

TRENDING: Local's husband caught in immigration snafu

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A helping hand: Fruita woman offers respite care for caregivers

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Joni Karp knows first-hand what it's like to be a caregiver for a loved one 24/7, and what a burnout it can be when there's never a break.

For two years, Karp was a full-time caregiver for her mother, Donna Williams, after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. The experience set Karp on a path of caring for Alzheimer's patients, as well as those who care for them.

In November 2013, Karp, 50, founded CaregiverCare, LLC, to provide respite care for caregivers of all types.

When her mother and father were still alive, her dad would often call Karp at her home in Salt Lake City to tell her she needed to come to Michigan to care for her mother because she "was losing her mind," Karp said.

SUPPORT GROUP

A CaregiverCare support group meets the first Saturday of every month at 10 a.m., and the third Wednesday of every month at 5:30 p.m. Meetings are held at the Atrium, 3260 12th St.

Following the regular support group meeting on March 1, CaregiverCare owner Joni Karp will present Alzheimer's and Dementia Basics, at 11:30 a.m.

"Be on the lookout for quarterly events (such as potluck gatherings, dances and slide shows) for caregivers and their loved ones," Karp said.

CaregiverCare, LLC, can be reached by calling 970-361-6308 or emailing at caregivercarecolorado@gmail.com. A website is in the process of being developed.

Karp traveled to Michigan that year to check on her mom and meet with the doctor. He prescribed medications and told Karp there was plenty of time before her mother would need outside care, and that she could continue to live on her own. So Karp returned to her husband and home in Utah. She talked to her mother every day by phone.

Then, that winter Williams slipped and fell on ice and broke her arm. A neighbor helped Williams board a train for Utah where Karp cared for her while she underwent physical therapy.

"That's when I noticed a lot more going on," Karp said. "She couldn't remember anything. She worried constantly about inconsequential things. She dressed inappropriately for the weather. She wasn't the woman who raised me."

Karp and her husband Robert moved from SLC to Fruita, to be closer to Karp's brother in Montrose after deciding they'd be full-time caregivers for her mother.

After two years of living with Karp and her husband in Fruita, Williams began needing wheelchair use and moved to Aspen Ridge Alzheimer's Special Care Center, 622 28 1/4 Road.

Karp spent a lot of time with her mother at Aspen Ridge. The staff there noticed her, and eventually offered, Karp a job. She became the activities director at Aspen Ridge, a position she held for two years.

"She'd follow me everywhere," Karp said, of her mother. "She participated in every activity."

Karp continued to educate herself about Alzheimer's; she started volunteering for the Alzheimer's Association where she'd bring along her mother who would help stuff envelopes. The director, Laurie Frasier, asked Karp to become the organization's development officer.

Karp has also worked as care coordinator at The Fountains, a Hilltop assisted living center, where a few residents have dementia or Alzheimer's, Karp said. She also named and ran Safe Haven, a secured memory care wing at Hilltop's The Commons, an independent and assisted living center.

Caring for the caregiver

While her specialty is caring for those with Alzheimer's or dementia — and their caregivers, Karp provides respite care for caregivers of all types.

"I give breaks to the caregiver so they can go on vacation, or just have time away," Karp said. "It could be for an hour or a week. I provide 24-hour care."

Karp also provides counseling and community resources to family members.

"My goal is to help the caregiver keep their loved one in the home as long as possible," she said.

"If I can help them get a break, and teach them how to care for the changing needs, they can keep the person in the home longer and be a healthy, happy caregiver."

"But when I talked to her on the phone I couldn't tell," Karp said. "It was early stage (Alzheimer's). She was a master of disguise. She'd have notes everywhere," reminding herself of what to say.

After her father died, Williams began calling her daughter constantly throughout the day.

Still, "I didn't know a lot. I was in Salt Lake City," Karp said. "I only knew what she told me."

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TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
59° F	58° F	54° F	54° F	53° F

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Karp said she realized after working in assisted living centers that many people do not have the resources to place their loved one in a care facility. Many simply can't afford it, she said. She remembered, while caring for her mother full-time, how difficult it was to find someone she could both trust and afford to stay with her mom.

"I realized the reason I am doing this — I know people who need the care and the break; and it needs to be affordable, or they'll burn themselves out," she said.

"In order to be a good caregiver, you have to take care of yourself. If you're burned out you're more likely to lose patience, get sick and put yourself and the person you're caring for at risk."

Finally, a vacation

Grand Junction resident Sandy Kipp booked a trip to the Bahamas three years ago, but hasn't been able to go. She was busy caring for her mother who had Alzheimer's before she died last year. Now she keeps a close eye on her elderly father who is experiencing some dementia, she said.

"I'm trying to keep him home as long as I can," said Kipp, who also has a job.

She hired Karp to stay with her father while she went away for a long New Year's Eve weekend — her first trip out of town in years.

"I was able to relax and didn't have to worry," Kipp said. "I highly recommend her. When I found Joni, it was like 'oh my God' — someone to care for him so I can take a break."

When Cathy Pease, of Fruita, took in an elderly friend who needed assistance, she didn't realize what an impact it would have on her own lifestyle.

"My husband and I were used to leaving town at least three times a year," Pease said.

They hired Karp, who spent four nights with their friend while they went to Las Vegas for four nights.

"Thank God for Joni," Pease said. "I knew I could trust her. Bonnie enjoyed her being there. Joni stops by every now and then and visits with her.

"We want to leave again, and when we do we'll hire Joni. She has a way about her."

Respite care for caregivers is essential, Karp said.

"If you can get away for two hours to read a book, go to lunch with friends, or go on vacation with family, you come back refreshed with newfound love for your loved one," Karp said.

Karp is certified in CPR and First Aid, and is also a certified Dementia Practitioner through the National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners. She currently has in-home clients, as well as clients who live at the Atrium, a Grand Junction independent living center, she said.

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"If I can help them get a break, and teach them how to care for the changing needs, they can keep the person in the home longer and be a healthy, happy caregiver."
— Joni Karp, owner of CaregiverCare, speaking on the importance of respite care for caregivers.

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Wind 0 mph NNW



TUE
59° F



WED
58° F



THU
54° F



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