

C CAREGIVER CHRONICLE

Connections for Caregivers

Dedicated to the memory of Cheryl Robinson, M.S.W., L.C.S.W.

Meeting the Challenges During a Pandemic

By David Greenberg

Back in February and March life became complicated for all of us as we struggled with how to deal with a new normal. That included businesses, organizations and individuals.

The challenges were even more difficult for caregivers and seniors and the agencies that support them.

One such agency that literally had to relearn how they deliver services to seniors and their caregivers was Elder Options (the Mid-Florida Area Agency on Aging, Inc.).

Faced with all of these unique obstacles, the staff at Elder Options started planning in early March, and before the end of that month, they had re-invented their operation.

“Word started coming to us at the beginning of March about what was about to happen,” said Elder Options Executive Director Kristen Griffis. “We were going to have to look at our office operations and how we deliver services. By the middle of the month, we really started facing what we had to

do – what the reality was. There was going to be a major impact on our physical operation. We were going to have to get all our people working remotely.”

So, the first step was to get everyone out of the office. That was accomplished by March 27. And that may have been the easy part.

The bigger challenge was going to be how to provide services.

“We were fortunate in some ways because we were one of the Area Agencies in the state already investing in having the right technology and equipment in place to provide remote services,” Griffis said. “We were able to make the change quickly in many areas. Some of our counterparts in other parts of the state were not able to get the equipment we already had because businesses and organizations everywhere were trying to do the same thing.”

The Elder Helpline (800-262-2243) didn’t miss a beat. The call center staff went from the office to their homes without any delay and was able to continue to provide critical

information to seniors and caregivers. Screening and intake for Medicaid worked just as smoothly.

“There was a small decrease in calls during the transition, but in the last few months, we have seen an increase,” she said.

The bigger challenge for Elder Options was how to operate their Savvy Caregiver Training and other health and wellness classes, which had always been done face-to-face in the field.

“We had to work with the Department of Elder Affairs to overcome some usual issues,” said Griffis. “In some cases, we were halfway through classes. But our community partners were closing down. Many of our classes were done in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. Overnight, they were not available.”

Yet again, there was some good news.

“The Department of Elder Affairs was very flexible,” she said. “We immediately got permission to go virtual through Zoom. And we were ready.

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Back in the summer of 2019, we moved to Zoom platforms with some of our meeting partners. We cover a 16-county area, so Zoom was saving us a lot of time and travel costs.”

The harder part was getting clients to adapt.

“Some use Zoom great. Some have challenges with technology. And some won’t do it at all,” she said.

There was also the issue of getting the right technology to clients who did not have it. That has started to be answered through a

\$10,000 grant from the North Central Florida Community Foundation. Clients who don’t have the necessary equipment are being identified and tablets with Wi-Fi are being loaned to them. And interns are working with clients and caregivers to teach them how to use the equipment.

All these changes are expected to last at least until Sept. 1.

“We had to make a major pivot to face this new challenge,” said Griffis. “We don’t have it all figured out yet. Some people just don’t want to do it. I worry about them. But overall, we have exceeded my expectations, and I am grateful for that.”



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From the Desk of Sam W. Boone, Jr.:

Seniors and the Pandemic

By Sam W. Boone, Jr.

Editor's Note: This is part of a series of columns that will be presented in this newsletter by Sam W. Boone, Jr., a local attorney whose primary practice areas include elder law, estate planning, probate and trust administration. It is hoped that the information will be valuable for caregivers and family members dealing with issues related to elder law.

I wrote here two months ago about how we were adjusting to the COVID-19 pandemic. It's now summer in Gainesville, normally a time for travel and family visits. But, if anything has changed since then, it is that in Gainesville and the rest of the state, the pandemic appears to be getting worse. So, it appears this will be a summer like none of us have ever experienced before.

Additionally, as scientists learn more about COVID-19, it also appears that there are longer-term effects. What initially seemed to be a respiratory virus only, can have catastrophic impact on vital organs in the body.

Many people are adapting to what is being described as a new normal. But for our seniors and their caregivers, it is a time to be vigilant about health as we continue to deal with the pandemic. The unfortunate reality is that for many of us – especially our vulnerable senior population – things will likely not change until a vaccine becomes available.

Our seniors face problems on three fronts from COVID-19.

First is obviously the physical health issues. And unlike other people, seniors may exhibit atypical symptoms. While the most common symptoms are fever, insistent cough and a shortness of breath, those in the older population may simply not act the way they normally do. They may sleep more or lose their appetite. Apathy and confusion are common, they may stop speaking and they become even more of a fall risk. And unlike others who get this illness, they are at a greater risk of death. And, of course, longer-term impact on vital organs can be devastating for our older population.

Second, there is the mental or emotional aspect for seniors. Because they are at a greater risk than others, isolation and quarantine have become commonplace for them. If they live independently, family can interact with them but with caution. If their adult children or younger

grandchildren have been interacting with others, there may be a greater risk for them to visit with family.

If they live in a senior community, nursing home or another facility, it is likely they are in lockdown and, for their own protection, will remain that way for some time.

The emotional toll of that would be challenging for anyone – no matter their age. For seniors and people with cognitive issues, it can be overwhelming.

So, as younger family members, what can we do? Visiting may not be an option this summer. As family caregivers, we often use this time to determine if adjustments need to be made in living situations or updates are required for legal and medical documents.

The answer is to seek alternatives. Technology may be the answer. FaceTime or other technology may be the best way to visit with senior family members for the time being. It's not great



but it is better than no communication at all or just talking on the phone. These are challenging times. We have to all do the best we can when it comes to family.

Finally, the third way COVID-19 is impacting seniors is through a serious increase in scamming.

We recently wrote an article about Medicare fraud and COVID-19. You can find it by going to our website: <https://boonelaw.com/>, clicking on the blog page and reading the article from May 14.

These scammers have been at it for months, and things have not let up. There has been a spike in robocalls offering fake cures, testing kits, masks, stimulus checks and more. It is estimated that seniors in the United States lose \$2.9 billion annually from financial exploitation. We can be certain that number will be higher in 2020.

Sam W. Boone, Jr. is a Gainesville-based attorney practicing elder law and estate planning. He is past-president of the Academy of Florida Elder Law Attorneys and is accredited by the Veterans Administration. To learn more about elder-law issues, go online to [www. http://boonelaw.com](http://boonelaw.com), or call (352) 374-8308.

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**Alzheimer's Association
Telephonic Support Groups**

United Church of Gainesville- Every 3rd Tuesday at 7pm. For more information on joining the telephonic Caregiver support group, please call the 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900. Each conference line is confidential; for the access code, please call the Helpline.

Edward Jones Chiefland- Every 2nd Thursday at 1:30pm. From more information on joining the telephonic Caregiver support group, please call the 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900. Each conference line is confidential; for the access code, please call the Helpline.

**Virtual Savvy Caregiver Training
Elder Options**

7/11 Saturdays 10 am to noon Judi 352-692-5233

7/13 Mondays 2 pm to 4 pm Teri 352-692-5220

7/14 Tuesdays 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm Renee
352-692-5226

7/15 Wednesdays 2 pm to 4 pm Teri 352-692-5220

7/16 Thursdays 10 am to noon Sam 352-692-5246

<https://www.facebook.com/savvy caregiver training>

We normally list a number of support groups here but given the current circumstances, it is best for you to contact the individual group to determine if they are meeting virtually.

Useful Resources

Seniors vs. Crime: www.seniorsvscrime.com

Alzheimer's Association – www.alz.org/cnfl

Doggie Styles: Mobile Pet Grooming – www.doggiestyles.org

Elder Affairs – www.elderaffairs.state.fl.us/index.php

Elder Helpline – Florida hotline 1-800-963-5337

Elder Helpline – Alachua County hotline 1-800-262-2243

Elder Options – Savvy Caregiver Classes –
www.agingresources.org

Florida Silver Alert – www.elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/silver_alert.html

SHINE (Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders)

www.floridashine.org

Palm Aging Life Management (Gainesville and surrounding areas) – www.palmaging.com
or 352-519-4648

Driving – www.ufhealth.org/uf-smartdrive-driver-rehabilitation

Medicare – www.medicare.org

State of Florida – www.myflorida.com

National Institute on Aging (free publications) – <https://order.nia.nih.gov>

United Way – Alachua, Bradford & Putnam counties –

www.unitedwayncfl.org

Aging Life Care Association – www.aginglifecare.org

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs – www.va.gov

Uber Guide for Seniors – <https://www.uber.com/blog/gainesville/freedom-in-motion>

Sleep Issues – <https://www.tuck.com/dementia/>

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to this list, please notify us at
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“When I moved in, I was in a wheelchair. With the help of the people here and my therapists, I graduated to a walker, then a cane, and now I walk without a cane and I'm driving again,” says Alton P. Alton especially appreciated the seamless transition from rehab to Assisted Living and how he didn't miss a stitch with his OT and PT. “I've been able to progress to where I'm in much better shape than I was when I moved in.”

Carole W. had already been through enough trauma, losing two sons, the travail of renting alone, and then having a terrible experience at her first assisted living residence. That was the final straw.

“I couldn't wait to get in Legend,” she says. “It's easy to get around. Plus, the fact that I don't have to leave the premises to get occupational therapy and physical ther-

apy is a big plus for me, especially now.” Upon moving in, she thought, “You start with strangers and all of a sudden you have all these friends! And it's kind of amazing.”

Where Can You Put Your Trust?

There are no miracle workers here – as Alton and Carole and dozens of others remind us – just real compassion, communication, expertise, sharing of goals and a mission to serve the whole person: physically, mentally and spiritually.

“At Legend they make it like home, and it's the people that work here that do it,” says Carole. “They make us feel like a family, and they tell you that's why they come here every day. And nobody could say anything better to me.”

Make your referral knowing that Legend pioneered the Assisted Living concept 30 years ago, and that we strive to make stories like Alton's and Carole's routine. Visit our website (<https://legendseniorliving.com>) for more information.

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Save The Date!

2020 Walk to End Alzheimer's - Gainesville, FL

Saturday, October 17, 2020

We're planing a safe and fun walk!

More information to come!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/GainesvilleWalk/>