

# The DeKalb Caregiver Resource Network

## 1 Introduction – The Need for Caregiver Services

In 2014, the senior population in the United States (persons 65 years of age or over) reached 46.2 million. At 14.5% of the population, this equates to one of seven Americans. It is estimated that by the year 2060, there will be approximately 98 million senior US citizens. While many older Americans live active, independent lives, there is a large segment of the population that require the support of caregivers.

Georgia has over 400,000 caregivers providing over 568 million hours of unpaid care, with a total value of \$7Billion. The traditional image of caregivers includes healthcare professionals, volunteer agencies, and adult children. Many caregivers in America and in DeKalb county, however, are seniors themselves. Seniors are called upon to care for ageing spouses, parents, siblings, or even neighbors. In recent years, changing societal and family structures have resulted in many grandparents playing the role as primary caregiver or legal guardian to their minor grandchildren. Whatever the scenario, serving as primary caregiver presents a particular set of physical, emotional and financial demands that caregivers are often not prepared for, and the need for information, resources and support is great and growing daily.

Currently, no caregiver support services exist in southern DeKalb county. Many of DeKalb's seniors live on fixed incomes, and thus cannot tap into private care resources to provide nursing, dietary, mental and emotional support. This leaves people providing care on their own with limited knowledge of care methods, such as creating menus, administering physical therapies, engaging in mentally stimulating activities. In addition to the responsibilities of their role, the caregiver also struggles with various physical and emotional demands, which can be exacerbated by the caregiver being themselves a senior with personal health concerns. Senior caregivers are a unique community with a critical and widely unmet need for support.

## 2 The DeKalb Caregiver Support Network Customer

The Anytown Senior Center in Lithonia, Georgia, was established in XXXX, to provide the DeKalb County senior population with resources that respond to the varying needs of seniors of all lifestyles, including those seniors who serve in the caregiver role.

As the center serves active seniors from across DeKalb county, many members currently serve as caregivers to loved ones and friends and have expressed the need for such a resource. For the past 10 years, the center has conducted a Caregiver Support Group event, a two-part symposium that offers workshops, panel discussions, and activities that explore the needs of caregivers and provide them with new information on providing quality care at home as well as managing one's own emotional and physical health. These events are planned and facilitated by two Licensed Social Workers, who work onsite at Anytown Senior Center and thus have a true understanding of the caregiver audience and their needs.

The overwhelming interest in these annual events have revealed the need for ongoing support and resources. Direct feedback from participants suggest that having a reliable resource would make caregivers more confident and comfortable in their roles.

### 3 Scope of Services

The **DeKalb Caregiver Resource Network** is a program that will provide support, information and resources to seniors who serve as caregivers in their families and communities. The program will offer several services:

- **Monthly Caregiver Support meetings**, where senior caregivers can meet to talk, seek support, and receive guidance from professionals that will be invited/scheduled to attend and facilitate group discussions. These meetings will provide caregivers with a safe place to express concerns and relive some of the emotional stress associated with the responsibility of caring for a loved one.
- **The Caregiver 411 Information Referral Program** will be a system of services and support that seniors may access for help with their specific concerns. An online portal of DeKalb County support resources will be vetted, built and maintained. This network will be a reliable resource for needs specific to senior caregivers, who may lack the physical ability to provide for their charges (i.e. technical skills, driving ability, administration of medications or physical therapy activities). A monthly newsletter will provide information on upcoming events, new resources and information of specific interest to caregivers.
- **Workshops** – in addition to ongoing monthly meetings where caregivers may seek information and support for ongoing concerns, the Resource Network will host workshops on various special subjects, identified by feedback received from members of the community. Attendees can receive information or be introduced to topics of special concern, such as planning special diets, engaging in healthy physical activity, how to prepare for surgery, the role of the grandparent as guardian, understanding insurance policies, and stress management. Partnerships with support organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association, the Visiting Nurses Association, and the Office of Senior Affairs will underscore the information provided.
- **The Annual Caregivers Conference** is a special event that will bring together members of the caregivers network community, to celebrate a year of learning and receiving support, engage in fun activities, learn about new services and resources, and connect with other senior caregivers. Panel discussions, workshops, and group activities will round out the conference, allowing all participants to prepare for a new year with new knowledge.
- **Respite care/sitter services** will be made available to members who wish to participate in activities, but who are responsible for providing round-the-clock care for their loved ones. Respite services are designed to offer caregivers opportunities to step away from the care setting and participate in activities that may help relieve stress. The Caregivers Resource Network will offer vouchers for membership with Anytown Senior Center or the person's local senior center (if fee based); other stress relieving, special quality-of-life enhancing activities such as dinner and a movie, spa days, or vouchers for time to rest and attend to personal matters, which is something that many senior caregivers report as significant need.

ATSC is seeking funding in order to manage these programs. Funds will be allocated to stipends for professionals providing guidance and information to caregivers, engagement of transportation services for seniors who wish to attend monthly caregiver support meetings, and technology for building and maintaining the online resource network.

## 4 Methodology

Anytown Senior Center's approach to senior caregiver support is focused on an evidenced-based approach which have been highlighted in studies over the past decade. Common among research outcomes are the benefits that result from intervention services provided to caregivers, including stress decrease, new skill education and internal resource building, and provision of external resources. Most significant results after a one-year study were significant improvement in depressive symptoms and substantially delayed nursing home placement due to caregiver intervention.<sup>i</sup>

Study results also emphasized that based on study outcomes, caregiver support is not synonymous with behavioral management, but instead should focus on multi-component intervention programs that encompass education, emotional support, and ongoing family intervention.<sup>ii</sup> These are they key focus areas of the Caregiver Resource Network and its offerings.

The focus on education will be applied through monthly meetings and workshops will be designed to focus on topics of special interest/concern in the senior caregiver community. By offering overview of the subject, presentations by professionals in related areas, as well as take-home educational materials, caregivers will regularly receive new information that will enhance their experience at the care site.

Emotional support is the cornerstone of the Caregiver Resource Network, as any intervention provided to caregivers results in reduced stress and anxiety. Monthly meetings provide attendees with the opportunity to speak openly and safely about fears and frustrations, and to receive support from other attendees through sharing experiences. Workshops will serve to lessen the fear that caregivers experience when performing activities that they are not experienced with (medical, dietary, recreational, emotional). The information received at workshops will give caregivers more confidence with meeting the demands of the care recipient.

Ongoing family intervention through the Caregiver Resource Network is offered through the ongoing services available to caregivers. The Caregiver 411 Intervention Directory, as an online resource, is one that is accessible 24 hours, 7 days per week, putting caregivers closer to the support they need at any time they need it. This brings peace of mind to users and allows the program to serve our audience on an ongoing basis. In addition to the Directory, meetings will be held at regular intervals, to establish a reliable outlet that caregivers can come to rely on, much the way their care recipients rely on them.

Funding is being sought for the ongoing operation of the online directory, including website development, building and maintaining of the Caregiver 411 Intervention Directory database; procurement of materials for events; funds for award of respite care opportunities and gifts; stipends for stand in sitting services; and expenses for printing/distribution of publication.

## 5 The ATSC Footprint

Currently, Anytown Senior Center reaches over XXXX members from all areas of DeKalb County. Our current membership base consists primarily of residents of the Lithonia, Stone Mountain and Decatur areas. Many members of Anytown are caregivers to loved ones of all ages, who have expressed a need for support. Currently, these support services do not exist in Southern DeKalb County. The Caregivers Resource Network will be headquartered at the Anytown Senior Center, however, the long-term goal is to reach caregivers across Southern DeKalb. This will be achieved by hosting monthly meetings, workshops, and special events in senior centers and recreation centers that reach other neighborhoods in DeKalb.

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<sup>i</sup> Haley, William E, Ph.D., School of Aging Studies, University of South Florida.

[http://www.powershow.com/view1/4ba6a-](http://www.powershow.com/view1/4ba6a-ZDc1Z/Recent_advances_in_caregiver_intervention_research_powerpoint_ppt_presentation)

[ZDc1Z/Recent advances in caregiver intervention research powerpoint ppt presentation](http://www.powershow.com/view1/4ba6a-ZDc1Z/Recent_advances_in_caregiver_intervention_research_powerpoint_ppt_presentation)

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