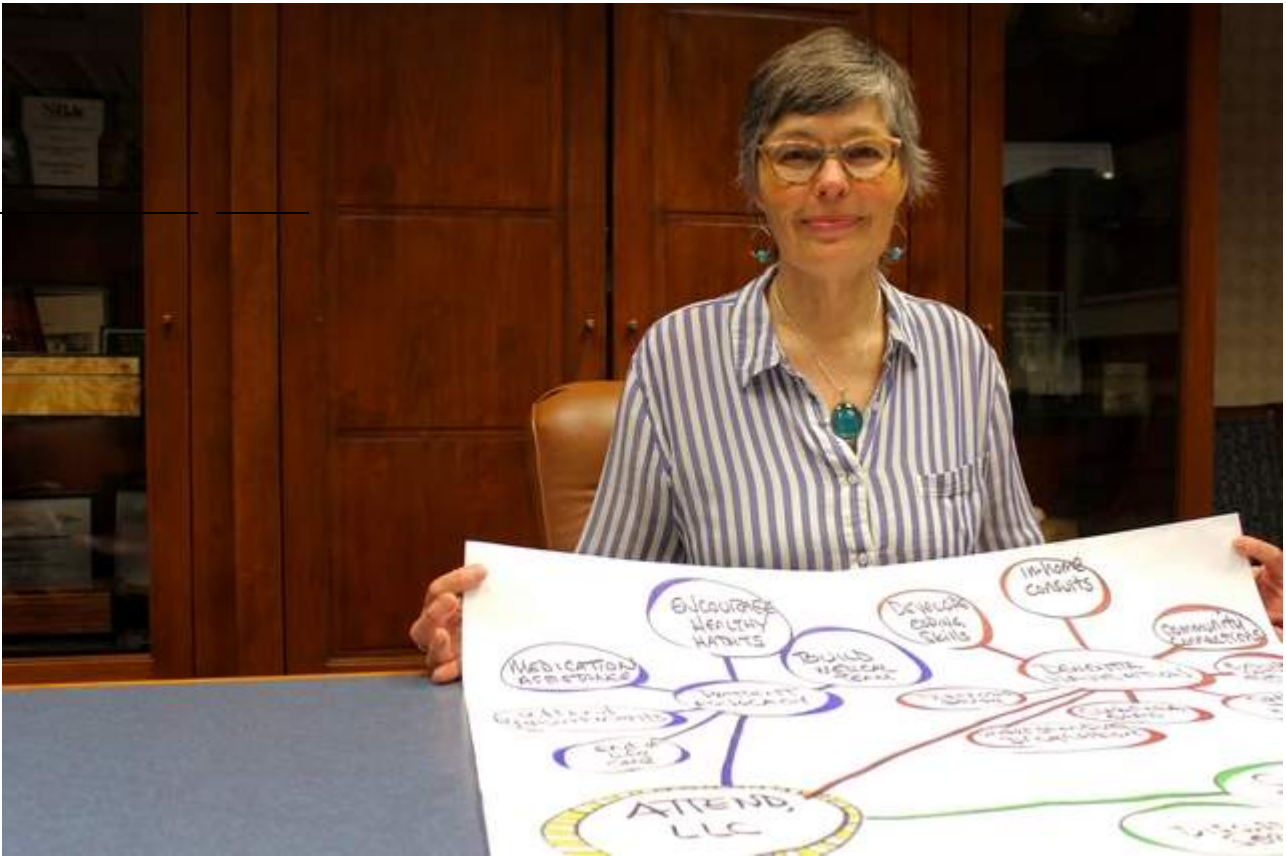


WOMAN TAPS TALENTS, SKILLS IN DEMENTIA-CARE WORK

April 22, 2019 at 5:00 am | By KIANNA GARDNER Daily Inter Lake



Kerry Nagel launched ATTEND LLC in 2016. She offers three primary caregiver services for those diagnosed with dementia and their families: patient advocacy, dementia navigation and education (Kianna Gardner/Daily Inter Lake)

At 58 years old, Kerry Nagel has never felt more fulfilled in her chosen profession.

The Minnesota native has had a long career in physical and occupational therapy and has worked in the field of caregiving in Polson, Bigfork and Whitefish. She has cared for people with congestive heart failure, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, terminal cancer, Parkinson's disease and dementia.

But Nagel, who lives in Whitefish, said her work life arrived at a tipping point when she launched ATTEND LLC in 2016 — a decision that allowed her to become an independent caregiver and allowed her to focus on dementia care specifically. Nagel describes the act of caring for and looking after the interests of people with dementia as a connecting point for all of her talents and skills.

"As I look back on my life I see how many dots in my life are connected to what I am doing now," Nagel said. "Any time all parts of me are connected, then I realize I am doing what needs to be done in order for me to have a fulfilled life."

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Aside from her professional background, other aspects and interests have contributed to her becoming what she is today and pursuing a career in caring for and looking after the interests of those with dementia.

For example, as an artist, she is gifted with creative thinking that allows her to develop unique care plans for each individual patient based on their individual needs.

“Dementia, in a way, is like cancer. You can’t treat everybody like they have the same cancer because there are so many types, and dementia is just the same,” Nagel said.

Nagel has also been a yoga instructor, was an English major, and speaks multiple languages. She says these skills have taught her to read subtleties in body language and pick up on people’s energies in ways that can often be more telling than one’s actual words — an important talent as language can sometimes fail those with dementia.

“Sometimes they don’t know my name and they don’t have any idea of how I’m connected to them, but they can still read positive and negative energy,” Nagel said. “It’s no different from someone losing their eyesight and getting better at hearing. Even if they aren’t speaking they are still relevant.”

And Nagel aims to ensure that sense of relevance is recognized and prioritized in every avenue of her patient’s lives.

ATTEND is currently comprised solely of Nagel. Essentially, she offers patients with dementia and their families three primary services: holistic dementia navigation, education and advocacy.

“I chose to use the word ‘navigation’ because a dementia diagnosis for most families is uncharted water,” Nagel said. “A lot of time patients and families are dealing with this for the first time and are unclear on how to even start.”

As a dementia navigator, Nagel helps families and patients develop coping skills, schedule in-home consultations and acts as a sort of liaison for the patient and other dementia resources in the community such as doctors, support groups and more.

As a patient advocate, Nagel attends doctor appointments, offers medication assistance, and ensures the person with dementia’s personal needs and desires are fulfilled and accurately represented both with their familial caretakers and their physicians. She helps explore care and living options for all stages of the disease and develops patient-centered care plans.

Finally, as a dementia educator Nagel offers various trainings, workshops and discussion series. Nagel’s workshops cover a wide array of topics surrounding dementia, including understanding brain lobes and brain functioning and the importance of interactions and games. One of the workshops is titled “Mom doesn’t know me anymore,” which helps loved ones maneuver through moments of failed recognition — a discussion that hits close to home for Nagel as she had spent a year in Minnesota looking after her mother when her dementia had become advanced. Her next discussion series, “Dementia Care in the Home,” begins in May.

Overall, Nagel said she hopes her work through ATTEND brings emotional and physical relief to those most involved in the lives of those with dementia and aims to be proactive with her patient's health and best interests during their journeys.

"My top goal is to relieve family caregiver stress in as many ways as possible," Nagel said. "Stress leads to poor sleep, poor health, poor attitude and poor decision-making. Caregiving can be incredibly isolating so knowing you have someone in your corner is huge."

Down the road, Nagel, who is certified through the National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners, hopes to connect with other independent caretakers in Flathead County and wants to be seen as a reliable and consistent reference for medical offices in the area.

"This is not just a trend," Nagel said. "This is a big medical issue that isn't going away, if anything the need for these types of services is growing, especially in rural areas like Montana."

For more information on ATTEND, Nagel can be reached at 612-231-5271 or attendllc@gmail.com

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