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CareLinks

Wrapping Up. . .

Lots of things are being “wrapped up” at this time of the year: presents, meetings, family decisions, last minute plans for trips, calendars, goals, even though the pace slows a little for everyone at this time of the year, Interfaith CarePartners included. I’m grateful for that because it gives all of us a chance to catch up on paperwork, phone calls, emails, and the like. I’m also grateful for it because it gives us all a chance to see more of one another in the office and to share stories and experiences that we have had throughout the year.



One constant theme of those stories is how grateful we are for you, our 2,400+ volunteers. For the 11th straight year we are going to realize over 100,000+ hours of volunteer service through our Care Team program, which translates to over \$2.4 million dollars of free care offered to the Greater Houston area on an annual basis. Yes, we work hard to make this a reality on our end of things, but we recognize that it is because of the partnerships we enjoy with congregations and their volunteers that completes our efforts.

In a season of giving thanks, it feels as if there is no way that we can adequately say “thank you” to our volunteers and all of the people who support us in many other ways. But know this: you are essential to our program and we have said “thanks” for you every day of our almost 30 year existence. You have helped ease the burdens of thousands upon thousands of people every year for almost three decades. As you take time to be thankful at this time of the year, know that there are many of us out there who are thankful for you. Wishing you all the best in the New Year. . .

—John K. Burk, President

‘Tis the Season for...Taking?

It is a commonplace that this is the season for giving. But for many vulnerable seniors, it can also be the season for taking; or, more precisely, for being taken *from*. Elder abuse can take many forms, not the least of which is fraud. At the recent Gerontological Society of America conference there was an interesting workshop on elder fraud and exploitation. The presenters shared research in which they had gained unprecedented access to people who had committed fraud (identity theft, financial manipulation, etc.) of elders. From my perspective, there seemed to be very little rhyme or reason to why people chose to become engaged in fraud. Some were family caregivers, some were strangers. Many were not actually in a precarious financial situation, though others were.

Keep in mind these below signs¹ of elder fraud and share them with family and friends in an effort to keep our seniors safe:

- Unpaid bills, eviction notices, or notices to discontinue utilities
- Withdrawals from bank accounts or transfers between accounts that the older person cannot explain
- Bank statements and canceled checks no longer come to the elder’s home
- New “best friends”
- Legal documents, such as powers of attorney, which the older person didn’t understand at the time he or she signed them
- Unusual activity in the older person’s bank accounts including large, unexplained withdrawals, frequent transfers between accounts, or ATM withdrawals

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It is important that we do as much as we can to protect our vulnerable neighbors, friends, and care partners.

‘Tis the Season for . . . Taking?

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- The care of the elder is not commensurate with the size of his/her estate
- A caregiver expresses excessive interest in the amount of money being spent on the older person
- Belongings or property are missing
- Suspicious signatures on checks or other documents
- Absence of documentation about financial arrangements
- Implausible explanations given about the

elderly person’s finances by the elder or the caregiver

- The elder is unaware of or does not understand financial arrangements that have been made for him or her

If you suspect fraud, consult with your Care Team Coordinator, family members, clergy, and get Adult Protective Services involved. It is important that we do as much as we can to protect our vulnerable neighbors, friends, and care partners.

¹ http://www.preventelderabuse.org/elderabuse/fin_abuse.html (Accessed December 2015)

Update on Planned Expansion

It was announced last year that Interfaith CarePartners had approved an expansion plan to other communities in the state, beginning in Waco, Tx. We are proud to announce that service has been launched in Waco and several congregations have expressed interest in future partnerships with Interfaith CarePartners.

The uniqueness of the Care Team model is its adaptability. We receive calls or emails weekly from other parts of the country (sometimes even internationally) with requests for assistance in starting our services outside of the Greater Houston area. Because we want to be excellent stewards of the model and programs begun by our founders, we believe that it is incumbent on us to take our model anywhere we believe it is a good fit. There is a lot of hard work in front of us as we explore new communities, but we are excited about the challenge.



Important Dates in 2016

We are grateful that we have had another year of exciting events, conferences, and educational offerings for the general public, and are also excited to announce some important dates that are coming up in the New Year. Stay tuned for more information!

February 11, 2016: 29th Annual Sweet Charity honoring Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas and

Enbridge; Westin Memorial City

April 9, 2016: Caregiver Conference; Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 18220 Upper Bay Rd, Houston, 77058

May 7, 2016: 3rd Annual Kentucky Derby Party; Hughes Hangar

**Other conferences and educational offerings are being scheduled.*



CarePartners Together

CarePartners Together is the wholly-owned subsidiary of Interfaith CarePartners. This fee-based service is designed to assist individuals and family caregivers whose needs have increased beyond the scope of what volunteers can provide. Profits from the company are designed to support the programs offered by Interfaith CarePartners, all of which are offered for free.

CarePartners Together had a stellar year in 2015, its first fully operational year. We began offering service in to several new clients both in their homes and in assisted living facilities. CarePartners Together is a state-licensed, bonded, and insured LLC. If you or a friend or loved one is interested in learning more about the services, please call Veronica Seivwright at (713) 263-7277.

Meet the Care Team Coordinators: Karen Pettit

Karen Pettit recently joined Interfaith CarePartners as our new Care Team Coordinator, following Linda Newsome's retirement. We have enjoyed welcoming Karen into the office and program. Learn more about her work and passion through her responses to the below questions:

What initially drew you to work for this organization?

I had been in a chaplain residency at Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center for a year and had enjoyed working with, and supporting, the patients, their families, and staff. I had especially gained satisfaction from my relationships with patients in the Neurological Unit. I discovered that I was able to cross barriers in communication with these patients through the use of music (using either my iPad or singing), therapeutic touch, reflective listening, and prayer. Although I wasn't sure that I wanted to continue as a hospital chaplain I was certain that I wanted to keep working with people affected by cognitive impairment, such as stroke, brain injuries, or disease. When I heard that there was an opening at Interfaith CarePartners, I felt an immediate draw because I knew that I would be able to use my hospital experiences together with my abilities in administration, coordination of ministry teams, and leadership development that I had honed in a church staff position I had previously held. In addition, I was the caregiver for my father who had dementia, and he had been helped so much by attending the Gathering Place at Living Word Lutheran Church in Katy and through visits from the Epiphany Catholic Church's Second Family team. It just seemed that God was taking my life's experiences and putting them all together to form the perfect position just for me. I wanted something that would be my capstone vocation in life and I felt that a position with Interfaith CarePartners would provide me with not only a career but a ministry.

Describe what your first few months have been like.

Because the chaplain residency had been grueling emotionally and physically I find myself feeling very pleased with the pace and activities I now have. Though busy, almost everything I am involved with is enjoyable and upbeat. I'm discovering areas of Houston I had not been familiar with before, I'm getting to know many different area congregations and the extraordinarily dedicated volunteers within them, and I'm really loving working with the incredible staff of Interfaith CarePartners. I am also getting to experience the delight of helping families who are caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's or dementia. When I hear the relief and joy in the voice of a caregiver when they discover that their loved one can attend the Gathering Place or be visited by a Second Family team member I know I'm in the right place. My husband, Andy, is happy, too, because I am enjoying what I do and he's glad that I've found something that gives me a sense of satisfaction. But, I think that my most distinct and memorable moments have been those times when I've had one-on-one conversations with our CarePartners. I really have tried to listen and to let them know that they are valued just as they are. Beyond conversation, the fun I have had dancing, singing, playing games, exercising, and enjoying meals with our CarePartners and volunteers have been additional perks of working here.

What is the one piece of advice you think all Care Team volunteers could benefit from hearing?

That's not an easy one because I'm learning so much from them in these first few months, but I think they would benefit from hearing that their time spent with a CarePartner during the Gathering Place or in their Second Family visits is a holy, God-appointed time of blessing which he has gifted them for. I never want a Care Team volunteer to underestimate what they bring to the relationship. A word, a smile, a touch, are such gifts which bring a form of healing to the CarePartner and to their loved ones. It's priceless ministry they are giving.

What is the source of your passion for serving the families associated with Interfaith CarePartners?

I think it's twofold. First, I feel passionately that everyone has a need to be heard and valued. With some, it takes a lot of time and patience to listen and offer affirmation, such as with our CarePartners at times. Often, people give up and just shrug off the effort. I want to give the CarePartners what is necessary so that they know they are heard and cared for. I want to hear their

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Karen Pettit

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stories because, in the telling of them, their lives gain value and meaning. And I think it’s just as important to listen and affirm the feelings of the family members and to provide them a respite time. I remember how good it felt to have some time off while my father was being cared for by Les, the Second Family team member who visited him weekly. That was crucial to providing good care myself because I knew that my husband and I had some help. Second, I want to honor my father by caring for others with dementia. He died shortly before my beginning this position, and I hope that my work will be a testament to the lessons and example of both of my parents.

And finally: what do you enjoy doing when you’re not working?

I most enjoy spending time with my family and friends. Andy and I have two adult children, Eric and Rebecca. Eric is married to Courtney and they have blessed us with a granddaughter, Riley. Eric and Courtney have recently retired from the Navy and they have returned home to Texas. Rebecca is a senior at Baylor University. Together with family or friends I like to entertain, hike, read, watch movies, and travel. I think you most often will find me reading or cooking when I am not working but now that I am finally finished with my education, hence “homework”, Andy and I want to start taking some fun weekend road trips.

Happy Anniversary!

Care Team Anniversaries celebrated since our last Carelinks...

Alzheimer’s Care Team®

- Memorial Drive UMC (22)
- Grace Presbyterian (22)
- St. John the Divine Episcopal (15)
- Bellaire UMC (8)
- Fountain of Praise (6)
- Clear Lake United Methodist Church (5)
- Congregation Beth Yeshurun (4)
- Clear Lake Presbyterian Church (3)

Second Family Care Team®

- St. Martha Catholic Church (11)
- Holy Cross Lutheran Church (11)
- Hosanna Lutheran (20)
- St. Ignatius Loyola Catholic (6)
- St. Anne Catholic – Houston (18)
- Woodlands Presbyterian Church (17)
- Epiphany of the Lord Catholic (17)
- Our Lady Of Guadalupe Cath.- Rosenberg (13)
- St. Francis of Assisi Catholic (13)
- First Baptist Church Woodway (1)

“Creating Caring Communities”



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