

Powerful Tools for Caregivers

The Situation –

Today, more than one in five Americans (21.3 percent) are caregivers, having provided care to an adult or child with special needs at some time in the past 12 months. This totals an estimated 53 million adults in the United States up from the estimated 43.5 million caregivers in 2015. Informal caregiving is considered a chronic stressor, as caregivers consistently report greater stress than non-caregivers.

What We Did

A statewide program available by trained Extension professionals, “Powerful Tools for Caregivers (PTC)”, is a program that empowers caregivers to adopt self-care practices. These practices include: helping manage stress, increase communication, and tackle tough situations, leading to less caregiver burnout and more successful informal caregiving relationships. The course is comprised of six sessions, taught once weekly by extension professionals. PTC is available in three formats: 90 minute or 2 ½ hour class for caregivers of adults with chronic conditions, and the two-hour class for caregivers of children with special health or behavioral needs. It is offered both in person and online.

Outcomes

Throughout the completed programs across the state, 100 percent of the participants reported they have learned new strategies to handle different emotional issues, cope with stress, to seek other’s help, effective communication, to practice self-care, reducing guilt/anger/depression, relaxation techniques, making tough decisions, goal setting or problem solving. Participants acknowledged they would be using skills learned to better communicate with family especially when needing to make difficult decisions about caregiving issues. Participants learned of available resources in their community as well as the provided PTC’s book for the class. Participants learned that caregivers are not alone in what they deal with through sharing experiences.

Success Story

- One learned to better communicate with her sister living out of town regarding the care of their mother. This resulted in a care plan which gave the primary caregiver a regular scheduled break.
- One used skills from the class to enhance communication between herself, her mother and her sister. The result was reduced stress in caring for their mother.
- Another caregiver communicated with her elderly neighbor the need of having Home Health Services, it allowed the neighbor to make the decision herself and allowed her to stay in her own home longer.

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