

Balancing Family, Work and Caregiving: Panel Discussion

Know us before you Need Us. That was the overriding message more than 40 people heard when they gathered on January 17 at the Gallery at Villageworks for the panel discussion “Tips, Tools, and Resources for Balancing Family, Work, and Caregiving.”

“Knowing what services are available to caregivers and care recipients before you are in a crisis situation is key to a better outcome,” said Leslie May-Chibani, Assistant Director of Minuteman Senior Services.

The event, which was sponsored by the Acton-Boxborough United Way (AB United Way) and The League of Women Voters, featured three community professionals who work collaboratively to ensure the safety of, and provide services for, caregivers and care recipients in our community: May-Chibani, Cathleen Summers, RN, JD, of Bay State Elder Law, and Richard Burrows, Deputy Police Chief of the Acton Police Department.

Rachel Sagan, Executive Director of AB United Way, began the evening by saying that AB United Way performed a Community Needs Assessment last year, and caregiver stress was identified as an issue in our community. This panel is one of the ways the ABUW is supporting this need in our community.

May-Chibani said that a major concern around caregiving is self-care for the caregivers themselves. The time, stress and isolation of being a caregiver can often adversely affect a caregiver’s own health. Minuteman Senior Services offers a variety of support groups for caregivers, as well as many other services including respite care, “Meals on Wheels” meal delivery, support for transitions from hospital or rehab to home, and much more. May-Chibani emphasized that prevention can be key to a better outcome. For example, Minuteman Senior Services can provide a Home Safety Assessment. “Falls are one of the biggest reasons people end up moving to a nursing home facility, said May-Chibani, “so we may suggest a walker for a care recipient. The goal is to keep the person living where they want to live for as long as possible.”

While Minuteman Senior Services provides service to 10 area towns, all programs are state-wide; it is only the agency access point that varies. May-Chibani encourages people not to worry about service eligibility, but simply to call Minuteman Senior Services and they can assess your situation and find the right people to help.

Deputy Chief Burrows described some of the situations in which the police assist caregivers and/or care recipients. One situation is addressing when someone becomes unsafe to drive. Burrows stated the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles is an excellent source for guidelines related to mature drivers. He suggested that if you are concerned that a loved one is unsafe to drive and that person is resistant to the suggestion, you can sometimes get their physician involved.

Another prevalent issue facing senior citizens is falling prey to hoaxes, either online, on the phone, or when a fraudster comes to their door. Because senior citizens are more likely to be lonely, they can be vulnerable to hoax phone calls or bogus internet requests. Burrows mentioned the wide variety of hoaxes, including someone posing as the electric company saying that the senior citizen is delinquent in their payments and that the electricity will be shut off if they don’t pay immediately. Burrows

mentioned that hoax callers will often ask for payment in “Green Dot” cards, which are cash cards that can’t be traced.

Finally, Cathleen Summers emphasized the importance of talking to your loved ones before there is a crisis at hand, including getting legal documents in place such as a health care proxy or durable power of attorney. It is also important to make appropriate financial arrangements that will protect assets and to talk with parents about their wishes and goals as they age. Should the time come that you are acting on their behalf, you can feel confident you are honoring parents’ requests. Summer says that although it may be uncomfortable for people to talk about, she always tells people it is better to appoint someone *now* that you trust to handle your affairs.

For more information on the many resources for caregivers and care recipients in our community, please refer to the links below.

Caregiver Resources

Bay State Elder Law: www.BayStateElderLaw.com or 978-263-0006

Minuteman Senior Services: www.minutemansenior.org or 888-222-6171

Acton Police Department: Non- emergency-- 978-929-6620

Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles, mature driver information:
www.massrmv.com/MatureDrivers/MatureDriverFAQs.aspx

Family Caregiver Alliance: www.caregiver.org

Book suggestion: *Can't we Talk about Something more pleasant?: A Memoir* By Roz Chast

For a comprehensive list of caregiver resources compiled by the AB United Way visit:
www.abuw.org/index.php/en/get-help