

Caregivers Unite!

Submitted by Sara L. Lieber, L.S.W., Owner and Operator of Senior Sidekicks

The latest report by Caregiving in the US 2015⁽¹⁾ says that 43.5 million adults are caregivers, yet it's not on the national radar. There are several national associations; Family Caregiver Alliance⁽²⁾ and American Society on Aging⁽³⁾. These organizations offer research, advice and support. However, this awareness does not seem to have reached other sectors of society.

For example, most employers understand new parents want time off. If a caregiver needs to rearrange her schedule to care for a loved one it is not as well understood. Maternity leave is usually a defined period. Caregiving demands do not lend themselves to defined periods. A caregiver may need time to take her loved one to the doctor one week and to the lab next week.

There are many who are missing our data. Doctors do not include questions about one's caregiving status. They ask about smoking, drinking, diet and exercise. Have you ever been asked if you are a caregiver? Yet caregiving associations show that caregivers can suffer costly health consequences: \$9.7 billion

in 2014⁽⁴⁾. Does your child's school or day care ask about household changes like a new baby? Do they also ask about how much time you devote to caring for grandparents? We have Father's Day, Mother's Day & Grandparent's Day. When do we recognize caregivers? Did you know that November is National Caregiving Month?

I have written 5 articles on this subject from all angles: parents of young children, employees, employers, doctors, and the general public. Those who responded were usually caregivers. *I conclude that only caregivers can get this issue onto the national radar.* Caregiving is too important and touches too many people in the prime of their lives to be ignored. I believe caregiving is ignored out of ignorance. Others do not realize how this status permeates other parts of life which seem separate but are not. Margaret Mead said; "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

What can we do? Here are some simple strategies to raise awareness in your social circle:

1. Prepare yourself. Read information on caregiving



organizations' websites. We can offer these facts in our discussions. We can present our numbers in weekly tasks and hours. Caregivers may need to track these data first. I am surprised at how many do not realize how much time they really spend or tasks they perform. The Alzheimer Association puts it at 17.9 billion hours⁽⁴⁾ of unpaid care! What would happen if caregivers went away and society had to pay for that? It would cost \$217.7 billion⁽⁵⁾! That equals the net worth of 8+ MacDonald's!

2. Be the first to bring up the caregiving topic. Are you meeting with your child's teacher or day care? Mention

how much you do in weekly caregiving. Explain that you do all these in addition to a job, a home, a family and a pet! Offer some national facts and figures to support your point that you are not unique! Ask if the staff knows how many other parents are also caregivers. Request a survey.

3. Write-in your status as a caregiver on your doctor's health questioner. Tell them the hours you spend and weekly tasks. When you meet the doctor, tell him your caregiving numbers. Add facts and figures to support your personal data. They need to know that you are part of larger group.

Continued on next page

Caregivers Unite!

from previous page

Explain that caregiving has far-reaching health consequences; \$9.7 billion in 2014⁽⁵⁾.

4. ***At your job, ask others if they are also caregivers.*** Share your weekly hours/tasks and information. Encourage other employee discussions. You could meet at lunch and share experiences. You could organize a Caregiver Pot-Luck Lunch. Creating a support group at work helps current caregivers and becomes an employee resource for future caregivers.
5. ***At your church, ask you pastor to consider ways to honor caregivers.*** Bring up and share your information. Raise the issue this year. By next year things will be different if you and other caregivers organize. You are not asking for something new, support and care are intrinsic to faith communities.

History shows that groups have used their experiences to fuel their drive to raise awareness and make change. Caregivers are already in good company. I believe we can change our social circles. Knit these social circles together and they will reach across the country. Therefore, caregivers unite!

⁽¹⁾Caregiving in the US 2015, by AARP (American Association of Retired Persons), Public Policy Institute & NAC (National Alliance for Caregiving). WEB. www.aarp.org/PublicPolicyInstitute/home-family/caregiving.

⁽²⁾Family Caregiver Alliance of the National Center on Caregiving. WEB. www.caregiver.org.

⁽³⁾ASA (American Society on Aging) WEB. www.asaging/education, Page: Caregiving.

⁽⁴⁾Alzheimer Association WEB. www.alz.org. Page Quick Facts/caregiving.

⁽⁵⁾Ibid. WEB. www.alz.org, Facts and figures.