

# Pathways

SERVING FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS OF BRAIN IMPAIRED ADULTS AND THE FRAIL ELDERLY

## When One Partner Needs to Move for Long-Term Care and the Other Doesn't

*He required more long-term care than she could provide. Moving him to an assisted living facility improved both their lives.*



**DONNA PACER**, of Essex County, N.J., had been dreading the phone call that came from her father's girlfriend informing her that it was time to move her dad to an assisted living facility.

"After my mother passed away, my dad started dating Pam," says Pacer. "Her husband had passed away, too, so they commiserated on their loss together. Eventually my dad, Joe, moved into Pam's apartment in the city where they lived together for about ten years."

But Joe's health was deteriorating. He had started falling and was having memory issues.

"I knew Pam was feeling overwhelmed with my eighty-three-year-old father's health issues," she says.

And Pam's two daughters said they were concerned about their mother's well-being. Pam's first husband had been ill for quite a while, and she had spent years caring for him during his decline.

On the phone that day, Pam told Pacer she wasn't willing to be a full-time caregiver again, especially at her age. "And she didn't want to bring in a health aide to her home. Moving my dad to assisted living was the only option," says Pacer.

When one person in a couple needs more care than the other, partners and adult children face a difficult choice, explains Becky Bongiovanni, brand president

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# Pathways

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*"Long-Term Care" continued from page 1 . . .*

for CarePatrol, a care placement agency.

"The decision to move a loved one into a care community can be agonizing, especially if you are the primary caregiver and already experiencing burnout," she says.

## Broaching the Subject of Long-Term Care

Having a talk with your partner or parent about moving to a long-term care facility can be upsetting. "Your spouse or parent may deny that they need help or express anger and even begin to blame the person trying to help them," says Bongiovanni.

So, you might want to make the conversation a dialogue, rather than just telling them what they are going to do. Be compassionate and empathize with their feelings in a non-patronizing way.

"As an individual loses their independence, they will go through a grieving process and we need to allow them to transition through these stages," Bongiovanni says.

Calmly express your concerns and observations while also acknowledging your loved one's point of view.

"Be honest about the physical and emotional toll that the well partner is experiencing," says Lisa Bayer, an aging life care manager. "Explain that moving to a facility is necessary to keep the well partner healthy and make sure that the less-well partner has the care he needs."

If the loved one is suffering from cognitive impairment, it may be hard for them to fully comprehend the situation. Besides struggling with memory loss, people with dementia may lose skills related to insight, judgment, logic and reasoning.

Without these abilities, sound decision-making and perception can be compromised. "In this situation, trying to discuss care needs can be counterproductive," says Bongiovanni.

When family relationships are strained, it can be beneficial to bring in a third party, such as an aging life care manager.

Connie McKenzie, president of the Aging Life Care Association, says an objective third party can help families navigate challenging scenarios.

"The person can offer council, options and solutions and helps alleviate a sense of blame or feelings of guilt that the spouse or adult children may experience," she says.

## Finding New Living Arrangements

A wide range of living options are available, including assisted living, nursing homes and memory centers. Be sure to find a place that is suited to the person's needs.

If possible, keep the person who will be moving involved in the decision-making. This can include touring and ultimately choosing the facility.

"Seeing with our own eyes helps to debunk preconceived thoughts and ideas," says Bayer.

Pacer looked at several facilities and ultimately found one close to her home that could provide her father with the type of care he required.

"Luckily, my dad had good long-term health insurance," she says. "It allowed us to afford a privately run senior living facility that could meet his needs."

After seeing how important good insurance was in smoothing the process, Pacer and her husband, who are in their 50s, bought long-term care insurance for themselves. "So we could take this burden off of our kids," she says.

## Tips for the Transition

Adjusting to a new living arrangement can be challenging. The transition is not usually linear. Up and down moments should be expected, especially during the first 30 days.

"Be prepared to set boundaries," says Bongiovanni, who explains that it's normal to experience feelings of guilt or loneliness. You may have to remind yourself why you needed help with care.

"Allow your loved one to work through negative feelings. Realize you cannot change their situation, but you can be supportive of their feelings," she says.

McKenzie advises putting together a schedule for in-person or virtual visits so the family member receiving care does not feel they are being sent away and left alone.

"Also, set up easy-to-manage technology to help them stay connected to their partner, family and friends," she adds.

The partner that remains at home may also have trouble adjusting, especially if that person has spent a good deal of the day caregiving.

"While it may be difficult at first having so much more free time, the well spouse may decide to get back

involved with a hobby or see friends that they have not seen in a while," says Bayer.

Pacer echoes this sentiment. "Even though Pam initiated the move, she misses my dad's company. The care facility keeps my dad busy with activities and he has made new friends," she says. "Pam seems lonely and continues to visit him weekly."

### Calming the Guilt

It's understandable to feel guilty about moving a spouse or parent from the home they have grown accustomed to into a long-term care facility. This is especially true if the person had expressed not wanting to ever live in a care facility.

"We all tend to make promises to our loved ones about their future care and do not always understand what that looks like until we are dealing with it," Bongiovanni says. "If your spouse or parent could understand the amount of care required, they would not want you to bear it alone."

Couples may feel they are letting each other down when they can no longer care for one another. But caregiving can be both physically and emotionally exhausting and can prove to be a strain on the caregivers' health and well-being.

Adult children may also have these feelings of guilt.

"As upset as I was, it was at the thought of my dad moving to assisted living," says Pacer. "It was clear that Pam could not provide the care Dad needed to say safe. If she was unwilling to bring in a professional caregiver to their home, an assisted living facility was the only choice."

Although it is challenging, moving into a care facility can improve the quality of life for both partners, as well as for adult children.

Even though it was a hard decision, Pacer is confident it was the right one for her family. She explains: "The year before my dad moved, I worried every day that I would get a call from Pam that he had fallen or gotten hurt. Now I am more relaxed because I know he has twenty-four-hour care. And his new home is so close to my house. I can visit with him more often and [we can] spend more time together."

*By Randi Mazzella, Next Avenue Contributor, May 26, 2021. Reprinted with permission, Next Avenue, <https://www.nextavenue.org>*



### The Cycle of Caregiving

by Doris Fox

Twelve years now and still  
memories come  
tumbling into my head  
Comforting funny  
disturbing loving  
satisfying

I am missing the little  
things  
Putting on socks warm  
from the dryer  
Wrapping a blanket  
around his legs as he sits  
in his chair  
The bowl of cereal covered  
in berries he loves

Trimming his mustache  
Dressing him for church  
Cleaning up accidents  
Watching his favorite  
movie 45 times

"Are you my mother?"  
"I'm your wife"—his  
smile  
appears in response

Tucking him into bed at  
night

Easing under the covers  
myself  
Thankful for a good day  
A roof over our heads  
Thanking God for these  
blessings each night

Times when his mind was  
clear  
I ask for a kiss he nods his  
head yes

The parade of pills  
throughout the day  
911 calls  
The bedroom full of  
medics and firemen

Ten years of caregiving  
stress and fatigue  
Love is remembered most

Now a different life  
Quiet days  
Texts and calls from  
daughters far away

A door opens  
"Hi Mom"  
I smile  
The caregiver has arrived

#### INVITATION TO CONTRIBUTE TO CAREGIVER'S COLUMN

We invite you to submit original work (poetry and prose) to be featured in upcoming newsletters. Send submissions directly to [crc@deloro.org](mailto:crc@deloro.org). If you reference or borrow from specific sources, please be sure to cite them properly. **Submit no later than March 4, 2022 to be considered for our spring issue.**

# Staff Spotlight



**Bernadette "Bernie" Abrea, MSW  
Family Consultant**

Bernadette Abrea graduated with honors from Sacramento State with a bachelor's degree in Gerontology in 2018. She eventually earned her master's degree in Social Work in 2021, specializing in health and aging. Bernie has always had a passion for caregiving and supporting others. Before college, she supported her mother in caring for her father

until he passed away and then, as an undergrad, became caregiver to her uncle during his battle with cancer; both of these experiences catalyzed her interest in working with seniors and caregivers. While at Sac State, she interned at Del Oro, worked in a senior retirement home, and volunteered for the Alzheimer's Association. During graduate school, she gained more experience by working at several senior services programs. According to Bernie, her experiences have helped her to understand the needs of seniors and family caregivers and develop a greater connection to their experiences. She feels she has come "full circle" and is grateful to be part of the Del Oro team. In the future, she intends to work toward become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), and in her spare time she enjoys tending to her plants, drawing, painting, doing crafts, kickboxing, and spending time with family and friends. **Welcome, Bernie!**



**Patricia Gruezo  
Bookkeeper**

Patricia Gruezo graduated from San Jose State University with a BS in Accounting. She grew up in San Jose but moved to Sacramento recently to be closer to family. She brings 6 years of experience working in the health-care to Del Oro. Like others on staff, she was attracted to Del Oro because of its mission to provide support to family caregivers. She says, "I love that

we help families in the time when they need it the most." She is a foodie and loves to discover new food. However, she is especially fond of sushi and frequents restaurants such as Mikuni and Arigato Sushi. Outside of work, she loves to travel (and hopes to do more of it in the future) and read, especially dystopian novels. **Welcome, Patty!**



**Kasondra Armstrong  
Program Assistant II**

Sondra Armstrong has over 13 years of experience in finance and administration at both for-profit and non-profit organizations. She is currently pursuing a degree in Business Administration at American River College. She began at Del Oro as a Program Assistant in 2016 and was drawn by the mission to support caregivers. Her parents had recently

moved back to the Philippines and her mother was managing her father's care as his dementia advanced. At one point, Sondra's parents were struggling to survive on their own. So, the leadership team at Del Oro, including Executive Director Michelle Nevins, former Director of Programs and Clinical Services Anne Spaller, and Director of Finance and Administration Amber Henning, organized a food drive on behalf of Sondra's parents. She reports that, "Everyone came together, and we were able to ship a huge box of food to the Philippines. I can't even begin to express my gratitude... That's how much compassion the people in the agency have for us. Del Oro and the staff will always have a special place in my heart." The feeling is certainly mutual; in her tenure, Sondra has been an invaluable member of the team. In addition to her administrative responsibilities, she also serves on the Social Media and "Fun" Committees. As one co-worker stated, she is the "glue that holds us together." Outside of work, she is a mother to three children and enjoys doing crafts, knitting, crocheting, sewing, and gardening.



**Stefani Wilson, MS  
Family Consultant**

Stefani Wilson is a two-time graduate of Oklahoma State University where she focused her studies on Gerontology, Family Relationships and Community Counseling and maintains her License as a Marriage and Family Therapist. Stefani has concentrated her 20-year career on providing a range of supportive services for older adults and those who care for them.

Stefani arrived in California in 2001 with a passion to help family members cope with the changes experienced during loss and life transitions. It was then that she discovered Del Oro Caregiver Resource Center and colleagues also dedicated to improving quality of life for family caregivers. After taking a professional break to expand her family and care for her son and daughter (now teenagers), Stefani returned to Del Oro where she loves connecting with family caregivers, facilitating support groups, collaborating with community resources and providing supportive educational workshops. Stefani describes her role at Del Oro as walking side-by-side with her clients along the caregiving journey and encourages all to "continue to practice self-care for it will only benefit everyone around you." Singing while playing guitar, doing yoga, taking walks along the river, going on road trips, and spending quality time with family and friends are ways she engages in self-care in order to reduce compassion fatigue and rediscover the joy and purpose in caring for others.

# THANK YOU SPONSORS



## BENEFITTING FAMILY CAREGIVERS IN OUR COMMUNITY

On Wednesday, June 23rd, Del Oro Caregiver Resource Center held the **16th Annual Cruise Around the World Cook-off and Fundraiser**. Out of an abundance of caution, we held the event online again this year but still managed to make quite a splash! We are so grateful to our community for helping us raise over **\$36,000**, all of which will allow us to expand much needed services to unpaid family caregivers in our community.

As we set sail again virtually, Del Oro Board member Casey Simon and Angel Cardenas hosted, navigating the live and silent auctions with ease and humor. Each of our cook-off partners filmed a cooking demonstration and donors voted for their favorite dish after viewing the videos via the MobileCause app. With all of the votes now tabulated, we are happy to report that **Chef Mike Ryder** with **AlphaOne Ambulance Medical Services** took the top prize with their mouth-watering STEMI Burger! Second and third place went respectively to **Chef Celine Callejon** of **Country House of Folsom** with her Mille Feuille and **Chef Tom** of **Revere Court Memory Care** with Crazy Crab. If you would like to watch all of our cook-off partners as each chef prepares their recipe, please visit and subscribe to our **You Tube Channel**.

Del Oro offers its heartfelt thanks to the generous support of everyone who made Cruise Around the World possible—our sponsors, culinary partners, and attendees. We appreciate your part in promoting our mission to improve the well-being of family caregivers throughout their journey, especially during this critical moment. We hope to connect again in person next year. Until then, may you have fair winds and following seas!



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Right at Home—Sacramento

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**We honor and thank all of our cook-off partners and their hardworking chefs for taking the deep dive into deliciousness to support Del Oro:**

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- Right at Home**
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For additional information or to schedule a presentation by Founder and Director Patrick Arbore, Ed.D, please contact Natalie Schroeder at 415.750.4137 or [nschroeder@ioaging.org](mailto:nschroeder@ioaging.org)



**Friendly Volunteers NEEDED!**

**Do you love people?  
Do you love Del Oro Caregiver Resource Center?**

We are looking to fill several volunteer positions at Del Oro and we need YOU! Whether you can spare a few hours a week, or make a more significant time commitment, please consider becoming a Del Oro volunteer.

**We can use your help in the following areas:**

- Office Help**
- Fundraising**
- Speaking Engagements**
- Advocacy**

If you are interested, please contact Amber Henning, Director of Finance and Administrative Services, at [ahenning@deloro.org](mailto:ahenning@deloro.org) or **(916) 728-9333**.

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