

There are many faces of caregiving. Nearly one out of every four U.S. households is involved with caregiving (23% or 22.4 million households). Caregivers are necessary for family members of all ages. There are more than 44 million caregivers providing care to an adult family member of age 18 or older and of these, 79% are caring for someone over the age of 50. Regardless of what a caregiver does to provide support for someone, they are a caregiver and need and deserve support and assistance and current information to make decisions about their loved one's care.

Eighty percent of all care provided to older adults in our country is provided by family members. Caregivers can be neighbors, daughters, sons, nieces, nephews, family friends, or faith community family. Caregivers can provide a range of support including grocery shopping, snow removal, a friendly visit, and more direct support such as meal preparation, bathing, dressing, housekeeping and 24 hour care. According to the National Alliance for Caregiving on average most caregivers provide 20 hours per week caring for their loved ones while 13% of family caregivers are providing 40 hours of care a week or more.

The life of a caregiver is stressful and rarely do they have a choice to be a caregiver or not. Once a person joins the ranks of the caregiving a decline in health is imminent and the degree of deterioration in caregivers' health increases in relation to the intensity and the amount of time they spend caregiving. Challenges that most caregivers face include keeping the care recipient safe at home, balancing work and family responsibilities and managing emotional and physical stress. Today, it is not uncommon to find caregivers balancing work, family, young children and caregiving duties for older family members. The amount of stress and challenges that result from living with these caregiving responsibilities on a daily basis can be vast at times.

The good news is there is a network of aging service providers who are available to help. There are 629 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) across the nation. This grassroots organization was built to respond to the needs in the communities they serve. They all manage programs and services designed to meet the needs of its particular area. Their mission is to deliver easily accessible, high-quality services that sustain healthy lifestyles and support self-sufficiency in the aging population. The challenge is knowing where to start when seeking services. In Kansas 11 AAA are available throughout the state to provide information, services and options to both seniors and caregivers. Along with the local AAAs, non-profit, government agencies and for profit companies provide a variety of services from transportation to counseling, support groups, in-home services, and much more.

Sara's Story:

Sara, a 52 year old caregiver and mother is caring for her mother and father. Her 78 year old father suffers with Alzheimer's disease. Her mother, age 75, is the primary caregiver for her husband. Sara supports her mother and assists with the caregiving duties as needed along with monitoring her mother's health. Although Sara works 3rd shift she often helped out by staying with her dad so that mom could attend her own medical treatment or take some time for herself, even just to sleep sometimes. Sara felt help was needed and contacted CPAAA. The CPAAA provided support, information and resources to help them maintain their caregiving duties while still taking care of themselves. CPAAA connected Sara and her mother to local resources and caregiver services that could provide direct assistance to the family such as respite care and other in-home supportive services and also recommended individual counseling for Sara's mom to address caregiver stress and to obtain positive coping skills.

Aging can create a variety of challenges for caregivers and seniors. Some solutions may be simple, others can be quite complex. Often, seniors and caregivers need advice from experienced and knowledgeable sources. That's where local resources can be of assistance. The

Central Plains Area Agency on Aging (CPAAA) has offered support and assistance to seniors and caregivers for over 30 years. CPAAA is located in Wichita but provides support for residents of Butler, Harvey and Sedgwick Counties in Kansas and in Sara's case referrals to much needed support services and tips that helped her and her mother continue to provide quality care for her father.

Like Sara, forty seven percent of caregivers are employed, hence the term "working caregiver". With more individuals remaining in the work force longer, the number of working caregivers is increasing. CPAAA has assisted many local employers to provide support for working caregivers such as on site caregiver groups, informational presentations and on-site visits from a Care Manager. All of these services provide support to the caregiver, increase productivity and help maintain longevity in the workforce.

CPAAA is a resource for anyone of any age, lay person or professional who needs information on programs and services for seniors and caregivers including housing options, nursing home placement, in-home services, case management, long distance caregiving, transportation, supportive services, health and wellness program, and recreational and volunteer opportunities. Caregivers do not have to do this alone; CPAAA is here to assist caregivers and seniors through life's transitions with various levels of support. A caregiver can find help by calling CPAAA's Information and Assistance at 316-660-5120 or 800-367-7298 or by visiting www.cpaaa.org.