

Adult day care plan under discussion: Seniors would have a place to socialize

By Brian D. Bridgeford / News Republic

One or more adult day care programs in the area would give seniors being cared for at home a place to socialize and receive services while giving their family caretakers a needed respite, say people hoping to launch such services.

Tuesday afternoon, adult day care advocates Mary Larson of Lake Delton and Baraboo resident Priscilla Fitzgerald invited other interested people to the community room of Baraboo's United Church of Christ to spark discussion on the issue. Responding to the call were Carol Olson, Portage-based area representative of the Alzheimer's Association, Trish Vandre, director of the Sauk County Aging and Disability Resource Center and Kathy Boettcher, director of the Our House assisted living senior residence in Baraboo.

During an hour-long discussion of what it would take to create one or more adult day care programs they reviewed past local efforts. The idea is to have a place where seniors who are frail or have dementia, but live at home, can go for all or part of a day while relatives who are caretakers work, run errands or take some time for themselves.

"I am living with my elderly mother right now," Fitzgerald said. "There are times I might need to do something and I don't feel comfortable leaving her alone for long hours right now."

Larson said one helpful service for an adult day care center would be staff and facilities to bathe seniors whose caretakers are not able to do so. She found that need fulfilled by an adult day care in Oconomowoc where she used to live.

"One of the reasons (her mother) needed to go was I couldn't give her a bath," she said. "I couldn't do her hair at home. I needed a few hours off, she needed 24-hours-a-day care."

Olson said the Reedsburg Senior Life Center offers an adult day care limited to people who are largely of sound mind and independent.

"It works well if you are vision impaired or hearing impaired or have some other issue so you need to be somewhere," she said.

The group observed other attempts at adult day care have failed because they didn't promote themselves and attract enough participants or were in locations too far from people needing service.

Vandre said there is a growing issue of adults who find themselves caring for both their children and their parents. It means there will be rising demand for adult day care services and support for them in area communities.

"It's an opportunity," she said. "You're right in starting sooner than later."

The problem is to take all the steps necessary to create adult day care programs in a timely manner, Vandre said, but have them start when there are enough people wanting service to support the day cares.

Olson said an adult day care program cannot be simply a safe place where seniors sit before a television. Enriching the lives of participants has to be part of the effort with activities and community outings.

"They have to be safe, but there has to be some enrichment to it," she said. "That's why we're really excited about (an existing center's) poetry project, and there's other sorts of really creative things that are life-enriching for the folks."

"To have them do things that are meaningful to them," Olson said.

The Alzheimer's Association can assist by coming in and providing some enrichment activities for seniors, she said. They can also provide training for staff on how they can enrich the lives of seniors who have problems with dementia.

Vandre said there are a lot of questions that must be resolved before moving ahead on an adult day care program.

Larson said she had a very positive experience taking her mother to an adult day care program serving Oconomowoc. Initially, her mother felt she was being abandoned, but grew to enjoy the center.

"When she went, it was 'I want to go tomorrow because I want to see my friends, I want to take part,' " Larson said. "I have more fun than when I'm sitting here with you."

Vandre was confident the need is going to be felt as the area's population ages and more seniors and their loved ones try to balance living at home with their need for services.

"If they get a taste of what it can mean for their quality of life on both sides, the caregiver and the loved one, it will spread like wildfire," Vandre said. "It's got to be the right timing."

In the end they agreed the next step is get an estimate of how many caretakers and seniors would be interested in an adult day care program for the Baraboo/Sauk County area. Fitzgerald and Larson said they will try to create a survey or find an existing survey results that will provide some of those answers.

Larson and Fitzgerald invited people interested in developing adult day care in the area to contact either of them.

Fitzgerald may be e-mailed at pfitzgerald210@centurytel.net; or called at (608) 355-4088. Larson invited contacts at MHL@jvl.net; her home phone — (608) 254-7002 or by cell phone — (608) 678-0307.

A wide variety of information and resources for seniors and people with disabilities may be found at the county Aging and Disability Resource Center - <http://www.co.sauk.wi.us/dept/coa>.