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Center for Persons With Disabilities

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CAC CORNER: WHO IS A CAREGIVER?

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This CAC Corner blog post was written by Gordon Richins, CPD Consumer Liaison and the CPD’s Consumer Advisory Council’s advisor.

Who is a caregiver?

“There are four kinds of people in this world: those who have been caregivers, those who currently are caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers.” (Former first lady - Rosalynn Carter)

As an individual who uses a caregiver every day, I thought I would share some personal experiences and information, as well as gather some general information that individuals could use and share with others.

Here are some of my personal experiences with caregivers over the last 26 years from my perspective. For starters, I would like to begin with when I was released from the hospital after my accident that paralyzed me from the neck down. The only caregivers I used were family members. It took me quite a while to start accepting assistance from others, especially individuals I did not know. After I got over this hurdle, my quality of life has greatly increased and my opportunities in everyday life has expanded. The use of outside help also provides my wife time to herself. Serving as a caretaker can be very stressful and demanding and in some cases require a great deal of time. I would encourage individuals and family to seek out the use of outside help from the beginning.

I would like to share with readers some of the things I value most in a caregiver. Reliability is the most important factor for me, as well as being on time. I also value their willingness to learn how I like to do things. I want things done my way. I have had caregivers that thought they were the boss, but it didn’t take long to change that. So I guess I should add listening and respecting the individual they are caring for. Honesty, integrity, and a good sense humor are very important, also. Gender doesn’t matter to me. I just prefer someone who knows what they are doing. In a rural community my selection of caretakers is very limited, so I appreciate the help I can hire. I have friends who will only use one gender or the other, which is fine because I believe in personal choice and preference. I have found that with the lack of qualified Personal Care Assistance available, a person is not always able to be real choosy.

Some of the challenges I have had to overcome when using a caregiver are their availability and also the turnover of caretakers primarily due to the low wages or salaries. And then there is the process of training a new caretaker all over again. Also, living in a rural community on a dirt road out of town, I have the added expense of mileage for the caregivers travel. For individuals and families who may qualify for state and government assistance there may be more choice of caretakers due to the availability of competing agencies within communities. In my rural community, there is only Franklin County Medical Center home health division and a limited number of private Personal Care Attendants who work for themselves. Most communities also have some form of training opportunities for Personal Care Attendants so they can be certified or accredited and be able to be paid through an agency. This may really improve the number of caretakers available, if friends and family go through the training and become certified or accredited.

I’d like to share some advise for individuals and family who may be looking for a caregiver that could be very helpful for individuals or family members who may be looking for the first time. The most important thing you can do is to research your area for the availability of caretakers, and the organizations they may work for. It is helpful to know the organization’s hiring process and how they do background checks. In the event that they do not work for an agency and work for themselves, then you become the employer and this has IRS requirements, Workmen’s Compensation requirements, payroll requirements and in some area, certified training requirements.

There is also a great deal of information on the World Wide Web for the individual who uses caregivers and for those who are caregivers. This information is also useful for family members as they research the topic of caregiving for the elderly or individuals with disabilities.

A great place to start is a website developed by Purdue University’s Breaking New Ground Resource Center and the Indiana State Office of Rural Health. On this website there is an advertisement for To Everything There is a Season, a very beneficial and informative set of training materials.

You can also find a list of various caregiving services, organizations and resources on the Utah Resources website.
Another great resource was developed by the Utah Assistive Technology Program here at USU. It is titled the Personal Assistance Services Guide and is available to download online through the UATP, or by calling 435-797-3811. This resource guides those looking for personal assistant caregivers through the process of locating caregivers, interviewing them, learning the employer's responsibilities, training and supervising new PA's.

This is just a snapshot of a wealth of information on caregiving, hopefully you will find it useful and helpful.

As the CPD Consumer Liaison, I am also available as a contact person for general questions regarding caregiving and care receiving.

Gordon Richins