

Pilot program offers eldercare services to employees

BY **MATT DODGE**

8/28/2012



MATT DODGE

Nova Ewers is director of Beach Glass Transitions' Working Senior Care Solutions program. The for-profit eldercare consulting business has teamed up with law firm Pierce Atwood to offer a pilot program aimed at helping employees deal with issues surrounding the care of aging family members.

Maine's largest law firm has teamed up with a local eldercare services provider to launch a pilot program aimed at providing support and training for employees who act as caregivers for aging family members.

Beach Glass Transitions LLC, a four-year-old senior-care consulting company based in Portland, has partnered with Pierce Atwood to launch a pilot of its Working Senior Care Solutions program. The program combines education and private consultation for employees to help them deal with issues around aging parents.

A study from AARP and Metlife found that there are approximately 43 million caregivers for aging adults in the United States with 61% of those caregivers employed in full-time jobs; the annual loss in workplace productivity associated with caregiving can be upwards of \$47 billion.

"The average caregiving employee costs their employer \$2,400 a year in lost productivity and increased health care costs," says Nova Ewers, program director Beach Glass Transitions' Working Senior Care Solutions program. "We project that we can cut that by 35%-to-75% within two years."

The workplace habits of those dealing with caregiving responsibilities can span a range of hard-to-address topics from fatigue and poor dietary habits to diabetes, heart disease and an increased risk of drug abuse and alcoholism.

In the AARP/Metlife report, 64% of caregivers said they had to make some accommodation to their workdays -- coming in late, leaving early, taking days off or even quitting their jobs -- to balance their professional and personal responsibilities. Ewers says another issue among caregiving employees is "presenteeism," a word she uses to describe the difficulty of focusing on work when issues of life-and-death are looming. "It could be doing online research or sneaking phone calls at work to calling physicians for reports or taking time to go to the bathroom and cry," says Ewers.

The average caregiver in the U.S. is around the age of 49, will provide care for four-to-five years and is working full-time, a description that applies to employees of many Maine-based companies. But for companies that bill by the hour, such as law firms or accounting firms, the impact of an employee distracted by eldercare issues is especially significant to their bottom lines. Teaching and banking are two other industries where the pilot program might be particularly useful, according to Ewers. Through the program, Beach Glass Transitions Services offers five lunch and learn

sessions or webinars on relevant caregiving topics such as dementia care, or how to broach the subject of repealing a senior's driving privileges. Such sessions are followed with open office hours, providing each employee with two or three hours of private consultation with an eldercare expert.

The service also includes a subscription-based newsletters tailored to each caregiver's specific areas of concern and includes resource reviews, healthy recipes and events. Beach Glass Transitions provides crisis-intervention services, where they will respond within 24-hours to take over case management and provide advocacy, as well as discounts on additional private consultation services that fall outside of the boilerplate service offering.

Tara Jenkins, Pierce Atwood's director of human resources, says the law firm became interested in the pilot to assist employees.

"When you are going through an eldercare situation, it weighs on you so heavily, so it's really important that we provide these targeted benefits to our employees and partners," she says. "I have no idea how much productivity is lost [to eldercare situations]; our primary motivation is just to make people's lives easier. What they really care about is not whether an employee has to take a day off, but if they have the support they need."

As a member of the pilot program, Pierce Atwood will not be charged for services provided in the first year of the Working Senior Care Solutions program. "If it's well-utilized, we will have good cause to add it to our benefits budgeting in future years," says Jenkins.

She says the first session was better attended than a typical lunch and learn and another is planned for September.

The first iteration of the program was launched in August 2010 after receiving a Libra Future Fund grant of \$5,000. Beach Glass offered informational sessions to large local companies like Unum and L.L.Bean, but had not yet developed a full program of support services.

"We found that people were literally following us to our cars asking us for more services and information," says Ewers, which spurred the company to develop what would become the Working Senior Care Solutions program.

The company normally charges a minimum of \$2,000 for its services on an individual scale, but working through a company's human resources department allows Beach Glass to offer a discount. Companies pay a retainer price, choose their services and are assessed by their employees' median age and demographics to determine the program's cost, according to Ewers.

The company recently moved into a new location in Portland's West End, a larger space that will allow the company to hold small-scale educational sessions on-site, according to Ewers.

© 2012 Mainebiz(maine's business news source)
