

Caution: Empowerment zone ahead

Merriam Webster tells us that empowerment means "giving authority, enabling or promoting the self-actualization or influence of a group of people."

The process of empowerment suggests a way of dealing with people by recognizing that everyone has something to offer and should participate in the decisions affecting their everyday lives.

When do you feel empowered? Is it when you are with family or friends? When you're helping your neighbor? When you're giving back by volunteering in the community? Or maybe when you're taking charge of your future by gathering the information you need to make informed choices?

There are many ways that you can feel empowered, and there are many organizations in our county that help to empower seniors every day.

June is Senior Empowerment Month in Ashland County.

This important month will bring many interesting and informative activities for older adults and caregivers in our community.

The Older Adult Behavioral Health Coalition is organizing

PEGGY BOALES
Ashland County
Council on Aging

these activities to continue to empower seniors, helping them to be active, independent and involved in making important decisions.

A healthy community is comprised of individuals who enjoy a setting where their contribution is central to the overall well-being of the community.

A community that is inclusive and values all members of society is a healthy, vibrant community.

To that end, the Older Adult Behavioral Health Coalition consists of many organizations that care about older Ashland County residents and work together to make life easier and better for them.

Some of the activities planned by the members of the coalition are:

■ Coloring contest/book grant event, 6 to 7 p.m. May 31 at Mill Run Place, hosted by Mental Health and Recovery Board.

■ A representative from

the attorney general's office at 10 a.m. June 2, hosted by the S.A.L.T. Council at the Sheriff's Annex.

■ The ombudsman from Area Agency on Aging at 1 p.m. June 10, hosted by Ashland County Council on Aging.

■ Two group sessions (1 and 6 p.m.) with elder law attorney Steven Roush on June 14, hosted by Ashland Council on Aging

■ June 15 — Wear Purple Day for worldwide Elder Abuse Awareness Day and Catholic Charities director at the Golden Center at 10 a.m.

■ Fredy Robles, director of Catholic Charities, at 10 a.m. June 15, hosted by Loudonville Golden Center.

■ Driving Safety for Seniors, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 14 and 16, hosted by S.A.L.T. Council (There is a fee for this event, at the Sheriff's Annex).

■ Directions Credit Union on Financial Abuse, 1 p.m. June 16, hosted by Ashland County Council on Aging.

■ Tanya Mounts on medication and compliance, 2 p.m. June 27, hosted by UH Samaritan Medical Center

■ Advanced directives by Brad Bostic from 10 to 11:30

a.m. June 28, hosted by Hospice of North Central Ohio

■ Andrew Bush, attorney on estate planning, noon June 29, hosted by Catholic Charities.

Be sure to mark your calendars for the events you are interested in. More information on these and other events will come in the future in the form of fliers and newspaper articles.

Empowerment is like a placebo. If we believe we can, we will.

Successful empowerment enables us to become our own placebo.

What do we need to be empowered? We don't want caregivers — we want support staff.

We want partnerships with professionals who can see past a few wrinkles and a few gray hairs, to see the person inside.

What we want and need is to stay connected with the community and engaged in life.

The organizations in the coalition understand that connection, and commitment to other people is a prime factor in empowerment for healthy aging.

They are dedicated to promoting what they call the PSMES — the physical, spiritual, mental, emotional and social

aspects of our lives.

At any age, we all need to feel valued, needed and in control of our lives.

We want to be surrounded by "support staff" and organizations that work to keep that feeling going for as long as possible, by not doing everything for us that we can actually do for ourselves, but need just a little help and encouragement.

There are a lot of compensations for being older, such as being more emotionally stable and generally happier.

The art of surviving old age is to constantly look outside ourselves and find a purpose so we can continue to be passionate about our lives.

We all matter, we all have something to contribute, and we all need a little help once in a while.

The Older Adult Behavioral Health Coalition recognizes this and wants to play an active role in helping you be all you can be.

Please join us for the special events we have planned for June.

■ Peggy Boales is executive director of Ashland County Council on Aging. She can be reached at 419-281-1477.

Pathways to awareness and prevention of elder abuse

Ashland County Elder Abuse and Caregiver Support Resource Initiative, Project RESOURCE, underscores pathways to elder abuse awareness and prevention. RESOURCE components include: R = Resiliency, E = Empowerment, S = Support, O = Organization, U = Understanding, R = Respect, C = Coping and E = Education.

With funding from the Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation and co-sponsorship by Ashland County Older Adult Behavioral Health Coalition, Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County will donate books to Ashland Public Library, Loudonville Public Library, Ashland County Council on Aging and/or Salvation Army Kroc Center. These resources will be available to patrons in June, Ashland County Elder Empowerment Month. The MHRB website (www.ashlandmhrb.org) will post resources May 1. In addition, Ashland University has several noteworthy books that address issues relevant to this initiative, and are accessible to community members and/or AU students, faculty and staff.

Resources promote awareness of caregiving issues and of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation, emphasizing prevention. Resources are targeted for seniors, caregivers, family members, clinicians, academics and the general public.

DIANA SPORE
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Caregivers and seniors are encouraged to consider the following recommendations for all Project RESOURCE components, such as promoting resilience and coping skills for caregivers, and empowering seniors. Notably, these soon-to-be-available resources provide the tools for acting on these suggestions.

The following tips have been compiled using many resources. However, one manual was particularly drawn upon and is highly recommended: How to be a resilient caregiver: Ideas, information and resources for healthy caregiving, 2014 (available online at www.caregiver-consortium.org).

R = Resiliency of Caregivers

Maintain relationships, stay connected with others.

Ask for help from outside agencies, family members, friends, neighbors and others.

Maintain hope and personal wellbeing.

Be kind to yourself, and give yourself a break.

Set limits and protective boundaries.

Celebrate your accomplishments and be proud of your efforts — you do not have an easy job or one that is readily acknowledged or appreciated.

Attend to need for support, develop and improve coping skills, and optimize organizational tasks (see below).

E = Empower Seniors

Develop mutually respectful and strong intergenerational relationships.

Educate about setting boundaries, being proactive and how to advocate for selves and other seniors.

Promote development of resilience.

Educate about legal and financial options to avoid financial exploitation, to preserve rights of seniors and to ensure that elders' wishes are followed.

Promote assertiveness training.

Use approaches such as mediation to resolve family conflicts, to ensure elders' quality of life and to promote respect for seniors.

S = Support Caregivers

Find strength and understanding by talking to other caregivers in support groups.

Call on others to spend time with your elderly parents.

Draw on outside agencies for assistance.

Become more informed about how to deal effectively with behavioral problems and caregiver stress.

If needed, consider other caregiving plans (who will be the primary caregiver, who will direct-

ly provide care) and living arrangements.

Work with a counselor or therapist who may provide trauma-informed care.

O = Organization

Organize financial, medical, legal and personal documents to simplify caregiving tasks and responsibilities, and to minimize undue stress.

Organize all documents for ease of use by seniors, family members and caregivers.

Find a simple, organized way for managing dissemination of medications, ordering refills or new prescriptions and monitoring use and associated side effects.

Delineate questions to maximize the quality of your visits with physicians.

U = Understanding

Gain understanding of the changes associated with normal aging.

Gain understanding of the changes associated with dementia and/or mental illness among care-recipients, and the behavioral problems that may emerge.

Gain understanding of what is needed to prevent elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Empathize with elderly care recipients as well as with those who struggle to provide quality of care on a daily basis.

Gain understanding about the stressors asso-

ciated with caregiving, and caregivers' needs for respite and support.

R = Respect for Seniors

Communicate directly with seniors.

Avoid negative stereotypes such as confused, senile and helpless.

Promote positive views of the elderly.

Display respect by developing and strengthening intergenerational relationships and activities.

Spend time with elders — allow them to share their life histories and memories.

Stop ageism.

C = Coping

Start with the basics: eat well, sleep well and exercise.

Be realistic about how much you are able to do.

Celebrate and find joy in special moments that arise during caregiving encounters.

Give yourself a break — go to a movie, go shopping, eat out, call a friend, read, take a bubble bath, etc.

Share your thoughts and feelings about caregiving in support groups, in conversations with trusted friends and in a journal

Creatively express your experiences in writing or in other forms of art.

Request help from others, realize that you don't have to do everything.

Attend to your own physical and mental health needs.

Use meditation, mindfulness and other relaxation techniques to reduce stress

E = Education

Learn about different types of elder abuse.

Learn about indicators of financial exploitation, physical abuse, psychological and emotional abuse and neglect.

Learn about risk factors for engaging in abusive behaviors and for being abused.

Learn about strategies and resources for helping victims as well as for those who are at risk of becoming abusive to care-recipients.

Learn about how caregivers can become more resilient, more adept at coping, and more informed about how to deal with problematic behaviors such as aggressiveness.

Know where and who to call when elder abuse is suspected. Call Adult Protective Services at 419-282-5001.

For more information about Project RESOURCE, contact David Ross, associate director, or Hillary Wertman, special projects coordinator, MHRB (419-281-3139).

■ Diana Spore is a board member of Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County and member of the Ashland County Older Adult Behavioral Health Coalition.

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