

Program supports caregivers

BY JANICE GIBBS
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COMMUNITY NOW

The average length of caregiving is 4.3 years, an exceedingly long time for the caregiver who has little support.

Community Now, a self-help group, provides information and emotional support to those who care for a loved one at home. The program is an offshoot of the Community Living Project, a 10-month pilot project managed by Aging and Disability Resource Center and Scott & White Geriatric Research Department.

A grant provided financial assistance for homemaker services and respite to the 185 families enrolled in the Community Living Project. The goal was to help patients who were at risk for nursing home placement and to reduce hospi-

- 12-week program for caregivers 10 a.m.-noon, Wednesdays, beginning July 7 at the Central Texas Council of Governments building, 2180 N. Main, Belton
 - Evening sessions begin in August and will be held at Scott & White Center for Diagnostic Medicine in Temple
 - Topics to be covered include: caregiver wellness, home safety, changes in relationships, care giving skills, stress management strategies, feelings and emotions, medication management, community resources, grief and loss, caregiver and elder abuse.
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tal admissions.

Beverly Rogers was the sole caregiver to her husband for about a year, before becoming a participant in the Community Living Program.

Having someone come in to help her husband gave Rogers

an opportunity to get out of the house. The VA is now providing her with respite care.

Scott & White provided transitional care, with specialists going into the home to help the family reconcile the patient's medications, coach them in

how to communicate with physicians and develop a personal healthcare record.

"Now as the project is winding down, we had to decide what are we going to do next," said Thom Butler, long-term care specialist.

There is little to no funding available, but the program had been highly successful and no one wanted to just quit offering support to the families, Butler said.

"We'd gone into the home, we'd done interventions, we'd worked with the families, worked with the caregivers about stress management, safety issues, all sorts of things," he said.

Peggy Naugle, health and wellness program specialist for the Area Agency on Aging of

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Central Texas, suggested that a self-help group be established, Butler said.

A workshop format will be implemented, with guest speakers and training offered.

"They can discuss the topic and how it relates to them emotionally and personally, or they can talk about whatever they want with a professional facilitator," Butler said.

The 12-week program is open to the public and participants are

encouraged to attend all sessions.

"It's not about forming a safety net, but more about empowering the families to take control of their lives," Butler said. "These caregivers have tough jobs. They have taken on new roles and there is a big need for information and emotional support."

By addressing both the education and emotional needs of the caregiver, the success of the Community Living Program could be reproduced.

"It makes the future very promising and now we have to go through the process of looking at the pilot project and figuring out where to look for other funding sources," he said.

The approximately 50 million caregivers in the United States provide \$350 billion worth of unpaid services each year. That is more than twice what is spent nationwide on nursing homes and paid home-care combined, according to the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving.

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