

# Family Caregiver Newsletter

Newsletter Date December 2013

## The Powerful Caregiver

*This column is named after the class "Powerful Tools for Caregivers," a six-session workshop on helping caregiving families thrive (not just survive). It is offered in Racine County several times a year.*

### Celebration and Communication

*Roger is a 76-year-old retired fire fighter. Early this year he had a stroke which left him with paralysis on his right side and difficulty speaking. Roger had always been the burly, talkative man in the room who had a story to illustrate any subject of discussion. He was accustomed to his well-deserved image as a hero. Now Roger has great difficulty expressing himself, tries to do everything with his left hand, and gets around in a wheelchair. He often feels very irritated with his situation, and sometimes shows anger toward Trudy, his wife and caregiver. It's December, and they are making plans to celebrate the winter holidays with their children and grandchildren. Trudy has made her to-do list: clean the house from top to bottom, cook everyone's favorite dishes, bake lots of cookies for the children, decorate, shop, wrap gifts, take Roger to the firehouse party, and so on. Trudy has high blood pressure. She's having frequent headaches and difficulty*

*sleeping and thinks that her medication needs to be changed. She adds to her list: "Call Dr. and make appointment for after the holidays." One morning she is caring for Roger when he becomes frustrated and yells one of the few words he's able to use: a cuss word.*

*Trudy bursts into tears and yells back at him. When she's finished crying, she realizes that something has to change.*



*Sometimes if you have one foot in yesterday and one foot into tomorrow, then we may be missing the beautiful holiday present that is being given to us this day.*

*Ellen is a 55-year-old website designer who lives with Sarah, her 85-year-old mother. Sarah has a diagnosis of dementia. She wants to be with Ellen at all times, and she asks the same questions repeatedly. It is increasingly difficult for Ellen to work while her mother is awake.*

#### Inside this issue:

Communication and Celebration	1
Community Resources	3
Support Groups for Family Caregivers	4
Caregiver Opportunities	4



**Contact:**  
**Marilyn Joyce**  
**Caregiver**  
**Support**  
**Specialist**

**Aging and**  
**Disability**  
**Resource**  
**Center of**  
**Racine County**

262- 833-8764  
[marilyn.joyce@goracine.org](mailto:marilyn.joyce@goracine.org)



continued from front page

*She tries to accomplish what is necessary after Sarah goes to bed, but lately Sarah has been very wakeful at night, too. Ellen's sister and brother are coming home for brief visits soon. Ellen is hoping for their help and suggestions to make the caregiving situation more sustainable.*

The winter holiday season can be a bittersweet time for caregiving families. There is a lot of work and fun, and who gets more of which is often just not fair! Here are some common situations caregiver support specialists hear about:

- Primary family caregivers take on the elephant's share of celebration preparation and then "hit a wall," "have a meltdown," "lose it," or get sick.
- Some family members deny the care receiver's decline, partly because that person may feel and function much better when there is company in the house.
- Other family members do realize the extent of the decline, and they offer well-meaning (but maybe not very useful) suggestions to the primary caregiver.
- Old sibling rivalries rear their heads, causing divisions and hurt feelings that hinder a family from working well as a team.
- Illnesses are more common and Healthcare professionals busier.
- Expectations of perfection and permanence (fed by commercialization) put stress levels "over the top."

Here are a few principles of good communication that may be helpful to have in your pocket:

Use "I" messages – "I need help." "I'm feeling overwhelmed." "I want to have some time away." **Not:** "You never..." "If you'd just..." "Why don't you....?"

Find common ground "I know we all love Mom and want the best for her."

Ban blaming Unfortunate events happen to people and families for very complex reasons. Recognizing this fact makes for better feelings than pointing fingers and keeping score. However, when emotionally overwhelmed, I think it is natural to want to dump a load of blame somewhere. Try to let that tendency come and go without damaging relationships or saddling yourself with later regret. Talking to someone who understands these dynamics is helpful.

Listen generously – Each family member may be at a different stage in accepting the situation and what it means to his/her daily life. When people have had a chance to air their feelings and feel heard, they may sooner be ready to accept responsibility for help that is needed.

Name feelings: Sometimes a lot of angst poisons relationships, when a simple statement like: "I feel angry" or "I am sad" would communicate a clearer message. If stating an emotion brings on the tears, they can be cleansing to the body and the atmosphere. Also, in the vignette above, since Roger can't verbalize about his own feelings very well, he might benefit from having someone say something like "This must be frustrating for you" or "You seem sad."

Describe observations factually, then describe how you feel: "Dad was alone

... continued from page 2

for two hours yesterday. I'm worried that he may fall or leave the house when no one else is there. "

Offer improvement to situation diplomatically: "Call me when you can't be with Dad when it's your turn. I will trade times with you if I can. That way Dad will be safer in his home. Otherwise, we may have to consider other living arrangements."

None of this is easy and none of it works all the time. But these tips may serve you well in those times when you need to give a message that will achieve

resolution to a challenging situation, bring you the help you need, and nurture important relationships.

**One More Thing:** With the season of generosity and gift-giving ahead, ask your loved ones for gifts of respite time and opportunities to pamper yourself. These are not luxuries. They are requirements for the role of Family Caregiver. The best present you can give your family is to be healthy yourself.



## Community Resources

This column highlights some of the many resources in our community. For more, see the Community Resource Directory available from the Aging and Disability Resource Center (262-833-8777) or [www.adrc.racineco.com](http://www.adrc.racineco.com).

### Hidden Treasure!

Looking for information that is not found in our resource books? Sometimes the ADRC has resource information that is listed separately, or we would be happy to work on ideas to help in your situation. For example, we have listings of Private Case Managers, Concierge Services, In- Home Foot Care Providers and more:

Advance Directives – copies of forms for Power of Attorney for both Health Care and Finance, and information on how to obtain/should I obtain guardianship.

Information on tasks like visiting the doctor, long distance caregiving, health and wellness, and driving.

Give the ADRC a call, Monday- Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. and we will be happy to help with information and ideas. 262-833-8777 or toll free at 866-219-1043.

### Alzheimer's Association:

Information, referral and support services

**Holidays and Alzheimer's Families**, please contact the 24/7 Helpline: 800.272.3900  
Website: [www.alz.org/sewi](http://www.alz.org/sewi)  
Email contact: [sewi@alz.org](mailto:sewi@alz.org)

### Caregiver and Dementia Caregiver Center

Do you have questions about Alzheimer's disease or related disorders? As the world leader in Alzheimer research and support we provide reliable guidance and information to all those who need it, 24 hours a day , seven days a week. Translation services are available in 140 languages and dialects.

### Care Consultations

Chapter staff members are available the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month 1-4 p.m., at the Racine ADRC office. To assist families with problem solving and goal setting through confidential and free care consultations. Call the ADRC to arrange.

*May I have...  
Serenity to  
accept the things  
I cannot change,  
Courage to  
change the things  
I can, and  
Wisdom to know  
the difference.*



**Aging and  
Disability Resource  
Center of Racine  
County**

14200 Washington Ave  
Sturtevant, WI 53177

Phone: 262-833-8777  
Toll Free: 866-219-1043  
[www.adrc.racineco.com](http://www.adrc.racineco.com)

Marilyn Joyce  
Email: [adrc@goracine.org](mailto:adrc@goracine.org)



**Caregiver  
Opportunities**

**Living Options Seminar  
Thursday, December 12th  
5:30-7:00pm**

Hosted by the Aging & Disability Resource Center of Racine County Presented by Carolyn Seeger, VP Lincoln Lutheran of Racine Learn the basics of living options in Racine County such as subsidized housing apartments, assisted living and nursing homes.

**Ives Grove Auditorium  
14200 Washington Ave  
Sturtevant, WI 53177**

Call **262-833-8777** to reserve.

Mary Finley, Outreach Specialist **Alzheimer's Association**, will be available for family consultations on Wednesday, December 18th between 2 and 4 p.m. at the ADRC office located at 14200 Washington Ave (just west of I-94). This invitation is extended to those dealing with **any type of dementia**. For an appointment call Felicia Elias, 833-8761.

**Support Groups for Family Caregivers**

**First Thursday 10:30 am-12 Noon**

**December 5th**

**Alzheimer's Association Group**

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias  
Lincoln Lutheran Office Bldg, 2000 Domanik Drive, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor

**First Friday 12 Noon-1pm**

**"Caregiver Connection" Telephone Group**

**December 6th**

Call 262-833-8762 to pre-register

**Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm**

**December 10th**

Yorkville United Methodist Church

17645 Old Yorkville Rd. (3 Miles West of I-94, Just N. of Highway 20)

**Second Saturday 10:30 am-12 Noon**

**December 14th**

Atonement Lutheran Church

2915 Wright Ave

Park and enter in back of building (on South side)

**Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 pm**

**December 18th**

Burlington Senior Center, Eppers Room,  
209 N Main St

**Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 pm**

**December 19th**

**Alzheimer's Association Group**

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias  
Atonement Lutheran Church, 2915 Wright Ave  
Park and enter in back of building (on South side)