



Managing the move for Mom and Dad

By: Cynthia Lescalleet

Surrounded mid-project by piles of books she loves, Trisha Gow, 75, realized she needed a little help winnowing her collection —and other possessions —before moving into a retirement community in the new year.

“It does feel like starting over,” she said of her decision to move from the apartment in which she has lived for many years.

During the pre-packing phase earlier this month, Gow said she was downsizing a little and dispensing with a few items so her adult children ultimately won't have to without her input.

The help with the sifting and assessing came from Cynthia Williams, a senior move manager. The emerging sub-specialty of professional organizing offers end-to-end move services while being sensitive to the physical limits and emotional needs of older adults when they decide (or have decided for them) that it's time to move.

Williams of River Oaks found her experience as an interior designer, museum docent and antiques appraiser well-suited to helping organize and manage home transitions for older clients.

A member of the National Association of Senior Move Managers, Williams named her company Transitions MMM (Making Moves Manageable) to suggest a seamless process amid one of life's most stressful shifts.

Williams jokingly calls herself “a professional daughter.”

Unlike a family member with emotional ties to the client and the client's possessions, however, “I can come in and say the exact same thing” about what needs to be done with it and be heard, she said.

That works both ways, she said. “The adult children don't always realize the emotional ties” of ownership and the difficulty of letting go of possessions (each filled with memories).

“You have to be patient and diplomatic,” she said.



Williams enjoys chatting with her older clients, who often share stories with her about the times through which they have lived.

The adult children have often heard it all before, she said, and “don’t want to hear it.” They also might rush the moving process, which increases anxiety all round.

From Move-out to Move-in

With the support of Gow’s adult children, Williams has been helping her client decide what to keep, repair, donate, sell, toss and dispense to family, friends and beyond. The two are also commiserating on how to arrange Gow’s new home so she will feel right at home from the start.

Gow said Williams has been effective in monitoring when the tasks at hand were too overwhelming. Plus, she takes over when Gow’s endurance lags.

Along the way, Gow has appreciated having someone’s objective opinion on whether to keep something or let it go.

Gow thinks many older adults opt to stay put with their stuff because it’s easier than revisiting a lifetime’s accumulation (“The past comes at you.”) but, “it has to be done.”

Holidays over, calls begin

January is a busy time for organizers in general and senior move managers in particular, said Mary Kay Buisse, NASSM’s executive director.

As with summer visits, the holidays are a time of year when adult children (especially those unable to visit regularly) notice how their parents are really faring, from a health and independent living standpoint, she said.

Navigating a parent’s housing transition can be challenging, said senior move manager Becky Hamilton of Hamilton Transitions in Memorial. She’s also a member of NAASM.

“There’s a lot of psychology involved in what we do,” she said. “It’s also hard for adult children to let it go.”

For clients, there is the idea of a move vs. the reality of the process.

“Everything has meaning and a memory,” Hamilton said. “We sit back and listen as they vent and reminisce.”

At the core of the transition, however, is that moving a parent is about more than the move.