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Stellar Senior Housing Experts pares down to size dizzying hunt for senior living sites

Premium content from New Mexico Business Weekly by Dennis Domrzalski, NMBW Staff

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- Stellar Senior Housing Experts
- 5901-J Wyoming Blvd. NE #332, Albuquerque
- (505) 369-8291
- Fax: (505) 312-8756
- corey@stellarseniorhousingexperts.com
- stellarseniorhousingexperts.com

Sometimes missing a job interview can be a good thing. For **Corey Nelson**, a blown interview put her on the path to starting her own business.

That business, Stellar Senior Housing Experts, which helps families place loved ones in assisted living homes, appears to be doing well. Since she started it in October, Nelson has placed 16 people in 12 assisted living homes in the Albuquerque metropolitan area. Nelson's customers and clients say the service she provides is exceptional and saves them time and confusion.

"There are so many considerations and so many places around, that even though we have been here [in New Mexico] for 32 years, it was hard to figure out what to do," says **Ed Angel** of Santa Fe who recently moved his 94-year-old mother into an assisted living home in Albuquerque.

"Corey was incredibly helpful. She met with us, went over our criteria and concerns, and within a week or so she had recommended some places that really fit our needs. She did her homework and saved us incredible amounts of time."

Starting a new business is no easy task for anyone. For Nelson, it was a bit more challenging as she and her husband Ray were transferred from Denver by the U.S. Air Force to Kirtland Air Force Base in August. Ray is an officer in the Air Force.

Nelson had marketed home health care services in the Denver area, but knew nothing about Albuquerque. That didn't stop her. After deciding to go into business, the 34-year-old Nelson did

her homework.

She visited more than 40 assisted living centers to see them firsthand. She asked doctors, nurses and social workers their opinions of assisted living homes in the area. From those connections, she learned which homes had good reputations and which did not.

"I did a lot of networking and sat down with owners, found what makes them different, what they charge and what services they offer, whether they take pets or Medicaid," Nelson says. "I needed to do that if I was going to be the expert I was claiming to be. I only work with homes that are licensed and that have good reputations. If I hear bad things ... I avoid them."

What Nelson offers to customers is a wide range of choices that meet their needs and budgets.

The homes she deals with charge anywhere from \$2,250 to \$8,000 per month. Her service is free to families. She earns a percentage of the first month's rent from the assisted living home.

Not only does Nelson's service save families time and the frustration of trying to find a good home for a loved one, she saves the home's owners time too. Assisted living owners spend vast amounts of time being interviewed by families and showing them facilities, only to find that the cost might be out of a family's budget range.

"We spend a lot of time with families, and sometimes they can't afford us. Corey has done the research. She is knowledgeable, and she is ready to match family members with the right place," says **Gloria Martinez-Newton**, co-owner of **Haven Care**, which operates six assisted living homes in Albuquerque and Rio Rancho.

Martinez-Newton says she knows of one other firm in Albuquerque that offers the type of services that Nelson does: A Place for Mom, a national referral service that offers services in all 50 states.

Nelson almost didn't start her own business. She and her husband made a home-hunting trip to Albuquerque last spring. While here, Nelson was supposed to meet with a contact in the home health services about a possible marketing job. Nelson didn't know that the local coffee shop at which they were to meet had several locations. She picked the wrong one, missed the meeting and returned to Denver depressed. After talking to a friend who was doing in Denver what she now does in Albuquerque, Nelson decided go out on her own.

"I was upset, but I said, 'Dang it. I know how to market and I can make it work,'" Nelson says. "If you do what's right for everyone, things are going to work out."