

Day Break offers caregivers some care

Growing old is not always graceful.

A common scenario that I see in my practice is elderly people who have various medical conditions, such as stroke, dementia, Parkinson's, or just gradual decline, limit some of their basic abilities to take care of themselves and to go where they want to.

In many cases, especially if they have relatives who really care about them, they are able to stay at home, rather than having to live in a care facility. While the loving home concept certainly sounds like the ideal way for an aging person to get along past the time he or she can really live independently, there are difficulties.

One problem is that caregivers are on 24/7 and get burned out or can feel trapped. Another problem is that despite good intentions, the living arrangement is often not ideal for the recipient of all this care, either.

It is easy for a person with infirmities to become isolated, lonely, and inactive. Often old friends have died or moved away or just are not accessible. It may be impossible to pursue old hobbies.

Inactivity and lack of stimulation tend to exacerbate existing conditions.

Mobility suffers and cognitive ability that may already be declining deteriorates faster.

Fortunately, our community is providing some help. Sheridan has a resource that I don't think our citizens are fully aware of and are not taking full advantage of — Day Break at the Senior Center.

The name comes from the concept of giving a break to caregivers, but it does more than that; Day Break is a place designed for social interaction.

It starts with the environment — a large, round, sunny room with big windows. Add some staff who have gravitated to this job because they really care about people. Throw in some creativity and organization.

What you get is a pleasant place to participate in activities appropriate to each customer's condition. This might be cards or armchair horseshoe or balloon volleyball or short walks; sharing music



**Center
Stage**

Dr. Ed
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from the '40s or crossword puzzles.

Customers can get a good meal there and even a bath! Some customers, of course, are able to be more active at these pursuits than others, but they have opportunity to make the most

of their individual conditions.

Meanwhile, their normal caregiver can be at work or shopping or taking a little time with friends — in short, a break.

What I see in my practice is that people don't always realize how they can benefit from Day Break. It is just easy to stay with the status quo, even when it really isn't working well.

But some of my thoughts run like this:

1. Maybe some mental and physical activity will help a person feel better — actually a well-known medical principle.

2. Sometimes customers balk at starting something like this. It's just easy to stay in the same old rut. But as the new setting becomes familiar and comfortable, often it is a welcome change from home.

3. Caregivers are sometimes hesitant. But this may delay nursing home care a bit longer, which most people prefer, and is a whole lot cheaper.

4. Maybe an option like this takes a little of the 24/7 pressure off and prevents some of the irritability that often builds up in the family relationship when one person has to do all the caring and giving.

If some of this sounds as if it might help your personal situation, stop in and look around, talk to Barb, Carol, Tracy or Rita. Watch what is going on.

Try it out. See what Day Break can do for you.

Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.

Dr. Ed Wilson has been practicing medicine in the Sheridan area for four years.