



Help for boomers stuck in the middle with aging parents



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Officially, they're called baby boomers – that huge bubble of kids born on the heels of World War II.

But now, with the majority of them firmly entrenched in middle age, they're being redubbed the "sandwich generation."

As the name suggests, they're stuck between caring for their own children (many of whom have returned to the workforce) while tending to their aging parents.

Throw in the fact that many are also juggling demanding careers and it's easy to see why boomers are looking for answers to some tough and complex questions.

Fortunately, a growing number of businesses and services are stepping up to help.

"These men and women want to take care of their parents, but it can be so overwhelming – especially if there's a sudden change in the health of an elderly mother or father," says Audrey Miller, managing director of Elder Caring Inc. (www.eldercaring.ca), a private company that offers solutions to the many difficulties of growing older.

"The public system does its best to help with guidance, but it's swamped. Many are finding it useful to turn to a private caregiver that has the time and the staff," added Miller, a social worker who will be part of a panel discussion on caring for aging parents at the Women's Health Matters forum tomorrow.

Kim Gurza, 47, says Elder Caring was a godsend when her mother, Bev, 73, developed diabetes and Alzheimer's disease years back.

"She was living in our family home with my father, but it just got to be a bit too much," Gurza says. "We initially hired an (untrained) helper to come in, but I just kept getting too many phone calls at work when something happened. I didn't know what to do."

To add to the pressure, Gurza was also helping a son – a teenager at the time – who had issues.

"I love him to death, but he was no angel," she says. "He's 21 now, but I still worry about him."

She says she was at her "wits end" trying to take care of a very needy family when she came across a card with Miller's number on it.

"I called and everything started to turn around," she says. "Audrey knows who to call, Audrey knows where to cut through all the hassle."

She says Miller never pushed, but after evaluating the situation, suggested Bev would get better support in a residence.

"She called the family together on a Saturday, including my mother, and we had a meeting to discuss it," Gurza helped us all through a hard time and found a perfect spot."

Miller still keeps tabs on the situation.

She says the company, which costs \$100 per hour, attracts many clients like Gurza, who have become exhausted looking for a solution on their own. Several other Toronto-based companies offer similar services, including Eldercare, Con Geriatric Care and Careable Inc.

The Elder Caring team analyzes each situation through interviews and home visits, assesses the client's needs and recommends services that can help.

A home visit and assessment, including a family meeting, can take two or three hours.

The team, which includes occupational therapists and nurses, checks the living environment to make sure it is safe and efficient.

Are there cigarette burns on clothing and furniture? Is there food in the fridge? Are newspapers blocking the front entrance? Is medication being taken properly? Can the client self bathe?

If the family decides to pursue a plan to keep the client at home, Elder Caring can organize the proper services. If it's decided a client would be better off in a residence, the company can research facilities and co-ordinate the move.

Miller says her goal is to help the elderly maintain a high quality of life in their own homes, and to provide support and assistance to their caregivers.

The business monitors the care through monthly visits and telephone support.

That supervision ensures the plan is revised as needed and that quality support services are in place.

"The most important message that we try to convey is to get a plan now," Miller says. "And include everyone in it, especially the elderly mom or dad."

