

Millennial caregivers could use help

By Ellen Waldman

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More than 10 million millennials now provide care to others. I'm a member of the boomer generation, and my daughter is a millennial, so this topic is close to home.

One in four family caregivers are in their 20s or 30s. This situation has its own set of challenges that are different from older family caregivers. Here are some statistics from AARP May 2018 on this topic.

- On average, millennials spend 21 hours per week on caregiving duties and nearly three quarters of them (73%) do it while also working a job.
- Only 19% discuss their caregiving duties with co-workers vs. 47% for older caregivers. Fewer than half of millennial caregivers (46%) mention their duties to a supervisor, and 54% say their work or career prospects have been negatively affected by their caregiving commitments.
- The average respondent reported spending \$6,800 per year (of their own income) on caregiving expenses. Compounded with the mounting student debt that is common for many millennials, the already profound challenges posed by caregiving can add financial pressure to the lives of caregivers.

I'm working with several families right now facing this issue. When their 30-year-old son or daughter comes in from Seattle, Texas, or elsewhere, not only are they concerned about their parents, they are afraid of their jobs being impacted. Even more, they were not expecting to have to face this life challenge so soon.

I can see how distraught they are as they watch their parents declining so quickly and so young. Some can only come to visit if their parents cover their missed income and travel expenses while they're absent from their jobs.

And that brings up the role of employment. It's clear that caregiver "family leave" programs, when offered, work well for both employee and employers, but they are not at all the norm. Some larger employers have employee assistance programs that support many of their employees' needs, but even those rarely offer help with aging family members' issues. This provision for caregiving needs may be years in coming, too.

For now, if you're an aging parent with adult children in their 20s or 30s, you might consider what you can do to help them prepare. This cohort is wonderful at using online resources but don't always know where to start. Tell them about AARP's website offering caregiver help:

(aarp.org/caregiving/?intcmp=GLBNAV-PL-CAR); Alzheimer's Association caregiver assistance:

(alz.org/help-support/caregiving); and Aging Life Care Association's professional care management:

(aginglifecare.org).

Also, they'll need you to get your own documents organized and put in place. Check out online services such as Everplans, (everplans.com) where you can store important documents. This will make it more accessible for your children should they need to help you out.

Discussions about these topics and your wishes need ongoing conversations. Ask yourself this question, offered by a good friend who is an OLLI volunteer (inside.sou.edu/olli/index.html): “Will your millennials be able to support your caregiving needs?” And then, do what you can to make this answer a yes.

I see the devastation in the adult children when they are searching for ways to help in the middle of a crisis, with no foreknowledge of any of this.

Not sure where to start? Read many of these earlier columns for what to put into place. Attend the classes at OLLI that focus on these types of preparations. New class signups begin this month. There’s not one simple way to prepare, but plans need to include the medical, financial, legal, housing and other components that make up your life. It’s now my age group that’s needing more help. I’ve seen how hard this can be for everyone. When I think of what might be on my daughter’s plate someday, maybe sooner than later (who knows?), I’m doing all I can right now to get it together, for all of our sakes. Wouldn’t you do the same?