



See Us: Wisconsin's Invisible Family Caregivers

Denise Roman (Waupaca, WI)

Denise works full time while caregiving. She moved back to Waupaca three years ago to support her 85-year-old mother and has been a caregiver for several family members over the past twenty years, including: her father who lived at home for ten years after having a stroke at age 80; her husband who lived at home for two years before passing from cancer; and her elderly aunt who moved to be closer to caregivers after a medical emergency.

"Caregiving is all consuming. It's 24/7 all the time. It's never turned off."

Marion Holmberg (Waukesha, WI)

Marion is 65 and, along with her 66-year-old husband, are caregivers for their three young adult children with disabilities. They coordinate and provide supporting care for 25-year-old daughter Meara, and are full-time caregivers for son Jon, 22, and daughter Leah, 20, who both live at home.

"You are literally on call every minute of the day. In 10 years, I'll be 75. In 20 years, I'll be 85. I worry that the level of care I give is not sustainable."

Hector Portillo (Madison, WI)

Hector recently left full-time employment to provide full-time care for his 20-year-old son with disabilities living at home.

"We are not forever. We need to be training someone different than the family to come to take care of him or supervise him."

Mary Beth Freckmann (Oconomowoc, WI)

Mary Beth, 57, suspended her business as an independent contractor to move back with her parents and provide care for her 87-year-old father and caregiving support for her 85-year-old mother. Mary Beth also provides caregiving support for her 28-year-old daughter Maddie who lives with a disability.

"I know it's not just us. This is happening all over the country, all over Wisconsin. And so, we're not alone in this, and yet it feels very, very lonely."

Julie Rosinsky (Green Bay, WI)

Julie is employed part-time 25 hours a week and provides caregiving for her 33-year-old son Alex, who lives with a disability.

"There's nobody else to do it. I'm still working 35 hours as a caregiver for my son because I can't get those hours covered. So if I wasn't there, there would be nobody."

Michele Rosner-Ertl (Slinger, WI)

Michelle recently left full employment. She and her husband provide full-time care for their 19-year-old daughter Julia who has complex medical needs and lives with disabilities.

Caregiving is not really given the priority or the attention that it needs. It's just really undervalued. And that's so unfortunate because it's a pretty sure bet that at some point in your life, you are a loved one will need that."

Virginia and Ron Socwell

Virginia and Ron are retired at 86 years old and provide full time caregiving for their 52-year-old son Kent who lives with disabilities.

"The two of us are 86 years old. Mostly our life revolves around our son," said Virginia.

"We try not to think about the future, what's going to happen with Kent. That's how we've survived. When you're trying to sleep at night, that's when some of the other questions come up," said Ron.

Nicole Estenson (Chippewa Falls, WI)

Nicole, 40, works full-time while caregiving for her 11-year-old son Elliot living with a disability and her 44-year-old husband who is battling serious long-term illness.

"I am a caregiver every single hour, every single minute of the day. This isn't what I planned to do. I'm only 40 years old. And I don't see an end in sight."

Meme Mihalovic (Onalaska, WI)

Meme, 53, is a caregiver for her 27-year-old son Jordan living with a disability. She left her job to provide caregiving for her husband Lance, who recently passed from cancer.

"I still have children that I'm caring for, but my parents are aging, and I'll be caring for them soon. When do I get the break?"

Christine Lidbury (Madison, WI)

Christine, 58, is working full time while caregiving for her father Redge, who is in his 80s and living with Parkinson's and Parkinson's related dementia.

"I'm an only child... so there isn't anyone else to provide the caregiving except me.

It's not a partisan issue, it's not an area issue, it's every state, every community, every neighborhood has somebody."

Deatrice Ash (Milwaukee, WI)

Deatrice is a 58-year-old working parent who provides total care for her 19-year-old daughter with disabilities and assists in caring for her 88-year-old mother.

"Hear the cries of many like myself, because we are crying. We are here and we're crying, but we're not being heard."