

START Senior Solutions Launches Respite Friends Training to Support Caregivers

Respite Friends teaches volunteers basic companion caregiving skills and how to develop a relationship with someone living with dementia.

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[/EINPresswire.com/](#) -- [START Senior Solutions](#), an award-winning elder advocacy and education faith-in-action non-profit, is launching Respite Friends, a free training program to support both caregivers and people living with dementia.

The logo for START Senior Solutions. The word "START" is in a large, bold, teal font. Below it, the words "SENIOR SOLUTIONS" are in a smaller, teal, all-caps font.

The [Respite Friends program](#) is a unique opportunity for people to learn the skills they need to comfortably and safely provide a much-needed short-term break (respite) for caregivers. During the two-hour training program, volunteers learn basic companion caregiving skills and how to develop a relationship with someone living with dementia.

“

My wife has severe dementia. It makes a huge difference to us to have someone visit her. It cheers her up, gives me a break, and makes life easier for both of us.”

Boyd Reid, husband who cares for his wife of 60 years

“Caregiving is an exhausting job that never ends,” says Tracy Keibler, START Senior Solutions executive director. Caregivers are often deprived of sleep and constantly on call, which can lead to physical and emotional health problems.

The need for caregiver support is more urgent than ever and will continue to grow as the U.S. population ages. The cost of companion caregiver services (\$35 to \$50 an hour) is prohibitive for many families, especially if they have lost an income and have greater healthcare expenses.

“Most people are unaware of the crisis in caregiving,” Keibler says. “Today, family members provide about 90 percent of long-term elder care,” according to the Family Caregiver Alliance.

Roughly 40 percent of family caregivers suffer from depression. About 30 percent of caregivers will die before the person for whom they are caring. The physical and emotional impact of dementia caregiving resulted in an estimated \$9.7 billion in healthcare costs in 2014, reports the Alzheimer's Association.

Respite Friends is funded by a Minnesota Department of Human Services [Live Well at Home grant](#). The free program focuses solely on supporting caregivers of people with dementia.



Respite Friends visits bring smiles and much needed relief

"My wife has severe dementia," says Boyd Reid, who cares for his wife for 60 years. "It makes a huge difference to us to have someone visit her. It cheers her up, gives me a break, and makes life easier for both of us."

Respite Friends will initially launch in cooperation with communities of faith. "Congregations want to support and care for their members, but when it comes to dementia, many feel at a loss and are unsure what they can do," Keibler explains. "We'll also be training friends and family members and members of other groups, such as veteran's organizations, book clubs and sports teams — any group that wants to support members who are living with dementia."

Packed with useful tools and insights, the two-hour training program:

- Equips volunteers with skills to positively connect with individuals with dementia
- Provides knowledge about specific brain changes that occur as dementia progresses and how those changes impact care
- Dispels myths about what dementia is and what it is not

Volunteers visit people in their homes, either alone or in pairs, and have access to dementia care specialists they can call with questions before, during or after a visit.

"It's a matter of listening and treating people with respect and showing compassion," says Otis Borop, visitation pastor at United Methodist Church, Bloomington, Minn. "We all want that, and it's something we can all do."

"In 2008, when I started my first term on the Minnesota Board for Aging, state officials and long-term care providers were dealing with staffing shortages back then," Keibler says. "The pandemic

has made the situation much worse.”

At some point, we will all know someone who is living with dementia. The need to support caregivers and the people they are caring for has never been greater.

ABOUT START SENIOR SOLUTIONS

START Senior Solutions is a Minnesota faith-in-action nonprofit elder advocacy organization that bridges the gaps in elder care and support. We advocate for seniors in crisis and provide the skills and resources they need to navigate future crises. Through advocacy, education and planning, START renews hope for seniors and caregivers, strengthens families and makes our communities better places to live. To learn more, go to startseniorsolutions.org.

ABOUT TRACY KEIBLER

Tracy Keibler is the founding director of START Senior Solutions. She holds a master's degree in gerontology and has earned certifications in Dementia Consulting and Training from Teepa Snow's Positive Approach to Care®. Keibler is a fierce advocate for seniors and is recognized for her leadership as the former vice-chair of the Minnesota Board on Aging and her work at the National Council on Aging in Washington, D.C.

Tracy Keibler

START Senior Solutions

+1 952-215-7052

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