

The Sandwich Generation

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The term “the sandwich generation” has been coined to describe those people faced with not only raising children but also with caring for aging parents. Although this is certainly not a new phenomenon the middle aged “children” may have to allow for parents that are going to live much longer than in previous generations.

According to statcan.ca, “Almost 3 in 10 of those aged 45 to 64 with unmarried children under 25 in the home, or some 712,000 individuals, were also caring for a senior,”¹ according to a study based on the 2002 General Social Survey.”

For these people, whose lives are increasingly busy and stressful, the study revealed that:

15 per cent reduced their work hours

20 per cent changed their schedules

10 per cent lost income

70 per cent said they felt stressed

The duties of caring for aging parents has also predominantly fell to women with an average of 30 hours a month compared to the 13 served by the men. These numbers are expected to change to reflect general social change in traditional roles but women will still remain as majority caregivers.²

These numbers are conservative compared to what will be happening within the next twenty years. So how can we help those living in the sandwich?

Employers must understand the difficulties of those juggling work and family responsibilities. Flexibility in scheduling and work duties will take a lot of the pressure and stress of those dealing with both parents and children. EAP (employment assistance programs) have already been changing to accommodate these demands.

Educating yourself in what resources are out there is of great importance as well. Talking with senior care professionals will help clarify needs and solutions. Family care can be an emotionally charged situation and objective, experienced help in navigating through all the challenges is invaluable. An Internet search will bring some information and hope to those feeling at wit’s end and there are many senior and care giving support groups on the Valley. These personal contacts will be the most beneficial in helping a stressed “sandwicher” know that they are not alone and that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

It must be said also that senior care giving can be wonderfully rewarding. A greater understanding of life’s journey and challenges brings personal growth and peace. The time to examine and discuss past difficulties can be wonderfully cathartic as well.

Next time, a look at some programs to help seniors adapt their homes for safety and comfort.

¹ Statistics Canada - <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/75-001-XIE/10904/art-1.htm>

² CBC News - http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2004/09/28/sandgen_040928.html