New Hampshire Focuses Long-Term Care Services on Caregivers

By Mikel Chavers [1]  
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One New Hampshire woman had been caring for her husband with Alzheimer's disease for two years. Devoted to his needs, she couldn’t leave the house. That meant she couldn’t go to her book club two nights a week.

What seemed like such a small thing was actually a key step in keeping her emotionally and mentally healthy, and avoiding burnout—a high risk for family members who become caregivers of sickly or elderly patients.

When a family member or other caregiver can no longer care for a patient, often the only other option is a nursing home.

With help from the New Hampshire Transitions in Caregiving program, the woman was able to find and pay a neighbor to look after her husband while she attended the book club. Because of that change, her blood pressure decreased.

Her husband is also still at home, not in a nursing home.

That’s because in New Hampshire, state officials are taking a common sense approach to long-term care. No one wants to be in a nursing home, so the state is shifting the paradigm to encourage home and community-based care. That program, called the New Hampshire Transitions in Caregiving, won a national CSG Innovations award—one of two in the Eastern region and one of eight nationwide.

The program helps the lifeblood of in-home long-term care: the caregivers. These are the family members, spouses and others caring for folks at home.

“The key to this project is it's consumer-directed,” said Cathy Creapaux, program specialist. The program looks at the well-being of caregivers who devote themselves to spouses with dementias, for example, or elderly family members.

It’s not a typical, cookie-cutter approach. The program tailors services and aid to caregivers, even if that means helping them to attend a book club—a little break from the burden of care—to keep them healthy. Similarly, the program also paid for a Kindle reading device for another caregiver who would tirelessly hold a book for hours on end and turn pages while her husband with Parkinson’s disease read—one of his few sources of enjoyment.
The purchase of the Kindle helped the woman avoid paying someone else $2,300 a year to sit with her husband, hold a book and turn pages for two hours a week, according to the Innovations award application [3]. Because of a tailored, flexible approach, the family caregiver gained respite and her husband regained some of his independence, according to the award application.

That idea is portable to other states as well—it just requires a shift to focus on the caregivers.

“Each state has these same dollars and I think they can use them differently,” said Kathleen Otte, director of the Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services in New Hampshire.

The program is funded by Administration on Aging Community Living Program grant funds, Title III-E Older Americans Act funds and part of the state’s general funded Alzheimer’s disease program funds.

CSG Resources

- CSG Innovations Award Application – New Hampshire Transitions in Caregiving [3]
- CSG Eastern Regional Conference Daily Meeting Newsletter [5]

Other Resources

- New Hampshire Transitions in Caregiving [6]

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