

Take a Moment to Thank a Family Caregiver

November is National Family Caregivers Month. How many “thank yous” would be needed to acknowledge family or informal caregivers in Idaho? An estimated 300,000!

And what is the value of this care? To families it’s priceless and to states it is a cornerstone to controlling costs associated with long-term institution-based care. According to research conducted by AARP, the economic value of this typically unpaid care in Idaho is over \$2 billion per year, with the average caregiver providing 18.4 hours of care per week. (These figures represent caregivers over the age of 18 providing care to individuals who are 18 years of age or older.)

Who are the recipients of this care? In Idaho the largest segment is older adults, but the population also includes children and adults with physical and mental developmental needs, individuals with disabling conditions such as traumatic brain injuries and multiple sclerosis, and veterans, both those just returning from combat and older veterans.

In addition to a “thank you,” what do caregivers need? A time-out. The opportunity to take a break is critical to the health and well-being of both the caregiver and the recipient of that care, and in most situations the caregiver needs to be reminded of the importance of a time-out. But, in order to take a break, appropriately trained individuals must be available to provide the respite care.

The Idaho Lifespan Respite Coalition is taking action to address this need. The Coalition, comprised of caregivers and recipients of care and public and private agencies and organizations throughout Idaho, is focused on strengthening available respite services and promoting the value of respite to individual caregivers, the community, employers, and policy makers. These efforts are supported by resources obtained from the Administration for Community Living by the Idaho Commission on Aging, in partnership with the Center for the Study of Aging at Boise State University.

Caregivers and the organizations represented in the Coalition need your assistance. If you know someone who is a family caregiver ask them if they could use a helping hand. If the level of support is more than you can provide, a call to the Idaho 2-1-1 Care Line can help make connections. If you’re interested in supporting veterans and their caregivers, a phone call to Friends in Action, 208-333-1363, for details about participating in or donating to the Legacy Corp program is a good first step. Friends in Action in conjunction with the Center for the Study of Aging is also hosting the 3rd Annual Caregiver Conference on January 25, 2014 at Boise State University; plan to attend and/or share this information with others. More details are available through Friends in Action.

To quote Roslyn Carter, “There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers; those who currently are caregivers; those who will be caregivers; and those who will need caregivers.” Take a moment to celebrate and support this priceless Idaho resource.