



# Caregiver News

Winter Sunrise January 2017



Dear Caregivers and Friends,

The month of November was a flurry of activity. It was National Family Caregiver Month *and*, I learned, it was Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month and Hospice and Home Care Month. Between the three communities, there were many events in which to participate. Some were attended by just a few and some were attended by many.

One such event I attended was the "Holiday Grief Support Group" hosted by the Widow Person's Group and Hospice and Home Care. There were nearly 40 people in attendance. I attended to make a presentation on the Caregiver Support Program, but also as a participant. I am so glad that I did, and that which lingers with me the most from the evening is: the most significant thing the people in this group had in common was their shared experience. And, through their shared experience, I witnessed genuine expressions of grief and joy and compassion. I laughed and cried, myself, and felt I was truly heard. I was surprised by the depth of discussion and support provided between the participants. It was very refreshing and it inspired hope in me that people are really caring for and about each other and who are doing so with intention.

Although, people come and go, I learned this group has been meeting for more than 10 years. They started as a support group and evolved into a social network. They go to brunch together, local community events and sometimes they travel together.

Having had this experience caused me to think more about the call-in support group we facilitate for caregivers through the Family Caregiver Resource Program: ***are we doing all we can to support our caregivers?*** Should we be meeting more often or in person on occasion? Are there other activities or events of interest? And, do our caregivers even have any more discretionary time for added activities? If not, can we find ways to create more time?

Please take a look at "One Caregiver's Story: Creating a Care-Tree" on page 4. It's about asking people for and accepting help. And, it's about helping people in our lives understand that caregiving is sometimes too much responsibility for one person and that caregivers need time to live their lives fully, as well.

Most of all, let us hear from you. Let us know how we might provide support that honors your unique family circumstances. Let us help you identify additional supports in your community. It's what we are here for and we want to help.

To our collective well-being,

Shelly Smith, Family Caregiver Resource Specialist



## PREVENTING FALLS

Winter is a time of slippery walkways and steps. Our elders and those who care for them are particularly vulnerable to falling this time of year. Falling is the leading cause of accidental death for people 65 years and older and the most common cause of emergency room visits. There are some things you can do to help prevent falls. The following are suggestions from the National Council on Aging. Please consider:

Winterize shoes, boots, and assistive devices:

- attach spike-less ice and snow shoe gripper sole covers to shoes (like yak traks)
- attach an ice gripper cane tip that has spikes on the bottom to penetrate ice
- choose shoes with rubber soles
- make wheel chair snow tires (can be inexpensively made with zip ties)
- Carry kitty litter for slick surfaces (carry a small zip lock bag filled with kitty litter that can be kept in your pocket and cast it out in front of you on slick surfaces)

Give the gift of Fall Prevention:

- Fall alarm systems that are motion triggered
- Higher toilets in the home
- Grab bars in bathroom and next to steps and thresholds
- Install stair railings on both sides of stairs, set automatic lights over stairways and entrances
- Give tiny flashlights to attach to keys, hats and coat buttons

Review vision health with your elder; chronic health conditions change over time and can increase and change risk factors. Be mindful of changes with your elder and their environment.

**If you need assistance getting access to any above items, please contact us. We can help you find what you need and in some cases may be able to find good second hand items. There may be grant monies available based on need.**

### **Tai Chi for elders and caregivers age 60 years and older**

**Level I, 8 week series begins on January 10, 2017 5:30 pm - 6:30 pm**

Classes will be held twice weekly on Tuesdays and Fridays at the Filipino Hall, Juneau  
Registration is required. Please call Eileen Hosey at 463-6113

**The benefits of Tai Chi for elders are many including increased strength, energy, flexibility and balance. Studies show the practice of Tai Chi reduces the risk of falling. These classes are designed for participants 60 years and older and no previous experience is required. *CLASSES ARE FREE!***

### Caregiver Call-in Support Group

***“I have always come away with at least one new idea, activity, or piece of information that has proven beneficial”***

“As a recent new participant to the Call-in Caregiver Support Group, and a new caregiver, I have found the monthly phone calls and information follow ups to be very beneficial to me for where I am in the caregiving journey. There are times I just listen to the phone sessions, and times I have been able to ask questions for advice or suggestions. I have always come away with at least one new idea, activity, or piece of information that has proven beneficial. It has been helpful just knowing that my myriad of emotions are experienced by others and that there are people to go to for assistance and guidance.

*Wrangell Caregiver, January 2017*

### Four Good Films About Caregiving

#### ***Life Itself***

a biographical documentary about film critic Roger Ebert’s memoirs and his wife, Chaz, who was his caregiver.

#### ***The Descendants***

George Clooney is the caregiver for his wife. This film addresses the issues of complex family dynamics and end of life issues.

#### ***Robot and Frank***

Susan Sarandon and Frank Langella star in this humorous character study on aging and a robot caregiver. A quirky look at the future of technology and caregiving.

#### ***Still Alice***

Julianne Moore won an Oscar for her portrayal of a woman who is developing early on-set Alzheimer’s Disease and its impact on family and caregivers.

## Call-in Caregiver Support Group



### ***Why Call-in?***

- ◆ Talk with people who will understand your experience.
- ◆ Know that you are not alone on your journey.
- ◆ Receive support from peers.
- ◆ Learn more about self care and develop caregiving skills.

### peer Support



**Next Call-in Meetings are scheduled for:**

**Thursday, January 12th**

**Thursday, February 9th**

**Thursday, March 9th**

**12:00 noon**

### ***Who is eligible to***

***participate?*** People living in Southeast Alaska who are caring for elders, family, friends and neighbors.

**In Juneau, call 463-6177 and toll free throughout Southeast, call 1-866-746-6177 for more details and to get the call-in code.**

Call the Senior and Caregiver Resource Center for information about these upcoming events, support groups, and more. In Juneau at 463-6177 or toll free at (866) 746-6177.

***Let us know how we can support you!***

## Sharing Wisdom

### Creating a Care-Tree: One Caregiver's Story

I want to share a story with you about conversations I've been having with a caregiver (I will call her Eleanor). Eleanor is caring for a friend (I will call her Ruth). They have been close friends for many years. Ruth does not have family or other friends available to her, so Eleanor has taken on the role of primary caregiver. Ruth has significant health challenges requiring frequent attention and trips to her physician's office. She is able to get herself to the bathroom but is not mobile, otherwise. Ruth has come to depend on Eleanor daily for a great many supports. Eleanor is beginning to feel burn out. She is an elder herself, works part time and has a large family and friends. The time she dedicates to caring for her friend Ruth is taking a toll on her own well-being and quality of life. Eleanor mentioned she recently decided not to answer the phone when Ruth calls, which makes her feel guilty. She has tried to convince Ruth to accept in-home services to relieve her of some responsibility but Ruth continues to decline services. Ruth stated, "I have Eleanor to take care of me." Eleanor thinks Ruth equates receiving help as a loss of independence.

In my recent conversation with Eleanor, we talked about setting boundaries. We talked about making a list of all services and supports Ruth needs and then circle the supports she is prepared to provide herself, comfortably. The supports and services remaining on the list need to be discussed with Ruth resulting in a plan of what needs to be done and who is available to fill those needs. We identified a few options including choosing in-home services, adjusting some of her expectations for things she would like to have done around the house and their frequency, and seeking other sources of support. Eleanor and I talked about the supports she has as a caregiver. Although, Ruth does not have other supports, yet identified, we know Eleanor does have many people in her life she can call upon. She might ask one of her family members to clean the cat box. She might ask a friend from her faith community to be in charge of transportation. She might also ask someone to take on grocery shopping, procuring medications or shoveling the driveway. Sometimes shifting the focus from the supports an elder needs to the supports a caregiver needs is helpful. In some cases, it might be the elder has more friends and family than the caregiver, in which case asking for help from the elder's family and friends would be appropriate. The goal is to spread the responsibility of caring for an elder to more than one person. We know the responsibility of caring for an elder is often too great for just one person.

***Creating a "care-tree" can be helpful.*** Going through the process of identifying people in our family and other networks, mapping out who can do what and when, can lighten the load tremendously for a primary caregiver. If you would like more information on how to create a "care-tree" call the Family Caregiver Support Program. We will gladly talk with you about how it works and we are available to go through the process of designing one with you. Eleanor liked the idea of asking for help and setting boundaries. She realizes she has the right to protect her own quality of life and that she shouldn't feel guilty about it. Securing help from her personal networks will relieve her from burn-out which will allow her to remain a caregiver for Ruth for a longer period of time. And, even though Ruth does not recognize this, asking for and accepting support from others will actually prolong her independence.

If you are willing to share your own story and wisdom, we would very much like to hear from you. We learn so much from the experiences of our peers.