

Finding Support and Community While Caregiving During COVID

By Susan Geier, November 2020



Like so many others, Kate P. has watched as her mother’s health has deteriorated over the past couple of years.

This summer, the situation worsened. Her mother, age 77, has been struggling with failing mental health, dementias, and falling. She has gotten lost and had accidents while driving. Kate lives in Rhode Island and works full-time while her mother lives alone in North Reading, Mass. Kate and her husband, who also works full time, have two boys, ages 7 and 8.

“My mom has trouble managing her bills and her medications, so I’ve taken over a lot of those tasks,” Kate said. “She lives alone, but I don’t think she should be alone any longer. I’ve been trying to get her to live down here closer to me or with me.”

“I’m typically a task-oriented person. If I have a plan, I can usually execute. But with my mother’s failing mental status, it’s like I’m standing over the Grand Canyon, and there’s this great big abyss and I need help with a plan and resources,” Kate said. “This is a lot to manage, emotionally and logistically, and I just didn’t know where to turn.”

Kate, like many, is squarely in the sandwich generation caring for a parent and young children. Kate and her husband are a good team, but they live 90 minutes away from her mom.

“It’s really hard to watch the strongest woman you’ve ever known begin to fail mentally and physically,” Kate added. “And the hardest part is she is aware that it is happening, she told me recently: ‘I would rather die in a fire or drown than go like this.’ It’s absolutely heartbreaking.”

While searching online for assistance for her mom, Kate discovered the Savvy Caregiver program offered remotely by ESMV-NS’s Healthy Living Center of Excellence.

“I thought this is a silver-lining of COVID, there is no way I would have been able to participate in person every week up in northeast Massachusetts, but given it was a

virtual class, I could dial in from home. It was perfect. I signed up right away, and the Program was simply life changing” Kate said.

The Savvy Caregiver program is a six-week training program for caregivers who care for someone with Alzheimer’s or Related Dementias. The program is geared to informal caregivers of those either living at home or planning to return home and in a moderate stage of illness.

During the class, Kate was able to connect with people going through situations like hers, some folks were caring for parents, others for spouses. People who understand what it’s like to feel scared, confused, angry, guilty for not having enough patience or wanting to run out the house screaming on a daily basis.

“There is something to be said for not feeling alone in those feelings, there is comfort in numbers” she said. “It was an unbelievable experience for me. The Program gave me tools, resources and taught me about the stages and progression of the disease, tips on how to succeed at each stage, an outlet to voice concerns and questions and the comradery of my fellow Savvy Caregivers, but, most importantly, it gave me hope. I am so sad the program has ended. I miss seeing everyone’s faces.”

“It’s a real testament to Elder Services. I want to stay as involved as much as I can with all the wonderful programs that are offered,” she said. “I am working on a plan for my mother, so she is closer to me and I now have a strong knowledge base, tools and action steps I can take to help my mother through this most difficult time of her life. I cannot say enough about this program. I would strongly encourage others to take it.”