



## The Caregiver Resource Center



Concierge Case Management & Advocacy

### Respecting a Senior's Independence

Finding ways to help without being intrusive.



As a Board Certified Case Manager, a day doesn't go by that Linda Ziac doesn't have a conversation with someone who is concerned about their aging parent, spouse, family member, or friend.

Unfortunately, when we become concerned about another person, the tendency is for us to jump in to "fix things"; often creating a bull in the china shop scenario.

Thoughts of a loved one aging can be frightening, possibly surfacing as fears of the person developing Alzheimer's Disease, becoming wheelchair bound, or ending up in a nursing home.

#### DAY TO DAY CHALLENGES FOR SENIORS

What many of us take for granted are the day-to-day tasks we do so easily, that seniors and people with

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#### Don't Become a Statistic

Are you one of the 78% of Americans who are unprepared should a medical emergency strike?

According to the File of Life.org

- 116 million Americans are involved in an accident each year
- 50% of people suffer with chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure, diabetes or asthma
- 58% of all 911 calls involve a senior

special needs struggle with on a daily basis. This may be something as simple as threading a needle or opening a jar.

One of the images that Linda recalls from her childhood is watching her mother struggle to thread a needle. Linda remembers bragging about how easy it is to thread a needle.

What Linda didn't know at that time but learned later first-hand, was that as we age, once simple tasks become much more difficult to accomplish.

Linda also clearly remembers 20 years ago when her neighbor moved in. The neighbor was emptying some groceries from the trunk of her car, when Linda rushed over to help.

Linda stopped dead in her tracks when her neighbor said, "You can't do that. You need to let us do things for ourselves. We'll ask for help if we need it"

Linda then asked if she could help, and with a big smile, the neighbor said "Of course you can help."

Linda has learned many valuable lessons from her neighbor, who is now 100 years old and still living next door. Over the past twenty years, they've become good friends. During that time, Linda has had many conversations on the importance of finding a balance between helping a senior, and supporting a senior's right to maintain their independence and dignity.

### **SENIORS OFTEN SUFFER IN SILENCE**

All too often, a senior wants to retain their independence, and doesn't want to become a burden on their loved ones. In order to maintain their independence, the senior may attempt to hide the fact that they are struggling, and are in need of some assistance.

One way that you may learn of a problem, is when you receive a phone call in the middle of the night. When you answer the phone you hear *"Your mother is in the emergency room, she's fallen and broken her hip."*

As the closest living relative, you receive the call, and within minutes, you are being faced with new responsibilities as your mother's caregiver.

Not all problems occur as a crisis, but instead evolve in a gradual series of warning signs spanning weeks, months, or even years. You may notice that the senior is

## **The Caregiver Resource Center**

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[Successful Aging Brochure](#)

## **Benefits of Our Services**

- Well respected company serving the community since 1990
- All services are individually designed to meet your unique needs
- We are available 7 days a week by appointment and 24/7 for emergencies
- Professional support & guidance
- Our services are provided on-site in the home, ER, hospital, short term rehab, assisted living, and nursing home

having difficulty cleaning the house, cooking meals, paying bills, or that you are finding yourself speaking louder so that you can be understood.

### **BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO**

A recurrent theme expressed, is the fear of broaching the subject of whether or not, a senior is capable of caring for themselves. In addition, once it's clear that the senior is in need of assistance, there's often confusion as to what's the best way to proceed.

This is a delicate balancing act, ensuring a senior's health and safety, while maintaining their independence and dignity.

It's only natural that when we become scared or concerned about a senior, our first impulse is to express our concerns, and immediately look to "fix" the problem. Unfortunately, this can often make the situation worse.

Unless you are faced with an emergency that threatens the senior's health and safety, it's wise to take some time to gather information and properly assess the situation; prior to taking any action on your own..

### **SENIORS HAVE CONCERNS TOO**

It's important to note that seniors are also concerned about what they may encounter, as they grow older.

In a NCOA survey of senior concerns, it was found that older American's top concerns include:

- Remaining independent in my home (75%)
- Maintaining my physical health (40%)
- Fear of memory loss (35%)
- Maintaining my mental health (32%)

Source: NCOA (National Council on Aging) 2015

### **A MAGIC WAND**

It's common for a loved one to ask a senior what they need, or if they want help.

The usual response is "I don't need any help. I'm fine."

Linda knows how important it is for us to support a person's independence and dignity.

## **Menu of Services \***

- Advocacy
- Home Safety Audit
- Emergency Medical Advocacy while in the ER and hospital
- Screening, arranging for and monitoring Care Services
- Crisis Management
- Family Support & Counseling
- Insurance Claims Research & Assistance
- Research of Community Resources
- Referrals to Specialists (e.g. medical, legal, or financial professionals)
- Family Discussions and Issue Mediation
- Transitioning to an alternative living option (e.g. home to assisted living)

\* Fee for service

## **Connect With Us**



At the same time, Linda shares that although a senior may still be able to accomplish certain tasks on their own, perhaps they would enjoy a better quality of life if they delegated some of these tasks.

**Linda usually asks the senior “If you had a magic wand what would you want to change in your life.”**

***The responses I often hear often include:***

- I wish someone would drive me to the doctor’s office.

There are never any places to park.

- I wish someone would walk my dog. He pulls so hard on the leash, I’m afraid I’ll fall.

- I wish someone would do my laundry. It’s hard for me to carry the laundry basket up and down the stairs.

- I wish my eyesight were better. I have trouble using the phone.

- I wish my knees were stronger. I have trouble getting up and down from the toilet.

- I wish my children lived closer so I could read bedtime stories to my grandchildren.

All of these have very simple solutions, but if we aren’t aware, we can’t help make the senior’s wishes come true.

Once I’m aware of the senior’s wishes, I’m better able to work with the senior and their loved ones, to help make their wishes come true.

### **A GIFT FOR A SENIOR**

Loved ones often tell Linda that they feel frustrated and guilty when they try to help, but they’re repeatedly told, “I don’t need anything.”

One suggestion that Linda often makes to loved ones, is that after learning a senior’s wishes, it may be possible to give a gift to the senior for no special reason; or for a special occasion such as a birthday, mother’s day, Christmas, or Chanukah.

These gifts can help improve a senior’s quality of life in so many ways.

Linda recalls one evening when we had a blackout.

Linda went next door to check on her neighbor, only to find her walking around in the dark, searching for her flashlight.

After the power was restored, Linda decided to do some research to find a way to help prevent her neighbor and her clients from a potential fall during a blackout.

Linda knew that office buildings have emergency lighting systems, and Linda found a very reasonably priced product for home use, that doesn't require any installation.

Linda purchased 2 emergency lights for her neighbor, which could be placed on an end table and plugged into a regular electrical outlet; one for each floor of the home.

These emergency lights last several hours before needing to be recharged, and allow a senior or person with special needs time to move safely about their home, and get settled to wait out the black out.

Linda routinely suggests emergency lighting for all of her clients.

### **SOME OTHER GIFT IDEAS**

**You may also want to consider one of the following:**

- Create a gift certificate for 6 rides to the doctor's office. If you don't live local, you can make arrangements for a substitute driver.
- Provide a senior with a tutorial on Facetime or Skype, so they can read bedtime stories to their grandchildren.
- Arrange for you or a person in the neighborhood to walk the senior's dog. Even one time would be a welcome relief.
- Provide a gift of a "cleaning person" to do a full house cleaning, including laundry. Even if this is a onetime gift, it would still be gratefully appreciated.
- Make a gift coupon book for a senior,, which includes a variety of services which you or a paid helper is willing to provide (e.g. cook a meal, grocery shop, pick up medication)

- Arrange for a home safety audit to identify areas of concern in the senior's home, along with a corrective action plan

### ***Assistive Devices***

Perhaps you may want to purchase an assistive device gift to help make the senior's life a little bit easier.

Some sample ideas include:

- Car Cane - an inexpensive small portable device that provides a senior leverage to lift themselves up and out of a car. (Linda keeps a car cane in her car for passengers who need a little extra assistance.)
- Large Button Picture Memory Phone - which allows the senior to see a picture of the person they want to call. One push on the picture button dials the call.
- Raised toilet seat with handles
- LifeLine – a medical alert system available with auto alert fall detection
- Arrange for a pharmacy to provide the senior with monthly pre-filled medication boxes and free delivery
- Replace regular door knobs with door knob levers
- Buy a shower seat
- Purchase a combination voice activated smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector.
- Provide small home fire extinguishers
- Replace the regular faucet with a lever faucet

### **PLANNING AHEAD**

As shared earlier, you may now be faced with a delicate balancing act, ensuring a senior's health and safety, while maintaining their independence and dignity.

Effective communication is key to ensuring that a senior and their loved ones can talk openly about their feelings, needs, and wishes moving forward.

Once the senior has shared what they would like to see happen, and you have gathered information about available resources, you can now work together on

creating a realistic plan of action. It's crucial to allow the senior a sense of influence and control regarding decisions affecting their future.

If the history of your relationship with the senior has been a difficult one, you may find it helpful to seek assistance from a professional (e.g. case manager, doctor, or therapist).

A professional can help you map out a viable strategy for moving forward.

Keep in mind that in order for there to be success moving forward, you will need cooperation and buy-in from the senior.

### **A PERSONALIZED ACTION PLAN**

The Caregiver Resource Center's "Successful Aging Action Plan" Program helps seniors and people with special needs take a proactive approach to addressing their current needs, while also planning and preparing for potential future challenges and crises.

Our successful aging strategies provide a wide range of services to meet the unique needs of the individual and their family. These strategies focus on health and mental health, case management and advocacy, home safety, transportation, and advance care planning to name a few.

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### **THE CAREGIVER RESOURCE CENTER**

We are specialists who assist seniors, people with special needs and their families in implementing ways to allow for the greatest degree of health, safety, independence, and quality of life.

The Caregiver Resource Center is unique in that we are available for our clients whenever and wherever they need us.

### **Some Benefits of Our Services**

- Well respected company serving the community since 1990
- Assistance for seniors, people with special needs, and families; who are dealing with health and mental health challenges
- All services are individually designed to meet the unique needs of the client & their family
- We are available 7 days a week by appointment, and 24/7 for client emergencies
- Our services are provided onsite across the continuum of care whether in the home, doctor's office, ER, hospital, assisted living facility, or long term care facility
- Professional Support & Guidance
- Family Discussions & Mediation

### **For more information contact**

Linda Ziac at 203-861-9833

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*Please consult your health care provider for an appointment, before making any healthcare decisions or for guidance about a specific medical condition.*

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*Linda Ziac is the owner and founder of The Caregiver Resource Center. The Caregiver Resource Center is a division of Employee Assistance Professionals, Inc. which Linda founded in October 1990. The Caregiver Resource Center provides a spectrum of concierge case management and advocacy services for seniors, people with special needs and families.*

*Linda's professional career spans more than 40 years in the health and mental health field as a CT Licensed*



*Professional Counselor, CT Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor, Board Certified Employee Assistance Professional, Board Certified Case Manager, and Board Certified Dementia Practitioner. In addition, Ms. Ziac has 15 years of experience coordinating care for her own parents.*

*Linda assists seniors, people with special needs and their families; in planning for and implementing ways to allow for the greatest degree of health, safety, independence, and quality of life. Linda meets with individuals and family members to assess their needs, and develop a Care Team, while working with members of the Team to formulate a comprehensive Care Plan (a road map).*

*Once a plan is in place, Linda is available to serve as the point person to monitor and coordinate services, and revise the plan as needed. This role is similar to the conductor of an orchestra; ensuring that there is good communication, teamwork, and that everyone remains focused on the desired goal.*

**The Caregiver Resource Center • Greenwich, CT**

**[www.TheCaregiverResourceCenter.com](http://www.TheCaregiverResourceCenter.com) • 203-861-9833**

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