



The Transition Network

TTN-NYC Newsletter March 2017

## In Case You Missed It: Caring Collaborative in the Media!

*From Kiplinger's Retirement Report, January 2017*  
**Caregiving Teams Help Friends in Need**

By Susan B. Garland, Contributing Editor

You are booked for outpatient surgery and have no one to drive you home from the hospital. Or even worse, you're facing a prolonged serious illness, and you need a lot more help than a friend or relative can provide.

Perhaps you can turn to a relatively new model of caregiving: a network of volunteers who join forces to lend you a hand. Several years ago, when Lynn Richards needed hip surgery, she tapped into the Caring Collaborative of the East Bay/San Francisco.

The Caring Collaborative is an all-volunteer service of the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of The Transition Network, a national membership organization for women ages 50 and older. Richards, who lives alone in Berkeley, Cal., says she gave the Caring Collaborative coordinator a schedule of the help she would need over the projected four weeks of her recovery. The coordinator sent an e-mail bulletin to the Caring Collaborative members—many of whom Richards, now 72, did not know.

Caring Collaborative members, as well as Richards' friends, assumed numerous tasks. One volunteer took notes when a visiting nurse described the exercise, care and medication regimen she would need to follow. Others cooked meals, ran errands and walked with her outside while she struggled on crutches. "It was just life-saving, both physically and emotionally," says Richards, a retired program developer for a nonprofit. She hired someone to help her bathe and clean the house.

There's nothing remarkable about accompanying a friend to the doctor or taking a meal to a neighbor after surgery. But as baby boomers age, they are creating more-structured systems of volunteer caregiving. These new models can be a godsend for older people who live alone, as well as for overtaxed spouses and adult children. "For the primary caregiver, there's a sense of relief—'Oh, I can breathe again, it's not all on me,'" says





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Sheila Warnock, president of the nonprofit Share the Care, which instructs friends, relatives, neighbors and others on how to create a “caregiver family” to help someone with a long-term or grave medical condition.

The Transition Network’s Caring Collaboratives are designed to step in when a member needs occasional help or, as with Richards, some aid over a short period of time. Of the network’s 13 chapters, four have set up Caring Collaboratives: San Francisco’s Bay Area, New York City, Long Island, N.Y., and Philadelphia.

About half of the 600 members of New York City’s chapter belong to its collaborative. New members must attend an orientation to learn the rules for seeking and offering help, says Barbara Stahura, the chair of the chapter’s Caring Collaborative committee. When a member wants to schedule help—perhaps she’ll need a ride home after a colonoscopy—she can e-mail the care coordinator, who looks for a willing volunteer.

The New York City collaborative also has created 15 “neighborhood groups” of a dozen or so women who meet occasionally in someone’s home. “If you feel closer to these women, you may feel comfortable to pick up the phone when you need help,” Stahura says. The Transition Network [offers a guide for community groups that want to create their own caring collaborative](#).

To help someone with a serious illness, friends could create a [Share the Care group](#). Warnock wrote the book *Share the Care* (Fireside, \$17) with Cappy Capossela after their friend Susan Farrow died of cancer in 1991. For more than three years, a large group of friends, neighbors and co-workers took care of Farrow, a divorced mother of two—running errands, checking her in and out of hospitals, supervising a home health aide and even organizing her daughter’s wedding.



In early 2002, Capossela was diagnosed with brain cancer, and Warnock put their book’s guidelines to work. “We ran her entire life,” she says. “It was very intense.” Capossela died later that year, and Warnock created the nonprofit, which, besides offering advice to individual caregivers, conducts workshops for health providers and faith groups. A Share the Care group follows detailed rules on organizing the team and keeping it going. You can download the information from the website, or buy the book.

Ron Stevenson, 76, who lives in Gaithersburg, Md., has organized three Share the Care groups. The core members of each caregiving team—and the beneficiaries of their help—



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belonged to a large running group in the Washington, D.C., area. Two friends were diagnosed with terminal cancer. The third Share the Care group in 2011 cared for a married couple who were injured in a car accident.

Following the book's instructions, Stevenson and his wife, Pam, set up an initial meeting between the patients and the Share the Care group. "They talk about their illness and their feelings," Stevenson says. "It's pretty powerful stuff." Each group ranged from about 30 to 100 volunteers.

Every Sunday, the captain for the week called the patient or spouse to see what was needed—and then assignments were issued, such as fixing dinner, doing laundry or just hanging out. Stevenson kept a spreadsheet. "Nobody gets wiped out by having to do everything," says Stevenson.

When his friend Charlie Roberts was diagnosed with cancer, Stevenson asked Roberts' wife if he could form a group to help her out. The group included members of their running group and Roberts' friends from his Veterans of Foreign Wars post. The vets built a wheelchair ramp, mowed the lawn, took him to the hospital and spent the night. Eventually his wife hired a full-time aide. Roberts died in 2007.

Local governments are also looking to collaborative caregiving approaches. Westchester County, N.Y., has issued a manual on creating "care circles." Circle members can't provide skilled care, but they can cook and provide other help "that could keep older people in their homes for as long as possible," says Colette Phipps, executive director of the county's [Livable Communities initiative](#). Caregiver groups such as the Caring Collaborative are also a good way for older adults to make new friends. Victoria Weill-Hagai, 71, an artist in Manhattan, has volunteered several times for the New York City collaborative. "If you do a job for somebody you have never met and you sit with them for coffee afterward, you may find you have a lot in common," Weill-Hagai says.

### Additional Reference Articles

[\*\*Solving Sibling Squabbles Over a Parent's Care\*\*](#)

[\*\*Managing Stress a Must for Caregivers\*\*](#)

[\*\*How to Manage Your Parents' Care From Afar\*\*](#)