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**LifePath**  
options for independence

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# THE GOOD LIFE

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## Feeling Overwhelmed? LifePath's Family Caregiver Program Offers Respite Care and Assistance.

By Kathleen Billus, Community Options Resource Specialist; and Celene Livermore, Community Care Coordinator



Kathleen Billus

*Are you an unpaid caregiver of an older adult and/or a person with a disability?*

*Are you 55 or older and caring for a child who is a relative?*

If you answer "yes" to one of these, then you're eligible for respite care and assistance through our Family Caregiver Program. Caregiving for those in need can be rewarding, but it can also be a relentless, exhausting, 24/7 volunteer job.

We help people in Franklin County and the North Quabbin who are struggling with caregiving, not only because they are often caring for a loved one around the clock, but also because they are doing the work of at least 15 other hardworking people in order to do the huge job of caregiving.

The average caregiving individual is doing the daily work of a highly skilled team, meaning one person is doing the work of many persons. A single care recipient can easily require the services of the following: a care/case coordinator, medical advocate, financial advisor, chauffeur, cook, housekeeper, companion, home modification expert, personal organizer/property rehabilitator (a professional who sorts out disorganized, cluttered dwellings), personal care attendant, podiatrist, nutritionist, certified nursing aide, social secretary, accountant, and a health insurance specialist who is also a Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security expert.

Additionally, many of our caregivers also work full-time jobs and take care of children or grandchildren. Some caregivers may also take on the extra role of groundskeepers, tending to outdoor work and indoor heavy chores. Until they call LifePath.

We know that these are too many hats to wear even for a more fortunate caregiver who has a partner or family members to pitch in. It's overwhelming.

LifePath's Family Caregiver Program can help you

**Caregivers have an acute need for respite and LifePath can provide some free time or resources to take the edge off providing continuous care.**

find a highly skilled team so that you don't have to do it all by yourself, by helping you find nursing homes, in-home care including foot care specialists, clinicians to help with hoarding and mental health issues, lawyers, public benefits including MassHealth, Fuel Assistance, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), educational workshops, caregiver support groups, and more!

Caregivers have an acute need for respite and LifePath can provide some free time or resources to take the edge off providing continuous care. LifePath has Caregiver Respite Grant funding to provide goods and services to give you and/or your wallet some respite—a break from your hard work. So far this year, we gave exhausted caregivers respite grants in the form of supermarket gift cards, massage gift certificates, paying off a problematic utility bill, providing camp scholarships for kids' and grandchildren's activities and camps, paid stipends to cover the cost of in-home care recipient supervision, air conditioners, durable medical equipment not covered by insurance, and more.

Call LifePath at 413-773-5555 or email [info@LifePathMA.org](mailto:info@LifePathMA.org) to access our Family Caregiver Program. Whether your loved one is home or transitioning from the hospital to home, we'll help you create a customized care plan.

## A Grandparent's Reflections on the Experience of Raising Grandchildren

By Lynne Feldman, MBA, Associate Executive Director



Lynne Feldman

A few years ago, local resident Rick Barree wrote a powerful and poignant article (<https://lifepathma.org/stories/grandparents-raising-their-grandchildren/>) for *The Good Life* about the challenges of raising a grandchild. As part of Caregiver Month, we are sharing some of his comments in honor of all the older people caring for children in our community.

Rick's journey as a grandparent raising his grandchildren highlights the profound challenges and resilience involved in such an undertaking. In his reflections, Barree emphasizes that taking on parental roles for grandchildren—often due to the destructive impact of addiction on their own children—requires unyielding commitment. "As grandparents, it has taken 100% of our efforts in our daily lives to do the work that is necessary to bring these innocent, young children back from the darkness into the light," he shares. This reflection illustrates the emotional toll and intense focus that was needed to support and nurture his grandchildren in the face of adversity.

Since beginning his journey in 2018, Barree found support through the "Grandparents' Group" hosted by Valuing Our Children in Athol. These weekly meetings have become a critical outlet for grandparents like him. Barree describes these gatherings as safe spaces where participants "lay it all out for 90 minutes" and leave feeling a bit lighter, knowing they're not alone in this struggle. The group offers not only emotional relief but also practical support, such as free backpacks filled with school supplies and connections to other essential services like counseling for the children and advice on accessing needed resources.

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The logistical demands of raising grandchildren are immense, and Barree notes the strain of coordinating "doctor, dentist, therapist, and specialist appointments," on top of day-to-day tasks like meal prep, laundry, and school activities. While younger parents typically handle these responsibilities, grandparents in this role are often "older folks, pushing sixty," and Barree recognizes the unique physical and emotional fatigue that comes with shouldering these obligations later in life.

In addition to logistical and emotional challenges, Barree highlights the financial and relational tolls. Many grandparents, he observes, face financial constraints that limit their ability to take even brief breaks. He also addresses the strain on marriages, noting that the intense focus on the children can leave little time or energy for maintaining relationships. "It's like we are working so hard to help out these young kids that we lose track of one another," he writes, capturing the quiet sacrifices that often go unrecognized.

Ultimately, Barree calls for systemic support for grandparents raising grandchildren. He suggests the need for respite programs that would provide paid breaks for caregivers, including qualified child care during these times, along with other support options like subsidized gym memberships or activity vouchers. As Barree poignantly observes, grandparents like him are performing an invaluable service, ensuring that their grandchildren grow up in stable, supportive environments despite their parents' struggles.

If you are an older relative caring for a child and could use some support, please contact us at 413-773-5555 or [info@LifePathMA.org](mailto:info@LifePathMA.org), or reach out to these programs:

- Valuing Our Children, serving Athol and surrounding areas: 978-249-8467
- United Arc, serving Montague and surrounding areas: 413-774-5558