

BY PROGRESSIVE CENTER *Forward* QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | SERVING OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 1996.

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This publication is brought to you by staff of Progressive Center for Independent Living and Mercer County ADRC

SUPPORT PERSON ALLOWED IN HOSPITALS AGAIN

The mother who was undergoing cancer treatment couldn't be in the hospital with her daughter with disabilities during her most recent hospitalization for the first time in her life. The daughter is medically fragile and also has autism. The mom was on the phone with the father, who told her the nurse was kicking him out because visiting hours were over. She told him, "Hold on, in the left pocket of your folder of her medical records is a memo from the NJ Dept. of Health, which allows a patient with a disability to have a support person with them at any time. You are not a visitor."

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your DOORWAY

QUARTERLY

A quarterly publication written by the Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging & Disability Resource Connection to help support older adults, those living with disabilities, and their caregivers

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Interfaith Caregivers of Greater Mercer County: Neighbors Helping Neighbors

*By Carla Winters, Grant Manager Interfaith Caregivers
and Linda Gyimoty, Executive Director Interfaith Caregivers*

The mission of Interfaith Caregivers of Greater Mercer County (ICGMC) is to promote the independence, dignity, and wellness of homebound older adults and adults with disabilities by matching them with supportive and caring volunteers who assist with the tasks of everyday life.

For over 28 years, the Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN) program has been at the heart of these efforts. With supportive funding, including continuing grants from the Mercer County Office on Aging, and a dynamic interfaith coalition, hundreds of volunteers are mobilized each year to provide free caregiving services to our county's older adults struggling to remain independent in the comfort and familiarity of their homes.

As we age, we all face both the potential for physical and cognitive decline, creating difficulties in our daily routines from caring for one's home to caring for one's self. It can also become more difficult to stay connected to friends and family. This lack of physical activity and social connections can accelerate physical, cognitive, and emotional decline creating negative health outcomes for what is a growing portion of our population.

When asked, a large majority of Americans consistently express the wish to stay in their homes as they age (AARP, 2021). This same group also expressed doubts that they would be able to do so due to a lack of affordable options or the inability to find someone to help. ICGMC's services provide an option for those in our communities who have the need but no means to address it.

The residents who call ICGMC for help often have no other option. They may be without family support, struggling to meet basic living costs, or both. Linda Gyimoty, ICGMC's Executive Director, states that "Providing these caregiving services free of charge ensures that our most vulnerable older adults, often those with limited means, do not have to choose between getting some help and paying for food or medication this month." Further, she notes that the agency's generous and compassionate volunteers help these care receivers know that are valued and are still an important part of the larger world around them. "Every day our volunteers complete small, kind, and loving tasks: providing a ride to a doctor's appointment, assistance with grocery shopping, help with a home chore, or perhaps they just offer a friendly visit," shares Gyimoty. Volunteers

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**Neighbors
Helping Neighbors**

You Can Make A Difference!

VOLUNTEER TODAY

INTERFAITH
Caregivers
GREATER MERCER COUNTY

609-393-9922
icgmc.org

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are asked to provide just an hour or two a week, but when combined in common purpose, the agency is able to provide thousands of hours of service each year to hundreds of neighbors in need.

It is not just older adults and those living with disabilities who are positively impacted by these services; caregivers can be provided much needed respite as well. As we all live longer, the portion of the population needing care continues to grow. Often it is family members who fill that role with as many as one in five adults reporting that they provide uncompensated care to a loved one (Kirzinger et al., 2021). These family members report an increase in stress, a decline in their mental health, a decline in their physical health, and additional financial strain, with many reporting a combination of these effects. Even a small reprieve can help a caregiver recharge, take time to handle personal business, and ease their mind knowing that their loved one is still receiving the help they need.

As ICGMC works to enhance our ability to address the needs of the most vulnerable in the community, we find the community, as a whole, is strengthened. When the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way we all work, ICGMC worked with experts to develop enhanced safety protocols and help those in the greatest need continue to receive services. Today, we continue to build capacity while prioritizing health and safety. Elderly and disabled care receivers are able to remain safe and supported, family caregivers receive respite and comfort, and of course volunteers themselves benefit, as the mental and physical health gains from volunteering are well-established.

For those interested in learning more about the services provided by Interfaith Caregivers or if interested in becoming a volunteer, staff may be reached by calling the office at 609-399-9922 or by checking out the agency's website at www.icgmc.org.



NATIONAL CAREGIVERS MONTH

The Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging & Disability Resource Connection Supports Caregivers

By Lauri Harbison

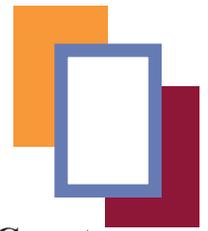
November is National Family Caregivers Month, and here at the Mercer County Office on Aging/ADRC, we don't just support older adults and those living with disabilities, we also provide services for their caregivers. As a caregiver, you have access to our information, referral, and assistance services to help you and your loved one connect to programs that can support your loved one's well-being and independence, and we also provide relief, education, and support to you. We support multiple community programs such as:

- **Active Day of Hamilton**, which provides a day program where adults can socialize,

eat, and engage in activities and exercise safely with supervision from nursing, social work, and other trained professional staff to assist and support them. For more information, contact Peg Barone at 609-883-0200 or pbarone@activeday.com.

- **The Advancing Opportunities Youth with Disabilities Respite Program**, which allows parents of children with disabilities a break from the stresses of caregiving and time to take care of other responsibilities. For more information, contact Chevron Brackett at 609-882-4180.

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- **Mercer County Special Services School District: Special Child Health Case Management**, which provides coordinated and comprehensive services, regardless of financial status, for children ages birth to age 21 who are physically challenged, have congenital conditions or chronic illnesses, developmental delays, or the potential for disabling conditions. The coordination of services covers the areas of medical, educational, developmental, rehabilitative, social/emotional, and economic needs. Services also are provided to the families of these children to help provide a stable environment from which a child can grow and learn. To find out more, contact Susan Danch, Unit Coordinator, Mercer County Mercer Special Child Health Services, at 609-631-6594 or sdanch@mcsssd.us.
- **Mercer County Special Services School District: Project ADULTS**, which assists young adults with disabilities who are graduating from high school to transition into employment, day programs, or other vital services. Services available to young people with disabilities while in school differ greatly from those in adulthood. Project ADULTS helps families navigate this transitional period with experienced caseworkers who educate on the availability and help apply for and connect to important programs to support the individual's independence in adulthood. To learn more, contact Ann-Marie Salerno, Project ADULTS/MAP Coordinator, at 609-570-1168 or asalerno@mcsssd.us.
- **Meals on Wheels of Mercer County**, a comprehensive nutrition program committed to providing nutritious meals and related services that are designed to promote the independence, dignity, health, and well-being of its homebound participants. As a comprehensive nutrition program, Meals on Wheels of Mercer County also offers nutrition counseling and education, shelf-stable groceries once a month, "Blizzard Bags" for inclement weather, and pet food for its recipients' furry companions. Contact them at 609-695-3483 or visit their website, www.mealsonwheelsmercer.org, for more information.
- **The Mercer County REASSURANCE Program**, which provides a daily phone call at a designated time to a senior to check on their safety, security, and well-being. Available to those 60 or older who are living alone, caregivers can be put at ease knowing a loved one gets not only some social contact daily, but also a wellness check. For more information, call 609-883-2880 or visit www.contactofmercer.org.
- **Oaks Integrated Care Senior Well-being Program**, which provides interactive workshops, presentations, and supports groups to adults ages 60 or older and their caregivers on topics related to mental health and wellness. The program also provides short-term assessment,

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consultation, and referrals for older adults or caregivers who may need to access mental health or other resources. For more information, contact Steven Guarino at 609-694-2595 or steven.guarino@oaksintcare.org.

• **Interfaith Caregivers Neighbors Helping Neighbors Program**, which provides

free caregiving services to elderly and disabled residents in greater Mercer County. Using a generous volunteer force, the program provides support services that include friendly visiting; transportation to medical appointments, shopping, and other service needs; light housekeeping, including occasional meal preparation and indoor/outdoor chores; and telephone reassurance. For more information, call 609-393-9922 or visit www.icgmc.org.

• **Central Jersey Legal Services**, which

provides legal advice, document preparation, and representation in court to Mercer County residents. This can include simple last will and testament and power of attorney documents. For more information, call 609-695-6249 or visit www.lsnj.org/cjls.

• **Mercer County Nutrition Program for Older Adults**, where caregivers are

welcome to accompany their loved ones and share a meal at their local nutrition site. For more information, visit www.mercercounty.org/nutrition or call 609-989-6650.

- **Home Health Services**, which can provide a certified home health aide to assist with activities of daily living through two agencies: Mercer Home Health Care, which can be reached at 609-227-2727, and Mercer County Board of Social Services, which can be reached at 609-989-4346). The Board's program also can provide access to personal emergency response systems.

In addition, the Mercer County Office on Aging/ADRC helps people understand eligibility and connect to programs that provide direct care, helping either relieve uncompensated caregivers of some of the stresses that come with caregiving or even allow them to be paid for the services they provide. These programs include:

• **The Statewide Respite Care Program (SRCP)**, which provides respite care

services to relieve caregivers of stress from providing daily care. This respite may be provided for a short time or once in a while. For example, services could be provided to allow the caregiver to take a vacation; cover care when a caregiver needs surgery or has an emergency; or give the caregiver time to take care of him/herself, run errands, etc. For more information, call 609-969-6661.

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- **Medicaid’s Managed Long-Term Services & Supports (MLTSS)**, which is designed to expand home-based and community-based services, promote community inclusion, and ensure quality and efficiency and to deliver long-term services and supports through New Jersey Medicaid’s NJ FamilyCare managed care program. Intended in large part to allow people to age in their homes and avoid facility living, MLTSS can provide a significant amount of in-home care, including a self-directed option through NJ’s Personal Preference Program (PPP), which allows a recipient to hire whomever they’d like to provide their care, including friends and/or family. For more information, call 609-989-6661.
- **Jersey Assistance for Community Caregiving (JACC)**, a State-funded program that provides in-home and community-based services to individuals age 60 or older who meet clinical eligibility for nursing home level of care and who desire to remain in their homes within the community. JACC aims to strengthen participants’ networks of informal caregivers and to maximize autonomy by providing participants with the opportunity to direct their own care, including hiring their own providers, if desired. For more information, call 609-989-6661.
- **Personal Assistance Services Program (PASP)**, a State of New Jersey program that provides entirely self-directed services to those 18 or older with permanent physical disabilities who are working, preparing to work in education or training programs, or significantly involved in community volunteerism. Participants must not be eligible for any of New Jersey’s Medicaid programs and they must need assistance in at least one activity of daily living. Participants use a provided budget to hire caregivers, which can include friends and family. The program is coordinated through the Mercer County Aging & Disability Resource Connection. For more information, contact Reed Thomas, Mercer County PASP Coordinator, at 609-989-6459 or rthomas@mercercounty.org.

Do you provide care for a loved one? Has it taken a toll on? Do you need more information on how both you and the care recipient can be better supported? If you or someone you love could benefit from these services, call us Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 609-989-6661 or contact us by e-mail at ADRC@mercercounty.org. We are happy help.