The Suffolk County Executive's Office of Women's Services

Steve Levy
County Executive

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Office of Women's Services

Between Us Women

"empowering women through awareness and education"

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"In this kind of a year, it's hard for women to look forward—you can get stuck in a rut," said Kathleen Rivers of the Displaced Homemakers program.

The Displaced Homemakers holiday party

Here's a wonderful reason why, on December 10, they held a party for 30 women at the Suffolk County Department of Labor's One-Stop Employment Center in Hauppauge: "In this kind of a year, it's hard for women to look forward—you can get stuck in a rut," said Kathleen Rivers of the Displaced Homemakers program. The day included refreshments, manicures, and educational games moderated by Gail Feldman from the county health department.

This Beat the Holiday Blues reunion event was for the Displaced Homemaker support group, which includes "alums" and women currently going through the program. It's designed to help widowed, divorced and separated women—who have been out of the work force for awhile—to explore their skills and talents to rebuild their self-esteem and find the job that's right for them. New groups form every two months.

To learn more about the Displaced Homemakers program, call 853-6540 and speak to Kathleen, Stacey or Heather.

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A caregiver's point of view

By Alex Fezza

You are a caregiver if you give basic care to a person who has a chronic medical condition; that is, an illness that lasts for a long period of time or doesn't go away.

Giving care to a loved one can be both rewarding and very stressful. Instinctively, you want to do whatever it takes to make him or her comfortable and feel that they are not a burden. You also want and hope that somehow, this person will recover from their ailment and life will return to what you think of as "normal."

Most of us will be caregivers at some time in our lives. You will be called upon to provide care for an adult who is in need, and you're the one of a few people close to them that they can depend on. As a caregiver, you will be doing many of the following things: feeding, bathing, dressing, preparing meals, paying the bills, making sure that they take their medicine, running errands, shopping and--most importantly--providing emotional support.

Being a caregiver takes a lot out of us. We are always putting our loved one's care first. Unfortunately, often we don't do a good job of taking care of ourselves. When the day is through, there never seems to be enough time or energy left to look after our own needs.

The physical and emotional strains of care giving can manifest themselves in any number of ways. You may begin to feel moody, experience changes in your eating habits, have a low

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A different kind of support center

One glance to the right as you walk into Breast Cancer Help's new offices, and you can see that this is a different kind of support center for cancer patients, cancer survivors and those who love them.

That could be because of the racks of lacey lingerie and the aromatherapy diffuser giving off the fragrance of lavender.

In May of last year, Breast Cancer Help moved to a new larger location off Sunrise Highway in Bay Shore, added another name—the Long Island Cancer Help and Wellness Center—and expanded its mission.

"We have a whole mind-body approach," said Alex Fezza, the executive director. "We treat the whole person and offer help to their family members as well." Breast Cancer Help offers its resources to all comers with no limitation on what township or village they may reside in.

Breast Cancer Help, founded by West Islip resident Lorraine Pace in 1994, offers regularly scheduled evening support groups for cancer patients and survivors, as well as support groups for family members and for caregivers (who may or may not choose

Lorraine Pace

to attend the family member groups as well).

In addition, the nonprofit now offers evening yoga classes and art therapy. Healing therapy is offered in the form of reiki, reflexology, and lymphatic drainage—a form of massage that facilitates the removal of stagnant toxins, reduces swelling associated with lymphedema and achieves drainage of areas affected by surgery. (All services, classes, and group sessions are free, but registration is a must; call 631-675-9003.)

Free literature on topics such as metastatic breast cancer, care and management of lymphedema, and a host of resources available for breast cancer patients and their families are available in the lobby.

There is also a Spanish-language hotline: 631-473-3658.

In order to serve the whole woman, Breast Cancer Help also makes space available for A Personal Touch Mastectomy Boutique, which sells prostheses, bras and swimwear, wigs, scarves and hats, lymphedema sleeves and compression garments, night sweat pajamas, accessories, jewelry, and skin care products. The boutique accepts most insurance plans and is open by appointment (631-328-4062).

Breast Cancer Help receives all its funding through donations and grants. There most recent effort is raising funds to buy a digital mammography system for North Shore LIJ-Southside Hospital.

Volunteers are always welcome too. Typically, the volunteer season kicks into high gear in the summer and fall, when Breast Cancer Help holds a half-dozen fundraising events at various venues around Suffolk County.

The facility is located at 1555 Sunrise Highway, Suite 7, Bay Shore. Call 631-675-9003 or send an email to; breastcancerinc@optonline.net.

Are you pregnant?

Not sure of what to expect or where to go? The first step to having a healthy baby is to go see a health care provider. Prenatal care throughout your pregnancy matters, starting now. The first three months is the best time for your doctor to find out what you and your baby need. You both deserve to be healthy. For more information, or for help finding a health care provider, call the Suffolk Perinatal Coalition at (631) 475-5400.

Are you a veteran?

If you served in the U. S. Armed Forces, and are a survivor of Military Sexual Trauma—the VA term for sexual harassment and sexual assault that occurred during your military service—the Northport VA facility has clinical staff who are trained to help you. For details, call James A. Leathem, MST coordinator, at (631)261-4400, extension 7047.

Finding office attire

If you're returning to the work force, maybe you aren't sure about what to wear to a job interview—or how to afford it. The agency you're working through--be it Suffolk County's Department of Labor, or any vocational, social-service, or rehab agency--can give you a referral to Dress for Success, run by the Brookhaven Town Office of Women's Services. Dress for Success helps all Suffolk County women. They do require that you call ahead to make an appointment with a "personal shopper" staff member (451-9127).

In Huntington, call the Business Boutique at St. John's Episcopal Church (427-1752) for their eligibility requirements and to set an appointment.

A caregiver's point of view- continued

energy level, and even though exhausted have trouble sleeping through the night. All of this may make you feel guilty or stressed and you may begin to ignore your own health.

It's important to pay attention to your own needs as you care for someone else. Although you may feel like everything is on your shoulders, always remember that the best thing you can do for your loved one is to take care of yourself. Your own good health is the best present you can give them. If you become run down, you won't be able to provide needed care--and if you get sick, someone else will need to fill your shoes.

Caring for a loved one who is seriously ill is not an easy task. There will be times when you'll feel angry, sad, lonely, even scared. All of these feelings are normal; do not let this overwhelm you. Seek out help before you fall into depression.

As a caregiver, you may feel that you must be the "strong one" and carry the entire burden by yourself. Many times, we even shut others out because we think everything is our responsibility and that others are too busy or wouldn't want to help. This is far from reality.

We must allow ourselves to decompress and share our feelings with others. Ask for some assistance from other family members or from close friends. You'll be surprised how willing others are to share what you're going through.

For the men out there who feel that it's "their job" to "make it all better," understand that you don't always have the ability to do this. Know that if you do your best to make your loved one comfortable and try to keep their stress level low, you are doing your job. Most of the time, what's happening is out of your control. Don't allow what you can't control to cause you pain and suffering. Your loved one knows when you are stressed and can tell when you're in need. This puts an undue burden on them, since they're aware that your situation has been caused by their illness.

Learn as much as you can about the illness and treatment that your loved one is going through. The more you know, the less out-of-control you will feel.

You must relieve your stress and anxiety levels by expressing your feelings. Do not think that because you aren't the one who is sick, you are burdening others. Talking about your loved one's illness and about how you feel will help you relieve the stress.

Join a support group where you have the opportunity to share your feelings with others who are going through or have gone through what you are experiencing. You can find support groups through your doctor or through the American Cancer Society.

If you find a group situation to be difficult, seek out a counselor and talk one-on-one about how you feel. Recognize that needing help is not a sign of weakness but a sign of courage and strength.

Alex Fezza is the executive director of Breast Cancer HELP, Inc. He was his wife's caregiver for 10 years.

Age or gender is no barrier

HIV and AIDS were originally thought to affect mostly gay men. However, women have always been affected too. And even though more men than women have HIV, women are catching up. In fact, if new HIV infections continue at their current rate worldwide, women with HIV may soon outnumber men with HIV.

The good news is that many women with HIV are living longer and stronger lives. With proper care and treatment, many women can continue to take care of themselves and others.

AIDS is a common killer, second only to cancer and heart disease for women.

Persons Aged 50 and Older

The number of persons aged 50 years and older living with HIV/AIDS has been increasing in recent years. This increase is partly due to highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), which has made it possible for many HIV-infected persons to live longer, and partly due to newly diagnosed infections in persons over the age of 50. As the US population continues to age, it is important to be aware of specific challenges faced by older Americans and to ensure that they get information and services to help protect them from infection.

Source: CDC. HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, 2005. Vol. 17. Rev ed. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2007:1–54.

THE NUMBERS

AIDS is a common killer, second only to cancer and heart disease for women.

HIV/AIDS in 2005
(based on data from 33 states with long-term, confidential name-based HIV reporting)
Persons aged 50 and older accounted for 15% of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses [1]
24% of persons living with HIV/AIDS (increased from 17% in 2001) [1]

What can you do to reduce your risk of being infected with the HIV virus? Visit the Center for Disease Control website url below for more information.

Women
cdc.gov/hiv/topics/women/protection.htm

Persons aged 50 and over
cdc.gov/hiv/topics/over50/protection.htm

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Levy to describe "State of the County"

County Executive Steve Levy will deliver his annual State of the County address Thursday, January 29 at Five Towns College in Dix Hills. The public will have an opportunity to speak before the County Legislature beginning at 6:00 p.m., and Levy will begin his speech at 7:00 p.m. sharp. He will be introduced by Huntington Town Supervisor Frank Petrone, and the event will be covered live by News 12 Long Island.

Last year, in his fifth State of the County address, Levy called upon county legislators to join him in continued fiscal restraint in increasingly troubled economic times, while working together on increasing workforce housing, providing greater preventive care, and adopting a 10-year plan to end homelessness.

In touting the county's successes in open space protection, workforce housing and infrastructure improvements with roads and sewers, he also called on the state and federal governments to provide more dollars to match Suffolk's aggressive programs in these areas.

Last year, the County Executive also unveiled a new initiative to encourage volunteerism in young students, and outlined proposals for electronic waste recycling, a pilot recycling program for general waste stream in the business sector, and a plan to make Suffolk County "Solar County."

This year's State of the County address promises to deliver more of the reforms and cost-saving practices that have helped keep county property taxes under control for the past six years, while maintaining vital services in these economic times facing our nation today.

Around and about

Tuesday, January 13—Start date for two new breast cancer support groups (one for newly-diagnosed patients, the second for Stage IV patients), through the Lend a Helping Hand Program of the Islip Breast Cancer Coalition. Times will be 2:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays. For more information, call the coalition office at 968-7424 or RN Donna Blydenburgh, the support group leader, at 567-1107.

Tuesday, January 27, 7:00-9:00 p.m.—Open house at the Women's Center of Huntington, 125 Main Street, Huntington. Join them for refreshments, friendship and support. The Women's Center is a community organization dedicated to the enrichment of women's lives, where women can come together for mutual support and growth in a caring atmosphere. Support groups, workshops, special events, lending library, information and referral service, short-term counseling. For details call 549-0485.

Thursday, January 29, 7:00 p.m.—Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy delivers the State of the County Address at Five Towns College, 305 North Service Road, Dix Hills. For directions to the college, call 424-7000.

Thursday, January 29, 7:30-9:30 p.m.—"Sweets & Spirits," fundraiser for the Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition, at Appliance World of Huntington, 414 New York Avenue, Huntington. Desserts, chocolates, presentations by chefs, wines, live music, raffles. Donation $60. For details and tickets call 547-1518 or email to friends@hbcac.org.

Friday, February 6—Wear Red Day. American Heart Association's sixth annual awareness-building event to kick off heart month. For information call (516) 777-8447.

Wednesday, February 11—Go Red for Women Luncheon, starts with networking at 9:30 a.m., eighth annual educational event of the American Heart Association, raffles and auction prizes, honorees, at the Crest Hollow Country Club, Jericho Turnpike, Woodbury. Tickets $125. For information call Jessie Leonard at (516) 777-8447.

Thursday, March 12, 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.—"No Child Left Inside: Connecting Kids With Nature," daylong conference presented by Long Island Nature Coalition for Kids (LINCK), at the Islandia Marriott Long Island. Conference will address the vital role nature plays in healthy child development, and discuss national and local initiatives to connect children and nature while helping us build the next generation of environmental stewards. Cost (includes dinner): $85 early bird by Feb. 1, $100 registering by Feb. 28, $125 at the door. Sponsorships also available. Call The Early Years Institute at (516) 304-5480 to learn more.

Saturday and Sunday, June 6 and 7—Sixth annual LI2Day Breast Cancer Walk, starting at Smith Point County Park, Shirley. Fee $95. Fundraising commitment $1,000. Registration will close at 400 walkers or on May 15, 2009. For details visit www.li2daywalk.org.

What is Women's Services?

The Suffolk County Executive's Office of Women's Services is a county agency that serves women in all walks of life, at all times and passages in their lives. This is done through a number of services; most are free, and all are available to everyone.

Women constitute over 51 percent of the population of Suffolk County. They are the majority population in every age group over 30. Many of these women are "head of households." Any and all programs or services designed to empower the women of Suffolk County have a direct impact, not only on the woman, but also on the entire family, particularly the children.

The Women's Helpline is available from 9:00 a.m.- 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. The Helpline offers information, referrals to resources for further help and emotional support. The Helpline is bilingual. Calls can be anonymous and confidentiality is respected.