

Carol Dickson Shares Insights on Supporting Seniors and Their Caregivers

Carol was inspired to work with seniors and their caregivers after volunteering as a friendly visitor for a senior from 1994 to 1996. It was a profound experience, and she realized the importance of social connections in a person's life and the struggles caregivers and families face while supporting seniors with declining health. In 2008, Carol became the Manager of Seniors Community Support Services at RCRG and now leads a team of 6 to provides services and supports to local seniors and their caregivers.

I. Listen to understand

To assess the needs of seniors and caregivers, Carol and her coworkers first ask standard questions during the intake process, but the focus is always on listening to understand the individual's situation. Carol believes that establishing a good relationship with the caregiver or senior is essential for them to continue reaching out for support.

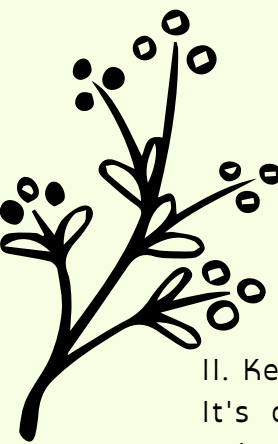
However, building a trusting and relationship with seniors and their caregivers takes time, as many people may be hesitant to seek help. Carol and her team ensure a safe space where clients can share their detailed situation and receive needed support. This is one way to help build trust.

Besides, "listening and not giving unsolicited advice is important," Carol says.

According to Carol's experience, caregivers face challenging situations such as a lack of outside help, feeling isolated, and dealing with different emotions like sadness, worry, anger, or guilt. The most frequent help and support looked for by caregivers include non-medical supports like shopping, companionship, and emotional support, assistance navigating the healthcare system, and ways to manage stress.

Carol and her coworkers listen and provide corresponding resources to help support the caregivers. They also provide opportunities for caregivers to connect with others. "I'd say that providing a chance for them to be with other caregivers, learn from others in similar situations and see that they are not alone is extremely valuable," Carol says.





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II. Keep up the good work

It's considered a success when caregivers share that they have learned valuable information through educational opportunities and have been connected to appropriate services. As well, caregivers say that having a good laugh with other caregivers is a great distraction and helps them keep their stress in check. They feel supported and valued, which goes a long way in keeping caregivers healthy.

“Caregiving” might be a new experience for some, or the services have changed dramatically since someone last used them. Now, the Caregiver Hub of RCRG distributes brochures and posters, issues a monthly newsletter, updates their website and uses all kinds of social media platforms to ensure seniors and their caregivers are aware of available resources and services. In addition, RCRG staff are invited to many different community groups and faith-based organizations to speak about the services.

III. Evolve with the changing times

Carol and her team stay up to date with best practices and emerging trends by attending workshops and training offered by other organizations like the United Way, Family Caregivers of BC and Alzheimer Society of BC. Community workers need to keep learning and respond to evolving trends.

Carol envisions a future that continues to value keeping seniors at home as long as possible. To keep up with this trend, RCRG is committed to evolving its services to support caregivers who provide care to seniors with complex medical and emotional needs.

For those interested in volunteering or a career in working with seniors and their caregivers, Carol advises them to enjoy the experience and understanding that they cannot fix the situation but can still provide invaluable support. We should trust that caregivers and seniors often just need a little help to remember how capable that they are.

“Just that I am very grateful for the opportunity to work with such a great team of seniors, caregivers, volunteers and staff,” Carol says in the end.

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