

Putting a Face to the Statistics

Legislative Effort Designed to Assist Caregivers in Tennessee

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During the last few months, I have truly come to a greater understanding of how the Positive Approach® to Care and the Six Pieces of the Puzzle can help us in our daily lives. I have been taught how powerful the amygdala truly is. Most of all, I have learned how important are the relationships we as PAC Consultants/Coaches/Trainers have with each other. I've discovered how our PAC Mentors come through for us in the most difficult times.

As a little girl from Hope, Arkansas, I was taught I could be anything I wanted. Hard work would prevail. There have been times during the last few months that the little voice in my head one day would say "Give up" and then cheer "Go for it!" the next day. Doubt would creep in and whisper "Do you really think you can change how a state looks at respite care?" All I knew was I had to try.

On February 21, I was sitting in a Senate committee hearing room listening to a group of senators decide if Senate Bill 1487 would go to the chamber floor for a vote. Many emotions went through my mind as I sat. I was there for a bill that would allow me and others in the state of Tennessee the opportunity to help those living with dementia. All the work we and two supportive local legislators—Sen. Ferrell Haile and Rep. Courtney Rogers—had been tackling in the previous nine months was now in the hands of a Senate Committee. After a little bit of discussion, the roll was called for each vote, and we held our breath. After the excitement of 8 ayes and 0 nays, we realized SB 1487 was headed to the floor for a vote.



Truthfully, this Arkansas girl wanted her Mama that day, but Mama is no longer here due to vascular dementia and other health issues. She and the others who have come through my life and the doors of my program were the reasons I was at the Tennessee State Capitol. My job is to help put faces on statistics. Everyone talks about the horrible statistics associated with dementia, yet often times we neglect to realize that behind every stat exists a face of someone touched by dementia. There is a face of every caregiver who cared or cares for their loved ones. Statistics are cold numbers. We as PAC professionals deal with living and breathing people whose hearts often guide them when their tangled brains struggle. We accept the statistics, but we are trained to help those individuals in their journey.

As of this column's publishing, our initiative with the State of Tennessee continues along the legislative process. We are focusing on HB 1498 to get it through committee and to the House floor for voting. With the leadership of Sen. Haile and Rep. Rogers, SB 1487 and HB 1498 (once passed to become law) will allow religious organizations/institutions to provide respite programs in their local communities on a limited schedule. The state of Tennessee will be among the first in the country to waive licensing for a four-hour, three-days a week, activity-based, church program. It will be a "Caregiver Day Out" program very similar to "Parents Day Out."

My opinion is simply this: If we can make provisions for children, we should offer the same provision for aging adults. Many million dollar buildings on church campuses sit empty during the week. Let's put them to good use. Help others less fortunate than ourselves. After all, I think that is what we are supposed to do.