

# Family & Friend Caregiver Aware Month

SEEKING VALUABLE INSIGHTS FROM EXPERTS:

**Tanya Fitzpatrick** (Seniors Wellness Coordinator - Community Services Division of  
Minoru Centre for Active Living)  
**Chester Sun** - Workshop and Group Facilitator

Based on your experience, what are some of the most significant challenges that caregivers face?

**Tanya Fitzpatrick:** Caregivers often don't think of themselves as caregivers or know that there are resources and support available for them. They often put the needs of others before their own and often undertake their caregiving journey alone. Often, caregivers are so focused on the person that they are caregiving for, that they don't prioritize their own health and well-being. Another major challenge is finding time for themselves. Even finding the time to run errands or going to the store to pick out groceries can be a challenge; let alone finding time to go for a walk or enjoy a hobby.

**Chester Sun:** As the population continues to age, it has become increasingly necessary for individuals to work longer in order to ensure financial security. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the diverse experiences of older workers, as they face unique challenges such as age-related barriers, pension regulations, negative attitudes towards their age group, and insufficient support to adapt to their evolving needs. These factors contribute to a precarious labour economy that disproportionately impacts older adults who must balance work and caregiving responsibilities for elderly family members. Social economist Ruiz-Pérez predicted that growing employment precarity would lead to increased financial crises and subsequent negative effects on mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 served to accelerate this shift, intensifying the precariousness and instability experienced by older working caregivers within our society.



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How can Caregiver program be more responsive to the needs of diverse communities, including those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as those with limited resources or access to technology? Do you have any suggestions?

**Tanya Fitzpatrick:** Caregivers need physical and emotional support. It is important to have safe supportive spaces around peers to share and learn from each other and not feel alone. It is also important to have opportunities for professionals to work with caregivers to share information, to educate and to assist with developing communication skills and self-care routines. Being that Richmond is such a diverse place, it is important to have support in multiple languages so caregivers are comfortable sharing and understanding. Caregivers face multiple barriers to participating in activities themselves. The availability of virtual programs has greatly helped those caregivers with access to technology, attend online programs. Exploring timing of programs, or having programs with flexible drop-in times might help as caregiver's schedules can change. We appreciate and recognize all the caregivers in the community who are selflessly working to provide care for loved ones..

**Chester Sun:** As I have increasingly encountered individuals in the community who require mental health services, particularly during and after the pandemic, I have come to recognize the importance of expanding my understanding of mental health and substance use disorders. The pandemic has heightened and intensified the need for people to access mental health support, especially those who may feel isolated and lonely and who may hesitate to seek help due to fear of the unknown.

Rather than expecting individuals to reach "out" for support, it is crucial that we reach "in" and walk alongside them with the intention of easing their journey to recovery from the moment they take that first step. Recognizing the complexity of human beings, it is essential to employ a holistic, person-centered, and collaborative approach in order to address each individual's unique needs and support networks.

In our efforts to assist individuals, we also acknowledge the immense value of engaging and collaborating with family members, friends, spiritual guides, and others who play a significant role in the person's healing process. Ultimately, it is vital to establish trusting relationships, advocate for accessible resources, involve interdisciplinary health support when necessary, and co-create solutions with the individuals we serve.

