

Stretched too thin caring for older loved one?

Know what it's like to feel stretched too thin? In today's complex world, most of us have learned to juggle a variety of conflicting roles. We balance the attention we give to family, work and social obligations, and to find time to take care of ourselves as well. Many baby boomers have discovered an unexpected added obligation and concern – how to meet Mom or Dad's changing needs while attending to the rest of their busy lives. Many want to spend as much time as possible with their aging parents, but it becomes difficult when their parent's needs occur during times they are also obligated to other parts of their lives. Making sure they get the attention and care they need and deserve can tip the sensitive scales of a carefully balanced life toward “overwhelmed.”

“There are these little treasures within our community for our elderly residents,” states Roxanne Emerson, Director of Services to Seniors & Person with Special Needs. HSI Resources for ElderCare program provides services such as adult day programs, meals and transportation that are critical to families who have elderly parents or a sick or aging spouse who wants to remain in their homes. HSI's support services help the elderly maintain or improve their well-being, while giving peace of mind, support, and often, a much needed break for caregivers.

Circle of Friends, HSI's licensed adult day program, provides supportive services and supervision for persons 55 and older with physical or mental impairments. Chronic illness, disabilities, depression, memory loss, loneliness and the need for post-hospitalization care are some of the reasons families seek the services. Circle of Friends offers daytime care for elderly loved ones while families attend to their jobs, appointments, or a much needed break. Cost of the program can be paid privately, through long-term care insurance, the Veterans Administration or Washington County when the participant qualifies for county assistance. Emerson states, “Circle of Friends is a program of ‘immeasurable significance’. Once experienced, most participants have the same reaction: “Wow! I wish I'd come here sooner!”

The need for an adult day program was identified through the Washington County Gaps Analysis, but Emerson stresses that she's gained an increased understanding of the importance of the program by talking to individuals served by the program, especially the clients' families. She says 70 to 75

percent of caregivers say they didn't access the program soon enough. Some, she says, hadn't even identified themselves as caregivers.

For those who are at home, either alone or unable to cook for themselves, good nutrition is essential to the quality of life, but it's not the only factor. HSI Meals on Wheels program provides much more than a hot meal. Along with a nutritious meal, volunteers also deliver friendship and safety. "When it comes to keeping seniors safe and connected with the outside world," says Karen Gigure, HSI's Nutrition Supervisor. "Meals on Wheels is the eyes and ears of the community. Volunteers who deliver meals get to know them and can tell when something's wrong." Often, she says, volunteers are the first to find out about a need. They get in touch with the staff at Meals on Wheels, who makes sure the client is put in touch with the right resources. "People think we just drop off meals and by 12:00, it's all over with. At 12:00, our work really just starts."

Gigure gives a recent example of a client falling on the floor. While delivering a meal, a volunteer discovered the client's emergency and was able to call for help. "Think about how long that client might have stayed on the floor if the volunteer hadn't been scheduled to arrive," says Gigure. "Without volunteers, there would be no program. From retirees to corporate recruits on lunch break, volunteers are the heart of Meals on Wheels, and on thirty-three routes in Washington County, they deliver over one million meals every year."

Transportation is critical for seniors or person with disabilities to remain independent. Emerson also knows that families need to be certain their loved one will be taken care of from the time they leave their home, en route, and into the front door of their destination. HSI has a unique countywide para-transit system. They offer clients who need transportation to appointments, shopping and social engagements "door *through* door" services aboard an HSI transporter. It's one more way HSI goes beyond the basics to make sure seniors are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve and receive the services they and their families need.

Programs like Circle of Friends, Meals on Wheels and transportation can help families keep their loved ones safely living at home. For more information about volunteering for the Meals on Wheels program or services for through **Resources for Eldercare call 651- 275-5810.**

HSI, a nonprofit organization with 7 offices located throughout Washington County, annually serves more than 8,600 residents by providing multi-services for adults, children, adolescents, and families who face daily struggles related to emotional disorder, mental illness, chemical dependency, or domestic or sexual abuse. In addition, HSI provides services for the elderly and adults with disabilities, which include nutritional services (Meals on Wheels and congregate dining), adult day programs, and transportation. For more information about HSI call 651-777-5222 or visit their web site at www.hsicares.org .