



Quarterly Newsletter

## Loneliness and Social Isolation in Caregivers

By Lynne Raynor

Loneliness and Social Isolation are two terms that might seem to be the same or at most only a shade different. However, a generally accepted definition of loneliness is “the feeling of being alone, regardless of the amount of social contact,” and social isolation can be defined as “a lack of social connections,” which can lead to loneliness for some people “while others can feel lonely without being socially isolated.” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020) Currently articles about, and studies of, these two conditions have appeared more often than ever before. Why?

If there is one thing that the Covid pandemic did with the need for social distancing, it highlighted the problems of loneliness and social isolation in the general population (Curelaru, et al, 2021), a problem that could often be seen to increase in a special population – those with some form of dementia who were receiving in-home or in-facility care. The flip side of that, of course, is the caregivers themselves. They were as isolated as their loved ones, but with the added responsibility of taking care of them.

Although more studies need to be done at this time, some recent studies have shown that social isolation can have dramatic effects on older adults. For example, a new study by John Hopkins University states that, “social isolation in older adults have 27% higher chance of developing dementia than older adults who aren’t” and that the dementia risk factor “is linked to other serious health conditions such as heart disease and depression” (Radde, 2023). The added responsibilities for a caregiver then could have him/her at risk for the same condition as those they are caring for.

A positive result of these studies, however, is more venues for a caregiver to use to feel connected to others who are experiencing the same situation and to those who can supply advice on everything from caregiving services to healthy eating habits. Some of these organizations and sources are listed below. With the exception of AARP, all of this information plus some details is available on the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine website.

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### WHO WE ARE

We are an innovative day program for individuals in early to mid stages of Alzheimer's disease and/or other related dementias.

### STAFF

#### Program Manager:

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We are excited to announce that we are sold out, for the third year, for golf registration! But that doesn't mean we still don't need your support. If you would like to donate items for our raffle and silent auction, we would greatly appreciate the help! Below is a list of ideas, all items need to be collected by Friday April 12th. Please reach out to Meghan Velasquez for more information.

- Gift certificates
- Gift cards, from fast food to fine dining
- Services: hair, nails, massages, home repair
- Vacation get-a-ways, cabins, beach, hotels
- Sporting event items: memorabilia, tickets
- Themed baskets: coffee/tea, spa, alcohol
- Jewelry and watches
- Cash donation

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- AARP: See the box below for more information.
- Valley Caregivers Resource Center, OASIS Adult Day Program: Serves as a crucial lifeline for family caregivers and a source of meaningful social connection for participants.
- California Department of Aging: Caregiver support, counseling on meals (delivered to your home). (559) 214-0299
- National Council on Aging: More on healthy eating habits, and Aging Mastery Program that “is shown to increase social connectedness.”
- National Institute on Aging: This is the place to go for no cost booklets and flyers on various aspects of loneliness and social isolation for elders (print and digital). There is also what is called a “warmline” or their Friendship Line (800) 971-0016 where professionals and trained volunteers offer support or conversation. (Harvard Medical School)

In future issues other sources will be highlighted for you.

## REFERENCES

Starting with this issue you can look in this box and find useful references for you to check for solving problems and getting help and/or advice about dementia in all its forms.

### AARP

Everyone over the age of 55 should know about this organization and the benefits it offers, but here are a few if you have forgotten. You can get discounts at restaurants, hotels and resorts, on airfare, cruises, car rentals, books, and games, but you can also access a driver safety course, Resume Advisor, and keep abreast of advocacy for Medicare. Their two publications, “AARP The Magazine” and the “AARP Bulletin” are excellent sources for keeping up on the latest developments in drugs and treatments for dementia and other ailments of the elderly. For \$12.00 per year it’s a steal.

It’s interesting that some of the strategies recommended to address loneliness and social isolation are the same strategies caregivers might use with their loved one who has dementia. For example, set realistic goals, keep regular routines, and simplify them wherever you can to save time and effort. Use technology like Zoom and other social apps to stay connected. In three studies, face-to-face interaction was considered “superior to non-visual modes of communication, such as the telephone,” (National Library of Medicine, 2023), but *do* use the phone. Arrange with someone to call you or for you to call them at various intervals. (Harvard Medical School, 2021) Think about what you really enjoy doing and budget some time for that activity. Exercising, even just walking, is good for you so why not find a partner to walk with?

The difficulty, you will say, is finding the time to do these things when there is so much else to do. Finding additional support to free some time for yourself is important and being able to ask for it, may be difficult, especially if you are a lonely person and not often in social situations. (HMS, 2021) Try one of the above resources for help. Ask a good friend to help you if you are still unsure of yourself because not asking for help can “lead to feeling isolated, frustrated, and even depressed” (Mayo Clinic, 2023).

Last, but not least, an important member of your support group is your own health care provider who can help keep watch on your physical and mental health. Tell them about any symptoms that you may be having. Once again, it depends on you asking for help, so remember that to help your loved one, you must help yourself first. The good news – there are lots of resources available to you.

#### References

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## Upcoming Events

- **Sing-a-long with Anita**  
Every Thursday  
10:00am-11:00am
- **Earth Day**  
Monday April 22nd, 2024  
10:00am-11:00am & 3:00pm-4:00pm
- **Music with Matthew Embry**  
Wednesday April 3rd, 2024  
3:00pm-4:00pm
- **Alzheimer's & Dementia Support Group**  
1st Monday and 3rd Wednesday of every month  
10am-11:30am

### Newsletter Staff

Lynne Rayner  
*Editor*

Meghan Velasquez  
*Editor & Design*



## Staff Spotlight- Meghan Velasquez

By Meghan Velasquez

Born in Bakersfield, but raised in Madera since the second grade, I grew up an absolute tomboy, loved sports, especially soccer. I played both travel soccer and for school and my dad coached me all the way through my JV year. In high school, I discovered my love for water polo and played Varsity all four years!

I fell in love again when I was 19, and began my career working in the ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) field. I worked in “early intervention” with toddlers who had just been diagnosed with Autism. I became really good at helping children navigate through very aggressive and difficult behaviors, so I started traveling throughout the Central Valley working with the more challenging cases.

However, I began to realize that as much as we were there helping the families we weren't leaving them with the tools to do this on their own, so, I started to coach the parents on how to approach and view behaviors as a “professional” in order to carry out the interventions and strategies we had in place. It was great and I loved the work I was doing, but the long drives and, late nights caught up with me and after seven years I made a shift and started to work in Special Education with Fresno County Office of Education.

Beginning in K-4th grade, I worked in a variety of classrooms and finally ended up in a high school behavior classroom. That was my biggest challenge yet greatest joy. An important thing I realized was that as individuals with cognitive impairments aged, the support they received lessened. People started to see them more as their diagnosis and less for what they were still able to accomplish.

During my time with FCOE I became close with a previous student who was diagnosed with Down Syndrome and Cystic Fibrosis. As her parents were overcoming personal challenges, the student was placed into foster care, but having such complex care needs, she couldn't be placed with just any family. I went to visit her at Valley Children's Hospital and decided I would foster her. After several days of training with the specialist at Valley Children's, she and I headed home. I fostered her for two years and it is one of the highlights of my life. Happily, she now lives with her Aunt and Uncle who love her deeply.

During my time as a foster parent, I transitioned careers and began my journey running day programs for adults with developmental disabilities. I also started to train and compete in Kettlebell Lifting and at a competition down in L.A. I met my, now, husband. We maintained a long-distance relationship, me in Fresno and he in San Diego, while I pursued my career as Program Director and fostered. After my foster daughter was placed, I made the move to San Diego where we lived for four years and I worked for an amazing nonprofit overseeing their day programs and residential homes and we began our family.

After having our son, and being far from family, we moved to Fresno where my husband learned the true meaning of “Valley heat!” We now have been married for six years with two kids, Clay (5) and Sydney (3).

After a long maternity leave with my youngest, I was ready to get back in the work force, when I saw an Indeed ad for a part time outreach position with an organization called Valley Caregiver Resource Center. After looking up what the non-profit did and having a recent dementia diagnosis for my grandfather, I was excited about the opportunity. I hit it off with Michelle DiBuduo, the Executive Director, during the interview and was very excited about the position, which I was offered. Within two weeks of being part time, she offered me a full-time position adding a “special projects” to my title. Within six months of working for the organization, we discussed the re-opening of OASIS. In July of 2022 I transitioned to Program Manager for the day program and I once again I am in love with the work I do. From the staff, to the participants and their caregivers, this is truly a family. I have supervised staff as large as 45 but I have not worked with quality like I have the privilege of doing here. They are dedicated to our participants and our mission here at VCRC. I couldn't be luckier!



## 2024 Aging Network Fashion Show Recap

By Meghan Velasquez

The Aging Network Fashion Show Resource Fair was a sold out event! The dedicated planning committee pulled out all the stops and made this event a success. The models looked beautiful dressed in outfits of their choice from Nonnie's House and our guest speaker Dr. Kim Armstrong filled the room with laughter and inspiration. We want to thank The Aging Network in choosing OASIS Adult Day Program as the recipient of the proceeds and thank the community for coming together and supporting this event. Mark your calendars for next year's show which will be held Thursday February 6, 2025!

