

## National Family Caregiver Month

*Increasing dementia awareness in the Native American Community*

### **Violet Blake, Caregiver, Oneida Reservation, Ashwaubenon**

We celebrate the dedication of caregivers during National Family Caregiver Month. Violet is the primary caregiver for her mother Shirley, who is living with mild cognitive impairment (MCI). Shirley has lived with Violet and her family, including her husband and son, for over 14 years. Her care is further complicated because she has paralysis on one side, due to a stroke almost 20 years ago.

### **Dementia in Native American Communities**

“There needs to be more awareness in our community about dementia,” Violet said. “Culturally, the Oneida just think people are getting old when signs of dementia creep in. We believe that babies and elderly are the closest to the spirit world – either closer to life or death. Unless someone specifically tells us specific signs of dementia to look for, we just think it is old age and they’re approaching the spirit world. If there was more explanation and more outreach about dementia, the Tribes would embrace it.”



Wisconsin has eleven federally recognized Native American Nations and Tribal communities. The Alzheimer’s Association Care and Support team supports these communities with education programs to increase awareness of dementia. “I have participated in many of the caregiver programs, like the Ten Warning Signs of Alzheimer’s,” shared Violet. “It helps you to know that you’re not alone.”

### **Creating Awareness**

“Unfortunately, many people don’t look for help until things are really bad,” said Violet. “There’s not enough information out there about Alzheimer’s and often people on the reservation don’t know who to ask for help.” In recent years, Elder Services, which is an outreach program serving the Tribal communities, has offered support to caregivers like Violet. Through the program, Violet has been connected with support and resources to help care for her mom. The Alzheimer’s Association works with Elder Services to provide education and resources to the Tribal communities in Wisconsin.

### **Caregiver Advice**

“Like any caregiver, I have my good days and bad days,” Violet shared. “I would encourage other caregivers to take time for themselves. Don’t be ashamed or feel bad to take the time.” Violet also encourages caregivers to look for resources to support them. The Tribes in Wisconsin share program and resources information to try to improve awareness about dementia for caregivers.

For National Family Caregiver Month, the Alzheimer’s Association salutes Violet and her dedication as a caregiver.