who needed healing.”
Providing Comfort through Serious Illness
Palliative care eases symptoms of illness and side effects of treatment.

In 2015, Barbara Flinker Ruttenberg’s daughter was diagnosed with advanced leukemia that would not respond to chemotherapy. When a palliative care nurse came into her daughter’s hospital room, Barbara immediately felt a weight lifted. “This complete stranger was so comforting. She helped translate what my daughter’s doctor was trying to explain. She navigated us through making difficult decisions. Every day, she helped my daughter breathe better – literally and figuratively.”

“I knew I could change someone’s experience with a serious illness the way that palliative care nurse did for my daughter.”

After her daughter passed away, Barbara was lost; she couldn’t think how to move forward. Then, she learned about HopeHealth’s Palliative Care program. “I knew I had to make sure that families in Rhode Island would be able to count on this support. I knew I could change someone’s experience with a serious illness the way that palliative care nurse did for my daughter.” Barbara decided to make a donation to support palliative care at HopeHealth.

Less than a year later, Sylvia Ann Oliveira was in shock. During a routine colonoscopy, the physician discovered abnormal cells. Further testing led to a diagnosis of ovarian cancer. “How could this be? I’m a healthy woman with no symptoms. That doctor saved my life.”

After struggling through four rounds of chemotherapy, a nine-hour surgery, and two weeks in the hospital, Sylvia was ready to go home. “My daughter was able to help with my recovery, but I had so many complications. We needed to really understand what was happening.” That’s when HopeHealth’s palliative team knocked on Sylvia’s door.

“These nurses have seen it all and they know just what to do. They call and check on me even when it is not their day to visit. They spent so much time with my daughter, making sure she understood exactly what to do when we were on our own.”

She also appreciated how her HopeHealth nurse helped the family have the difficult conversations about her challenging recovery and setbacks. “She eased us into talking about my wishes and making sensible decisions by first asking me if I had any goals. She then helped me talk to my husband and children about what I wanted. I wanted to see my grandson get married, I wanted to spend next winter in Florida. HopeHealth is making sure I’ll be there.”

Most families do not realize that insurance reimbursements cover only about half the cost for palliative care services, care that is essential to both the healing and comfort process. Thanks to Barbara, and 57 other generous friends in our community who donated over $87,000 to HopeHealth’s palliative care program last year, we were able to support nearly 3,700 patients like Sylvia.

When Barbara heard Sylvia’s story, she smiled through tears. “My daughter would be so happy to know that we were part of her care. That we helped ease what this mother, wife, friend was going through.”

Sylvia can’t say thank you enough. “Most people don’t understand what a gift palliative care is to someone trying to heal. I am amazed that there are nurses who want to do this job and people who want to make sure they are there for patients like me. There are no words for my gratitude.”
A New Conversation of Care
A model program, led by HopeHealth, teaches physicians and clinicians how to have sensitive conversations with their patients.

A critical element to providing outstanding medical care is communication between the care team and the patient. But for seriously ill patients and their families, conversations with doctors and clinicians can often be confusing and sometimes lead to care that doesn’t meet their wishes.

Director of Palliative Care, Jennifer Ritzau, MD, knew that HopeHealth could be a leader in transforming these important conversations. “All care providers need to be able to have conversations that address the patient’s physical and personal goals. We need to teach these skills alongside traditional medical training, so that providers have the tools they need for effective and compassionate conversations.”

“This same issue was on Gus Manocchia, MD’s mind. Executive Vice President & Chief Medical Officer of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI), Manocchia believed that to improve care physicians need to fully appreciate patients’ wishes for their care and quality of life and that patients need information to fully understand the progression of their illness.

When Dr. Ritzau learned in 2016 of the Complex Care Conversations curriculum developed by CORE Healthcare Consulting Group, she knew their strategy would partner well with HopeHealth’s depth of experience. The timing was fortuitous for Dr. Manocchia. “It felt like a breakthrough,” he said. “Consistent with BCBSRI’s mission of addressing rising costs, quality of care, and patient care experience, we recognized a meaningful opportunity to partner with an organization that had a proven track record of delivering compassionate care.”

With two generous grants from BCBSRI in 2016 and 2018, HopeHealth piloted the program.

The interactive training is led by HopeHealth physicians and nurse practitioners and accredited through Brown University Continuing Medical Education. “Thanks to BCBSRI and the State Innovation Model program, the Department of Health, and the Sheila A. Duffy Fund,” notes Dr. Ritzau, “we have been able to offer this program free to providers throughout the state. In just two years, we have trained over 800 physicians, nurses, medical assistants, and administrators. Most importantly, thousands of patients and their families have benefitted.”

During the eight-hour training session, Complex Care Conversations facilitators use role-play and other exercises to teach strategies for asking questions about what is important to patients. “Critical conversations should happen long before hospice or palliative care,” notes Dr. Manocchia. “Conversations about choices on quality of life or next level of care need to happen at the moment someone receives a diagnosis of a chronic condition – high blood pressure or diabetes, for example – not to mention advanced conditions such as cancer or Parkinson’s.”

These conversations help the patient and the care provider manage illness, set expectations, and develop a plan of action for when things change.

So far, the results are promising. “Patients and families tell us that their needs and wishes are being heard and that their doctor helped them make important decisions for themselves and their loved ones,” says Dr. Ritzau. Dr. Manocchia further notes, “It would be our goal to see every doctor in Rhode Island trained in having these conversations. And with HopeHealth as the leading model, this should be the goal for every city in America.”
Thanks to a generous grant from the Rhode Island Foundation, HopeHealth Visiting Nurse has expanded an innovative program for Parkinson’s disease patients: LSVT Big and LSVT Loud therapies.

The LSVT programs are nationally recognized 16-session interventions shown to greatly improve the slow motor (Big) and vocal function (Loud) that can become compromised by Parkinson’s. Through HopeHealth Visiting Nurse, these therapies are now offered to patients who are receiving their care at home. The Rhode Island Foundation grant helped support training for 15 clinicians—physical and occupational therapists for LSVT Big and speech therapists for LSVT Loud – bringing HopeHealth Visiting Nurse’s total trained to 25 therapists.

Mary Macro was one of the first HopeHealth physical therapy assistants who signed up for the training program. “I have always been interested in working with Parkinson’s patients and wanted to be trained in LSVT Big so that I could really support them.”

Mary typically works with patients whose Parkinson’s is advanced. They have muscle rigidity and some have cognitive impairments as a result of the disease. “LSVT Big is really well suited for these patients, because they can do all of these exercises at home, with no equipment.” Mary emphasizes that the program requires commitment from the patient and their caregiver. “There is a series of standing and seated exercises that must be done twice a day. But within these set exercises, we can completely personalize the routine to suit each patient’s endurance, balance, and pain tolerance. Our job is to push them, while being aware of and sensitive to all of their health issues.”

Many of Mary’s patients are homebound and in bed for lengthy periods of time, which increases muscle rigidity. Simply getting out of bed – swinging your legs to sit upright and pushing yourself to standing – can be an impossible task that needs caregiver help. “One of my patients and his wife noticed that within a few weeks of working with LSVT Big, he was able to get out of bed by himself without her help. That independence was incredibly freeing,” says Mary.

“I always tell my patients that exercise is just as important as medication. Independence is the best thing I can give my patients.”

Mary Macro, HopeHealth Visiting Nurse
Physical Therapy Assistant
Special Events

HopeHealth’s special events are celebrations of lives lived well. For more information on events to benefit HopeHealth, please visit our website at HopeHealthCo.org/Events.

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HopeHealth Invitational, September 20, 2018

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An Evening of Hope & Gratitude, October 13, 2018

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Light Up a Life, December 2018
When Time is a Gift

In 2018, our dedicated corps of more than 300 volunteers contributed 33,289 hours of service: visiting with patients, running errands, making music, knitting afghans, stuffing envelopes, working with kids at Camp BraveHeart, and much more. While these numbers are impressive, what can’t be calculated is the value of every personal interaction our volunteers have with our patients and their families. Their compassionate care and support makes our work so effective.
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Hospice Aide Patrick Wallace received the Employee of the Quarter award for his work providing care with dignity.

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Camp BraveHeart offers traditional camp activities alongside grief support sessions—and a place to make new friends who share the experience of loss.
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Administrative Assistants Stephanie Ortiz and Liz Lavalley and Hospice Aide Sally Jaeger work closely together in the HopeHealth Hulitar Hospice Center to provide specialized care for patients at end of life.

Hospice nurses Amy Krawiec and Cathy Bedard in the HopeHealth Hulitar Hospice Center.

* Includes 2018 An Evening of Hope and Gratitude Gala contribution
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The Circle of Hope Legacy Society provides future funding for HopeHealth, ensuring that our mission of caring for seriously ill patients and their families will continue far into the future. To learn more about becoming a member of the Circle of Hope Legacy Society, please visit HopeHealthCo.org and search for “legacy.”

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Barbara Grossi, LPN, loves working for HopeHealth Visiting Nurse because she can care for patients in the comfort of their homes.
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HopeHealth PediPal Manager Lindsay Coe with a Camp BraveHeart participant.

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2018 HopeHealth Annual Report
HopeHealth's Weekend of Hope & Healing offers grieving adults a restorative experience.
Gifts in honor of or in memory of continued
2018 Facts & Figures

Statistics

Hospice patients 4,139
Palliative care patients 3,693
Home care patients 4,519
Bereavement clients 1,069
Camp BraveHeart participants 130
PediPal patients 75
Full-time employees 315
Part-time employees 101
Donors 7,738
Philanthropic support $1,527,311

Free care provided through the Arthur S. Robbins Hope Fund $193,503

Consolidated financials for HopeHealth Hospice & Palliative Care and HopeHealth Visiting Nurse

FY18 annual revenue $62,914,005
FY18 annual expenses $61,536,974
Income from operations $1,377,031
HopeHealth is a nonprofit organization serving thousands of people each year in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Our caregivers support patients and their families through all stages of illness, providing home care, palliative care, hospice, and dementia and Alzheimer’s support services. For more than 40 years, HopeHealth has provided high-quality care with the utmost skill, compassion and respect for our community.