

Community Caregivers in search of local volunteers

By Jennifer Dugan, Latham Life

November is National Family Caregivers Month, a time dedicated to thank and honor family caregivers across the nation. But what happens to those who do not have family members to care for them, or whose family members simply need a short break to recharge?

In cases such as this, Community Caregivers' dedicated network of volunteers step up to help out those who need it the most in the towns of Berne, Bethlehem, Guilderland, Knox and New Scotland.

Acting Executive Director Christine Damon says that Community Caregivers and its volunteers provide a myriad of services to their clients. "We offer transportation services, mainly for medical appointments. We also do some respite care, some light housekeeping, visitation and assurance calls, as well as shopping and errands," said Damon. "We will assist people with applications for HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Program) or food stamps and we also do referrals to other agencies. We have volunteers who work in the office and help with committees too."

Community Caregivers, which has serviced over 600 clients since its inception, is in serious need of volunteers from the Capital District.

Damon says that the application process is simple and straightforward and she urges people to sign up to help.

"We do a simple two page application and we have an hour orientation. We have a process for checking references and we also request permission to do DMV checks. It's pretty simple," she said.

Once a volunteer has been approved, they choose the type of services they are interested in providing and they decide their time commitment.

Damon stresses that the need for volunteers to provide transportation services is great.

"We always need transportation volunteers and right now our marketing for transportation is 'drive someone happy.' That's definitely our biggest need," Damon said

Community Caregivers volunteer Nancy McCaffrey says that the flexibility afforded by Community Caregivers was a natural fit for her busy life. "I really appreciate that you can work at your own pace. They call you to see if you can take any clients for the next week. You take it if you can and you don't take it if you can't; there's no guilt," McCaffrey said. "I appreciate the flexibility with this kind of volunteer service."

McCaffrey says the relationship she forms with the clients is the real reward. "I like meeting the people," she said. "The people are delightful and very, very, appreciative and that makes me feel good."

Linda Chaffee, another longtime volunteer with Community Caregivers, says that she too was attracted to the services and the flexibility that the organization provided. "Like so many members of the 'care giving generation,' I found all my vacation time was going to taking my mom to her doctor's appointments rather than actually taking vacation. I noticed that the need [for transportation] was great, not only for the patient but also for those taking care of them," Chaffee said.

Chaffee, who volunteers predominantly as a driver, echoes McCaffrey's sentiment that it is the relationships that make it so worthwhile. "Getting to know the clients is the best part," she said. "We definitely form bonds with them."

Damon feels that it's important to recognize the hard work of dedicated volunteers, like Nancy McCaffrey and Linda Chaffee, who step up to the plate whenever they are needed. "It's actually National Family Caregivers month but, in our case, its friends and neighbors that are helping out. It's very important that they are honored too," she said.

For more information about Community Caregivers or to volunteer, please visit www.communitycaregivers.org or call (518)456-2898