



Aging Happens: Lifespan Respite serves many in Ashland community

By Ellen Waldman

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Millions of Americans, including 360,000 Oregonians, care for seniors or persons with special needs at home. They might truly benefit from some real respite, as long as they knew their person was also getting excellent care.

Respite care, or short-term relief, is a time for families and primary caregivers to restore and strengthen their ability to continue providing care. If you've ever been tasked with caring for a family member or friend, you know how vital it is to have a break, for both you and the person receiving your care. Locally, we have a wonderful organization, Lifespan Respite, which provides this all-important service.

Holly Churchill, site coordinator of the Lifespan Respite Senior Social Clubs, has been with this program from its start, nearly 10 years ago. Barbara Beers is the program coordinator of both the social clubs in Medford and Ashland, and the in-home respite program. Lifespan Respite is a nonprofit program of The Arc Jackson County (thearcjackson.org) and is designed and driven by local community partners and family caregivers. They were kind enough to share this information about this much-needed resource in our community.

1. What is the Lifespan Respite social club?

We are a community-based social (not medical) program that provides an afternoon of respite for family caregivers who are caring for of any adult with special needs. They also need to be living at home with a full-time family caregiver. Their needs could be learning challenges, such as any form of dementia; medical fragility; or developmental delays or other special needs. It takes place on Wednesday at the Elks Lodge, 255 E Main St., in Ashland, and on Tuesday and Thursday at Brookdale of Medford, 3033 Barnett Road, between noon and 4 p.m. Each session is limited to 12 attendees. Ashland currently has five attendees, and we would especially like more men attending. Medford consistently has eight to 12 people each session, with more than 45 families enrolled. It is a low-cost alternative providing a break for \$6.50 per hour.

2. What sorts of activities do people engage in?

Since this is a community-based social model, we engage in age-appropriate, memory activities that relate to past enjoyable experiences. These might be card games, board games, jig saw and word search puzzles, singalongs, "sittercise" and balance work, pool, Wii bowling and golf, brain teasers, mind joggers and other muscle memory prompts.

3. What is the benefit of a program like this?

Having a break of just a few hours on some days can be a lifesaver. Respite strengthens the ability of families and primary caregivers to continue providing care in the home. (I would add that it's also a real benefit for people who have these needs to socialize with others they are compatible with, in a supportive environment.)

4. How can Lifespan Respite help?

Lifespan Respite is there to take care of the family caregiver by offering a variety of resources and programs. We offer many FREE services: in-home services; overnight and weekend care; recreation activities or camps; a friendly visit to provide a social opportunity for you or a loved one; or a break that ensures you and your family's stability. Our in-home program has over 100 providers with a varied range of skills, experience and expertise. We screen and provide criminal background checks, CPR and first-aid trainings, with occasional workshops and resources for our providers as well as our families. This enable families to continue providing excellent care in the home for as long as possible, without jeopardizing the health and well-being of the family caregiver. (I will add that this last point is critical. Burnout among family caregivers too often exacts a very high cost on their own health).

5. How can people reach you?

They can call us at 541-821-8764 for information about our many services for family caregivers. Our website has application forms for the Social Clubs. They can call Holly directly at 541-621-5196 for specific information about our social clubs. People are free to drop in any Wednesday at the Elks Lodge in Ashland, or any Tuesday and Thursday at Brookdale of Medford, to check out our programs in action.

Having Lifespan Respite as a resource for families and their loved ones can make a huge difference in everyone's well-being.