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SteppingStone, like most health care agencies, works closely with other organizations to meet the needs of our program participants. This newsletter looks at two important partnerships that help provide essential services to our clients: caregiver support and mental health services.

Family Caregiver Alliance

Because all of SteppingStone's program participants are disabled, they need support from caregivers to maintain their health and navigate aspects of daily living. Caregivers themselves, also need support, which SteppingStone works to provide. In doing this work we have a partnership with the Family Caregiver Alliance (FCA), which provides both funding and resources to assist our clients' family members in providing care.



Born in San Francisco over 40 years ago, FCA provides services to family caregivers of adults with physical and cognitive impairments, such as Parkinson's, stroke, Alzheimer's and other types of dementia. It operates multiple mechanisms to provide resources including FCA CareNav, a digital service platform, and locally, the Bay Area Caregiver Resource Center. FCA also provides financial support to senior service agencies including SteppingStone.

"FCA provides direct services to family caregivers both nationally and locally through our multiple programs. Our contract with SteppingStone and other local service providers helps us broaden our reach."

"During the COVID pandemic the stress on caregivers has grown immensely. It is not just disabled seniors being impacted by isolation; it is also their caregivers. The pandemic has limited the availability of many forms of support, including respite, which are essential for caregivers that are also working." Christina Irving, Client Services Director, Family Caregiver Alliance.



SteppingStone staff members in various staff positions at all four Centers deliver services under the FCA grant, led by each Center's Social Worker.

"Here at Mission Creek a majority of our clients with dementia have family caregivers, some their children, but also spouses and siblings. During COVID, caregivers, particularly for people with cognitive deficits, are undergoing a lot of stress. Often, they don't know about available resources such as in-home support services (IHSS) or the Family Caregiver Alliance."

"I think there is a special bond between social workers like me and caregivers. My job is to support them, give them information and help them navigate the process. We're working together to take care of their loved ones." Naomi Childs, Social Worker Mission Creek Center.

SteppingStone's client population and their needs vary among our four Centers. Social workers meet their clients where they are, providing all possible support.

"I meet with clients and/or their caregivers weekly to ascertain what they need. Sometimes caregivers have specific needs, but also they need someone to talk to that understands what they are going through. Caregivers, particularly those taking care of family members with dementia during this time, need support!"



"The FCA program for family caregivers of seniors with dementia is great and I recommend it to clients. However only some of our participants choose to take advantage of it, perhaps because they are simply overwhelmed. I am looking forward to when the Centers can resume more activities. That will provide more respite days for caregivers and perhaps we can restart the support groups that were in place before the pandemic." Silvia Sobral, Social Worker, Mabini Center. As the pandemic persists the stress on caregivers continues to grow.

SteppingStone expects to be able to continue to expand in-Center activities over the next few months, which will benefit everyone. We are grateful for the support of the Family Caregiver Alliance and the support they provide our participants.

"If you or someone you know is family caregiver of a senior with dementia, I hope you check out the resources available through FCA. They offer many supports including grants for short-term respite and regular webinars on providing care. Their website is: caregiver.org" Daniel Gallagher, Executive Director, SteppingStone.



Curry Senior Center

SteppingStone was born as a program of the Curry Center nearly forty years ago, when it was the North of Market Health Clinic, a primary health care center for low-income seniors living in the Tenderloin. SteppingStone was originally called North and South of Market Adult Day Health, created to provide adult day health care from a small center in Tenderloin. Decades later our two agencies are still partners, working hand-in-hand help low-income seniors and adults with disabilities maintain their health.

One area where Curry has great expertise that is needed by SteppingStone is in providing mental health care. Adult Day Health Care provides some mental health support for participants, but it is limited, and we are not well suited to address some conditions.

One of these is addiction. To help our clients, SteppingStone contracted with Curry to provide both substance abuse counseling and other mental health services. This program is being implemented for Curry by Jack Spohn, Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), primarily at our Mission Creek Center.

"Substance abuse is not uncommon among seniors and adults with disabilities in San Francisco. They need to access care for this condition and one way to do that is the context of adult day health care. Providing substance counseling to SteppingStone clients, just makes sense. They need the support and already attending the program multiple times each week.

"Before COVID shut us down we were conducting a substance abuse counseling group every week, which was attended by about a dozen SteppingStone participants. I've been able to provide ongoing support during the pandemic and we are resuming in-Center support with two smaller groups. Interestingly, I didn't see a big uptick in mental health problems for these folks during the pandemic,

though not having adult health care was difficult for some.

"My goal in therapy is similar to that of adult day health, to keep my clients stable. I do think that providing even more counseling services, particularly talk therapy, could help some SteppingStone clients and hope the agency will explore that option." Jack Spohn, Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), Curry Senior Center.

In addition to facilitating the substance abuse group, Jack provides training and professional supervision to SteppingStone social workers on a monthly and a weekly basis.

SteppingStone is continually looking for ways to enhance care for the benefit of our program participants and their caregivers. Often that means partnering with another organization that has expertise or resources our clients need. We are proud to be partners with Family Caregiver Alliance and the Curry Senior Center. They make our work stronger, helping us meet the needs of our clients and their caregivers.

Photos: (Top) Christina Irving, Client Services Director, Family Caregiver Alliance
(Middle 1) Naomi Childs, Social Worker Mission Creek Center
(Middle 2) Silvia Sobral, Social Worker, Mabini Center with participant.
(Middle 3) Jack Spohn, Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), Curry Senior Center

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