



## Caregiver Support

### Helping caregivers navigate the journey of memory loss

Mental Health America of the MidSouth's (MHA) Caregiver Support Program has been a staple within our community for over two decades. With the support of the West End Home Foundation (WEHF), the past 5 years have been full of changes and growth. Originally, the Caregiver Support Program was called the Aging Services Program. MHA participated in a Reframing Workshop made possible by the WEHF. As a result of this workshop, we reframed our program name and materials and in 2020, we rebranded it to the Caregiver Support Program. This truly envelops the true nature of the services that we provide to families. There are several organizations and agencies working with a person living with Alzheimer's or another dementia. However, we know that each family's journey with dementia is unique, and caregivers often find themselves in different places along the journey.



As there are very few organizations that support caregivers in a one-to-one setting, we are intentional about meeting caregivers where they are on the journey and providing them with the tools, resources, and information they need along every stage. MHA has addressed this issue with our Caregiver Conversations portion of our program.

This offers family caregivers the chance to meet with our Certified Dementia Specialist to review the issues and challenges affecting them so that their questions can be answered in a way that is specific to their situation and best supports their family. The information they receive is specific to what a family caregiver is directly experiencing regarding the day-to-day care and support needed to someone on the caregiving journey.



With WEHF's support, our Caregiver Support Program has provided vital resources and helped find solutions to caregiver-related issues for caregivers and professionals alike. We often provide both virtual and in-person training to Caregiver Support groups, including support for professional caregivers of partner organizations. We have trained numerous local respite organizations to provide client-centered care to make respite stays successful. The respite services provided by our partner organizations have helped families feel confident about the care that their loved one receives during a respite stay.

On one such occasion, we were able to help a family navigate an upcoming road trip to North Carolina. This trip involved several days of travel to pick up other family members and then more than a week stay to vacation. The family was concerned because the father could become very confused by any changes to his routine. It was suggested that all the travelers get together and decide if the upcoming trip would be successful. We gave the family a resource page entitled "Can My Loved One Travel?" This resource page gave

the family the information they needed to make an informed decision, including pointers and options to consider before traveling. A week after the initial conversation, our Caregiver Support Coordinator received a call asking about what to do if it was decided that travel for their loved one would not be possible. Our care coordinator was then able to provide the family with information on all the options available to care for the loved one so that the trip would not be postponed or canceled. We discussed options, including the level of care needed to make sure their loved one was comfortable and well-cared for while the family was gone. As a result of these conversations, the family decided to use an assisted living respite service. The family reported that they had a wonderful time on vacation and upon return, the person living with Alzheimer's also thought that he had been on a vacation and asked to plan another stay.

Overall, the feedback we have received is incredibly strong with 100% of program participants reporting feeling better after their individual sessions as well as 98% of participants feeling more confident in their ability to care for their loved ones. As a direct result of WEHF funding, MHA has reached over 1,300 individuals and we are on track to exceed that number in 2024, having already reached over 1,000 individuals through our programming. We continue to offer the multiple facets of our program free of charge to the families that are served. We can provide this due to the ongoing and generous support from the West End Home Foundation.

