

PROFILE OF A CAREGIVER IN RURAL AMERICA

Back to Wisconsin

When a staph infection after surgery left her mother weak and in need of twenty-four hour care, Carolyn, 52, made a decision to close a chapter of her life in California and move back to the rural countryside of Wisconsin. Her children were grown and establishing their own families. Soon she was immersed in daily caregiving which included getting her mom ready for the day, and learning medical procedures such as catheter care. She took care of household chores such as meal preparation and cleaning, and transported her mother to doctors' appointments. Her siblings, who lived within a few miles, had busy lives and were unable to provide consistent help. Her dad helped as best he could; however he was also aging, and it was evident that the bulk of the care was on her shoulders.

Carolyn soon realized that she had a full time caregiving job, and that she needed help with it. She came to a Town Hall Meeting sponsored by the Caregiver Support Network, a two county collaborative, that provides educational programs and resources on family caregiving. There she made connections that led her to respite care, and later to take part in the *Powerful Tools for Caregiving* class series co-taught by the local University of Wisconsin Extension Educator and the Lifespan Respite Care Coordinator.

"It was eye-opening," she said about *Powerful Tools*. "It provided sensible tips that helped me to take time for myself, so I could take better care of my mom." She also felt it helped her manage the stress that developed while providing care.

Now, six years later, Carolyn lives in a home built next to her parents, and continues to provide daily care for her mom, as well as her dad. A skill she's developed since moving back to a new role in Wisconsin is one that can benefit caregivers everywhere. She doesn't hesitate to get help when she needs it!

PROGRAM PROFILE

eXtension (www.extension.org)

eXtension, www.extension.org, provides Internet visitors with reliable, up-to-date information on a variety of topics, including family caregiving. It is a space where Extension educators from over 70 universities in the land-grant university system gather to develop and disseminate new information and resources.

The eXtension family caregiving resource (<http://www.extension.org/family+caregiving>) provides knowledge and resources for any adult providing care for someone older than 18 who is frail, disabled or unable to care for himself or herself. The information is divided into eight areas: caregiving and disasters, employed caregivers, financial management, health, housing, nutrition, relationships and psychosocial well-being, and rural family caregiving.

Materials include research-based, peer-reviewed articles, fact sheets, learning activities, linkages, and answers to commonly asked questions. The site complements the work of Cooperative Extension System educators in more than 3,000 counties throughout the United States and is customized with links to local extension sites.