

## Advocacy Therapy *A Look at an Intergenerational Home*

### **Becca Donaldson, Wauwatosa, WI**

Becca is a caregiver for her mother, Deborah, who is living with early-onset Alzheimer's. She and her partner Steve also have a 7-month old son, Levin. Becca is part of a group called "sandwich generation" caregivers – the 25% of all caregiver's who care for an older adult and a child under the age of 18. "I guess you could say we have an intergenerational home," Becca shared. "My mom moved in with us after she was diagnosed. It's a lot of work, but for anyone who has ever helped support a loved one with Alzheimer's, it's so rewarding and I'm grateful she can age in place with family."

### **Fighting for Change with Those Who Need It Most**

Becca works full-time from home as an attorney at a public interest law firm that specializes in providing free legal services to low income clients. "So much of my identity is based in change for those who may not be as visible to the system," Becca shared. "Advocating for families on a journey with Alzheimer's is another way I can find meaning and fight for a vulnerable population."

"I have done advocacy work in my personal and professional life," Becca shared. "For a lot of people, you have to figure out what works for you and your coping mechanism. For me, it's advocacy therapy. It made sense to use what I've learned from my experience with my mom to advocate for others and improve their experience."



### **Life After the Pandemic**

Prior to COVID-19, Deborah participated in the Adult Day Services at the Lutheran Home in Wauwatosa. They have an intergenerational program, and Deborah started attending in part because she loved seeing the kids at the child daycare. During the pandemic, the Adult Day Services closed, and several months later Becca gave birth to Levin. He now attends the child side of the daycare. The family hopes that both Levin and Deborah will get to attend the program together when Adult Day re-opens. In the meantime, Deborah shifted to being at home full-time with Becca and Steve. "While we do have a lot of interruptions over the course of our day, we are so grateful to be in the same bubble with my mom," Becca shared. "I wake up early to get my mom's day going before I start work and I consider that an honor. However, I'm most grateful that she gets to spend time with her grandchild. While her short-term memory is impaired, she remembers the baby. It has given her a sense a purpose and it's so special that they can spend time together. If she had been in a care facility, it's possible she could not have even be able to meet him yet. Babies love attention and she gives that to him – giggling and making faces at each other. It's magical."

### **Policy Needs**

Becca has been involved in Advocacy efforts through the Alzheimer's Association over the last year, attending town hall meetings. "I'm looking forward to getting more involved in talking with legislators," Becca said. "There is so much that can be improved if you fast forward to look at the growing needs of families living with Alzheimer's. I want to advocate and pay it forward so I can support others on a similar journey."

“Anyone who goes through this knows how challenging it is,” Becca shared. “If you take even a moment to reflect on what would have made the experience run more smoothly, it doesn’t take long to see how there can be improvements in the system.”

### **Proponent of Utilizing Services**

Becca had just turned 30 when her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. “I turned to the Alzheimer’s Association for education and resources when she was first diagnosed,” Becca shared. “I found the classes around communication tremendously helpful. I was a Communications major in college and my mom taught Communications at Marquette University, so it’s very important to both of us. The tips and suggestions were so helpful. After the class, my mom and I had a candid conversation about some of her preferences for how to communicate. For example, was it helpful for me to fill in blanks or wait for her to find the words – she quickly said to jump in, otherwise it would be frustrating. I wanted to make sure my mom felt heard.”

We salute Becca and her dedication to her family and improving the lives of those in this vulnerable population.