

CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER

Advancing with a Care Plan

By Katie Balske, LCSW, Advance Care Planning Group Visit Program Coordinator

Modern medicine has come a long way with technological and medical advancements that provide people with numerous opportunities to extend life. A longer lifespan can also come with an increase in chronic illness, which in turn can lead to medically over-treating patients and/or providing care that is not wanted. Advance care planning is an important process to help individuals identify wanted medical treatments and trustworthy people to advocate for them in times when they are unable to speak for themselves. Advance care planning is an opportunity to prepare for one's future healthcare preferences prior to a medical crisis or illness progression occurring.

The topic of advance care planning can be confusing, scary, overwhelming and easy to defer, but VA Portland is now offering a new program to assist Veterans with this process so they do not have to do it alone. The Advance Care Planning Group Visit program (ACP-GV) offers a safe space where Veterans can come together in a group setting to discuss the importance, benefits and their experiences with advance care planning. ACP-GV groups are specifically focused on advance care planning related to medical care and identifying who a Veteran would want to speak for them in times when they are unable to speak for themselves (i.e. coma, stroke, heart attack, severe mental health episode, COVID-19, etc.). Group discussions also help Veterans learn about common life sustaining treatments (i.e. CPR, breathing machines, feeding tubes, etc.) and which ones might be right for each individual based on their own unique goals, background, thoughts, values, preferences, and cultural and spiritual considerations. There is power in people's stories and ACP-GV groups offer a community of other Veterans,

Veteran's trusted others, and knowledgeable providers to share their stories that might help other Veterans determine care that is right for them. Group facilitators can also help Veterans complete an advance directive to make sure their wishes are known and documented.



Inside this issue:

- Advancing with a Care Plan
- Caregiver Spotlight
- Recovering My Childlike Wonder
- Annie Text Program
- Local Caregiver Classes & Groups
- Humor as a Path to Resilience



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(Continued on page 3.)

CAREGIVER SPOTLIGHT



Let's get to know ...

LYNN

My Veteran's Name: Daniel

Branch of Service: Marine Corps

My name is Lynn and on February 23, 1969, a large caliber armor piercing round changed the whole world for our family. The gun shot wound my husband sustained in Vietnam left him a cervical vertebrae 6-7 quadriplegic at 29 years old. Where would life go from here? We had two young children; a daughter 5 ½ years old (our daughter is profoundly deaf from maternal rubella) and a one-year-old son.

Daniel was in the hospital from February 23, 1969, until May 1970. Discharged basically with no rehab, no family training, and no instruction manual!

Wow! What a different new world to tackle as wife, mom and caretaker (caregiver wasn't a term at this time) at 24 years old. This wasn't an elephant to be tackled one bite at a time but a brontosaurus looming before me to cope with hourly, daily, and monthly. Then we made it to years. Fortunately those first years have faded to a dim memory.

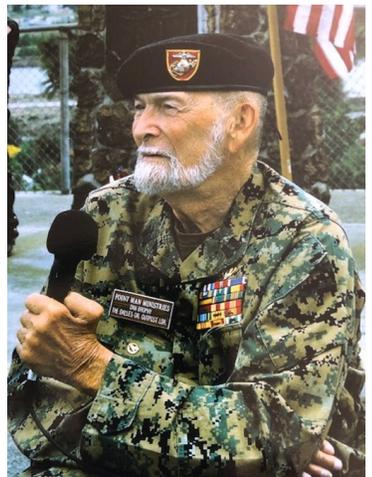
During the last 52 years of caregiving, we have raised our children, and a few others, moved from California to Washington to Nevada to Oregon and next to Hawaii in May 2021. We both have a master's degree. My degree is in nursing and his in social work .

Daniel learned to drive with hand controls. His van has a lift and he can go most anywhere in his vehicle. He hunts during hunting season, but needs a flusher and hauler to retrieve the game.

Life has had its ups and downs, but for the most part, life has been rewarding. We have travelled, gone to school, raised kids, maintained a home and now we will de-clutter and really retire.

I have been a Caregiver since: 1969

I enjoy: This is hard to wrap my head wrap around since the client is my husband and this isn't a go-to-work-go-to-home job. It is a 24/7 calling. The injury changed our lives, our dreams and our goals for the future. I enjoy our time together and family. We have been involved in church since 1973. Daniel has been actively involved in Point man Ministries, a Christian based outreach for vets.



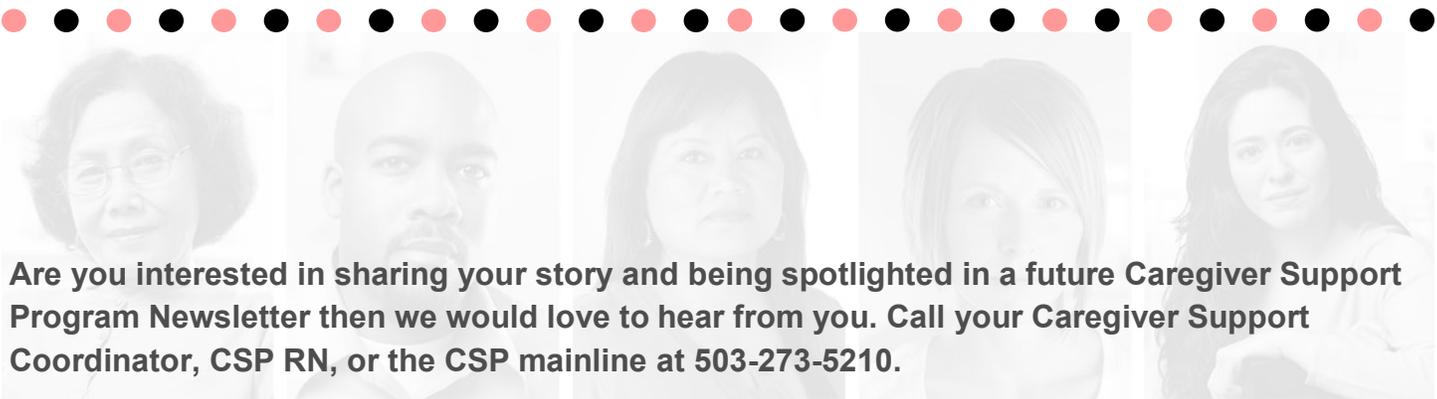
SPRING NEWSLETTER



My favorite part about being a Caregiver is: This again is another difficult question for me as a caregiver since this is not a 2 hr. to 12 hr. shift job. I am IT most of the time. My favorite part is when Daniel is settled in bed for the night. I have uninterrupted time for myself to watch a TV show, read or just do Happy Color on my phone.

I take care of myself (and my family) by: Apparently, per my oldest granddaughter, I am the Matriarch of a large clan spanning ages from 66 to 9. We are blended and all have our niche in Clan Brophy. I have travelled with other family members and Daniel has stayed home with family caregivers. He hunts I stay home so we get breaks from each other on occasion.

I would like other Caregivers to know: This is easy: if you aren't called as a caregiver, don't muddy the water. This is a calling-- not a job for a paycheck.



Are you interested in sharing your story and being spotlighted in a future Caregiver Support Program Newsletter then we would love to hear from you. Call your Caregiver Support Coordinator, CSP RN, or the CSP mainline at 503-273-5210.

Continued from front page

Advancing with a Care Plan

ACP-GV groups are open and encouraged to all Veterans enrolled in VA healthcare regardless of age, health status, or any other factors. Even if you are not sick now, planning for health care in the future is an important step toward making sure you get the medical care you would want, especially if you are unable to speak for yourself and doctors and trusted others are making the decisions for you. Life is unpredictable and anything can happen at any time. Advance care planning is most effective when explored before a medical crisis happens. ACP-GV groups are free, 60 minute workshops offered to Veterans and their caregivers through VVC (video appointments) or VANTS (telephone appointments). ACP-GV groups can help you feel well-informed and empowered in your healthcare decision making. To sign up, please contact the ACP-GV program at 971-352-0844, or talk with your Caregiver Support provider today!

WHOLE HEALTH CORNER

Recovering My Childlike Wonder on a Five Senses Nature Walk

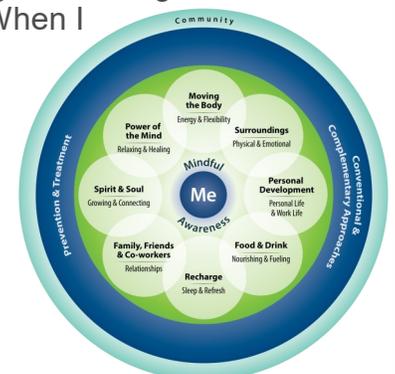
Amanda Walker LSW

Can you remember a time when you were young and the whole world felt fresh, magical, and new? I can. From preschool to 5th grade I lived in a small town in Utah; our backyard was dotted with crabapple and aspen trees. My favorite time of the year was always when my mom would make crabapple pies in the fall; I would smell the rich aroma from her baking, as it floated up the stairs and into my bedroom. I would sprint down the stairs and into the kitchen to be served a (dinner spoiling!) afternoon slice. Prize in hand, I would sit on the porch eating my tangy-sweet treat, marveling at the golden leaves of the aspens and crabapple trees, squishing the cool damp earth between my toes, and listening to the wind rustle through the leaves. Everything felt possible; the world somehow seemed comfortingly familiar yet incomprehensibly miraculous at the same time.

Years later, I foster similar feelings within myself whenever I step outside to appreciate the beauty of nature. Whenever the world feels overwhelming or confusing, I leave the mess and stress of big and small frustrations, if only for a few moments, and allow the healing power of nature to sooth me. Sometimes I forget that the beauty of nature can be found and appreciated right outside my door; I don't need to go far to find it. Sometimes I walk to a nearby park or stream; oftentimes, I stroll through the neighborhood and appreciate the trees, birds, and squirrels that come outside to play. I feel so fortunate to live in Oregon, where the sky, clouds, and light are always changing; I never tire of admiring the familiar and simultaneously unique cloud formations and weather patterns that the sky illuminates on a daily basis.

My favorite way to experience the world, while on my nature walks, is to take a few minutes focusing on each of the five senses; sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Maybe this will be helpful for you, too, if you ever want to give it a try, and remember that childlike wonder and comfort that the beauty of nature can provide. I ask myself questions like; what colors do I see right now? What shapes? Are there any interesting plants, flowers, or animals that I can see? Are there any background noises on my walk today? Birds, cars, maybe the sound of my jacket swishing, or the sound of my feet on the ground? What do I feel today through my sense of touch? Is it warm or cold outside? Is there a breeze on my face? Is there a certain texture to the clothes on my arms and legs, and can I describe this texture to myself? What about taste? Was I chewing gum just before I went outside? Is the bitter taste of coffee lingering in my mouth? What (I can just imagine) would it taste like to eat that flower, or lick a rock! What can I smell? Perhaps the damp earthy smell from rain? The scent of pine? Grass?

Sometimes I can get so caught up in my day, I can forget the gift of being alive. I forget the constancy of nature when the world feels so unstable and inconsistent. When I go on my five senses walks I allow myself to be comforted by something bigger than myself and greater than myself; something that is endlessly fascinating and engaging. My five senses walks restore me with a sense of peace and ease, allowing me the strength and fortitude to continue with the rest of my day. I hope that a five senses walk is helpful for you, too. You deserve to embrace a tiny bit of childlike wonder, as often as is possible.



CAREGIVER RESOURCES



Caregiver Text Program

Annie is VA's text messaging service that promotes self-care for Veterans enrolled in VA health care and now for enrolled caregivers. You just need a phone that can receive text messages to enroll!

-  Annie will help you manage stress and support self-care.
-  You will receive text messages 3 times per week for a year with the option to renew yearly.
-  You can pause or stop at any time.
-  Messages will be educational, motivational, and activities to manage stress.

VIRTUAL CAREGIVER CLASSES & GROUPS

PTSD Caregiver REACH VA Telephone Support Group

May 11, 2021—June 15, 2021 Tuesdays 10:30 am—12:00 pm

Caregiver Whole Health Matters Series #3 (via WebEx)

May 10, 2021-June 21, 2021 Mondays 12:30 pm—2:00 pm

Mindful Resilience Yoga (via WebEx)

Tuesdays (*Women only*) 9:00 am—10:00 am

Fridays 2:00 pm—3:00 pm

Guided Rest (Via Telephone)

Fridays 10:30 am—11:30 am

Operation SAVE

June 23, 2021 1:00 pm—3:00 pm

Caregivers First

Dates and times to be determined

Caregiver Resource Fair (via WebEx)

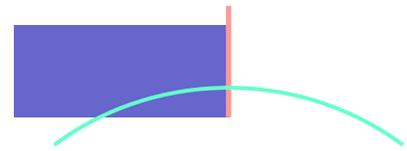
June 9, 2021

Call the VA Portland Caregiver Support Program at 503-273-5210 for more information or to register for a class.

SPRING NEWSLETTER

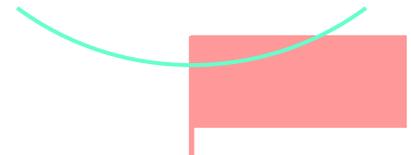
HUMOR as a PATH to RESILIENCE

Greetings, family caregivers! In this article, we draw from “The Healing Benefits of Humor and Laughter”, from the VA Whole Health Library at [The Healing Benefits of Humor and Laughter - Whole Health Library \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/wholehealthlibrary/). Here are some excerpts for a quick read, some quick jokes and ideas for bringing more humor into your life



Q: What was the dairy farmer hired to do at the Chocolate Factory?

A: Milk chocolates

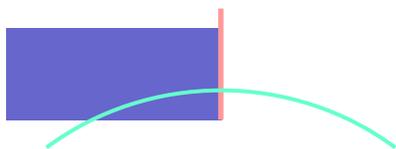


PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES (to name a few)

Laughter has physiological effects; it changes **body chemistry** and **brain function**. For example:

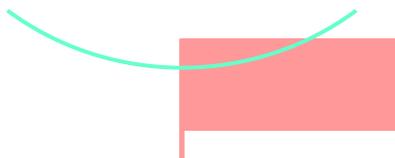
- Laughter affects **heart function**. It increases stroke volume and cardiac output, and it **dilates blood vessels**.
- Watching humorous videos revs up the **sympathetic nervous system (SNS)**. However, this does NOT increase blood pressure.
- Laughter **lowers levels of the stress hormone, cortisol**.
- It raises levels of **beta-endorphins** (the feel-good chemicals of the body) and increases **human growth hormone production**.
- There is an **inverse association between coronary heart disease and propensity to laugh**; laughing more means **lower heart attack risk**.
- Laughter **increases pain tolerance**.
- Laughter therapy **improves self-esteem and mood in cancer patients**, according to a small 2015 trial.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT



Q: Why are you staring at that orange juice?

A: It says 'concentrate'.



be a bit tricky to think about the “why” of the funny things in your life, but it will become easier over the course of the week.

Create a physical record of your items by writing them down; it is not enough simply to do this exercise in your head.

Here are some other tips you may find helpful for your writing:

- ✍ Give the event a title (e.g., “joked with my friend about parenting”).
- ✍ List any funny things you like: They can be relatively small in importance (e.g., “my partner made a silly face”) or relatively large (e.g., “I went to a comedy show”).
- ✍ Write down exactly what happened in as much detail as possible, including what you did or said and, if others were involved, what they did or said.
- ✍ To make this exercise part of your daily routine, consider writing before bed.

WAYS TO ENHANCE LAUGHTER AND HUMOR IN OUR LIVES:

Here is a suggestion from the Greater Good Science Center. See link: [Three Funny Things | Practice | Greater Good in Action \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

EXERCISE: For one week, take 10 minutes every day to complete the following:

😊 Write down the three funniest things you heard, saw, did, or experienced today. Think about the things you found really funny and describe how they made you feel.

😊 Also write down the reason why these things were funny. In other words, answer the question: “Why did this funny event happen?” It may

Need Support?

Call the **VA Portland Caregiver Support Program Mainline at 503-273-5210**

Your local Caregiver Support Coordinator (CSC) is a licensed professional who can support you by matching you with services for which you are eligible, and providing you with valuable information about resources that can help you remain smart, strong and organized as you care for your Veteran.