

Sandwich Generation

Some struggle to care for both parents and children

Brandon Siem/Staff writer - Sleepy Eye Herald Dispatch – August 07

No one wants to think about it until it actually happens: the time when you will have to take care of your children and your parents.

“Some people say being a caregiver for your parents is sacrifice, but I say we gain more from the rewards of being with them,” said Cindy Steffl, discharge planner for Sleepy Eye Medical Center. “Brown County is rich in resources and services that will help both seniors and their caregivers,” she said.

Steffl is a strong advocate for families using homecare services to ease their burdens. She worked at a nursing home for twelve years, and believes that taking care of others goes in a circle.

“80 percent of caregiving for seniors is ultimately provided by family members,” said Michelle Norsten of Homewatch Homecare.

“Sandwich generation” is the term given to the record number of Minnesotans caring for both their children and parents. Sleepy Eye area Baby Boomers are no exception. These people are finding themselves forced to become caregivers for their parents while still raising their own kids. Typically these people aren’t prepared for the financial, physical and emotional needs of the role.

Margo Sower, formerly of New Ulm, was one of those people. Sower was living in Massachusetts with her husband and son when her mother became cancer stricken. She decided to quit her job and move to New Ulm to take care of her mother.

“It was very difficult finding a place to live where we could all stay together,” said Sower.

Sower had to juggle raising her young son, tending to her mother’s needs and having her husband more than a thousand miles away. That was until she sought out a professional home care service.

For example, Homewatch Homecare provides private home care services to assist those who don’t qualify for Medicare. “We assist a couple hours a day, week or to around the clock,” said Norsten.

Home care companies provide registered health aids and nurses around the clock if need be. Seniors can even pick out the type of personality they want the caregiver to have.

“If they want a talkative personal type of person that’s who they get,” said Norsten.

Homewatch Homecare enabled Sower to have time to go do things such as camping with her son. The program made sure Sower’s mother was taken care of while she took a break.

According to the National Caregivers Association, 61 percent of “intense” family caregivers, providing 21 hours of care a week, have suffered from depression. Many become sick themselves from the stress. Caregivers are often late for work, leave early or take time off from work, which only adds to the stress.

According to a survey done on 565 Baby Boomers in their 50s or 60s, 93 percent want to stay living in the home of their own. Less than one percent want to live in assisted living and zero wanted to live in a nursing home. The most important thing a homecare service provides is the luxury of being able to stay at the home people love.