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Community agencies provide service to caregivers

By CAROLYN BLACKMAN, Staff Reporter

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TORONTO — Now in its second year, Family Caregiver Connections, a collaboration of seven agencies, helps caregivers by offering support and education.

Patricia Wendy, left, and Natalie Zabolotsky

Co-led by Baycrest and Circle of Care, the agencies include Bernard Betel Centre, Chai Tikvah Foundation, Jewish Family & Child, Jewish Immigrant Aid Services Toronto, and Reena.

Patricia Wendy, program co-ordinator, said that commonly, caregivers are children of elderly parents; parents of adult children who are disabled; spouses or siblings.

□ Caring for a family member can be overwhelming, and caregivers often feel stressed and isolated. It can be a financial and emotional strain, and caregivers often have their own health problems.

“Most, though, they don’t think of the impact on themselves, and they don’t seek out services. They feel that caring for their loved one is their own responsibility, and they feel guilty for any negative feelings.”

She said that 450 caregivers requested services in the program’s first year, “and that number is growing quickly. We are quite pleased, because caregivers have to take care of themselves, as well as taking care of their loved one.”

Services Family Caregiver Connections offers educational workshops related to seniors and caregiving, transportation services, in-home respite care, groups for Russian-speaking caregivers, individual counselling and support, information and referral services and group education and support.

“Reaching out to the Russian population is important, because they’re often not well connected. We’ve translated a lot of our material into Russian so they have access to a lot of information they had been missing,” she said.

The partnership organizations can connect caregivers with day programs, financial assistance, Holocaust survivor services, social programming, wellness services, kosher meals on wheels, and friendly visitor and phone pal programs.

Some caregivers want to connect to others, but they don't know where to start, she said. "Start with us, we're here to help."

They have run a support group for couples, in which one takes care of the other, Wendy said. "It had a recreational and therapeutic component, and the couples shared activities with each other, and with other members. We are planning to run it again."

She said that they plan educational events based on the needs of participants. "They often don't realize what they need until they get here. They like to hear about others, and then they relate it to themselves. All educational events have a social component."

In order to make it easier for caregivers to participate, she said, transportation is provided to and from events, and all programs are free.

For information, call 416-373-4093 or visit <http://www.supportingfamilycare.com/>, which offers space to share experiences with others.

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