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## E-respite help will soon be available to family caregivers in the community

By KATE DAY SAGER Olean Times Herald

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In the near future, those who need a break in caring for a loved one at home may be able to find respite, or a break from caregiving, thanks to the Western New York E-Respite grant that will be provided to local agencies through Healthy Community Alliance.

The funds are expected to be available in 2021 to local agencies such as Total Senior Care and HomeCare & Hospice who will use the monies to provide digital solutions for respite care in the home, said Ann Battaglia, CEO of Healthy Community Alliance, a rural health network in Gowanda.

Battaglia, who had been executive director of Total Senior Care in Olean in the past, said the initiative is through the Communities Care Family Caregivers Respite Pilot Program. Funded by the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation and the Health Foundation for Western & Central New York, the grant is managed by The Philanthropic Initiative with support from Teresa Lawrence of International Deliverables.



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Battaglia said the project will focus on digital technology and how it can be used to help rural caregivers achieve a sense of relief, learn self-care techniques and solve new problems in caregiving.

Battaglia provided examples of how the funding can be used to help local caregivers who are unable to take their loved one to a facility for respite care, but still could use a break from the day-to-day care of the individual.

“The traditional definition of respite was an afternoon or several days away from (the individual) through adult daycare, a healthcare facility or having somebody else come in and care for your loved one,” Battaglia explained. “But rural respite needs to take on a different form because not everybody has access to adult daycare services. And now during COVID, place-based respite (at a facility) is not an option.”

It was with this mind that professionals looked at the possibility of providing relief to caregivers through digital solutions that are internet-based or equipment-based. The program will be customized to fit and serve each individual caregiver’s needs.

For example, in one home a camera placed in the room of the disabled person could be connected to a monitor in a separate room where the caregiver is working on a craft, exercising or visiting with a friend.

“We learn what is most important to that caregiver and then determine how we can match the technology solution with that value,” she remarked. “Our respite coaches would work with that caregiver to imagine how they could achieve that need.”

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The technology could be used in other ways that include setting up telehealth equipment and software that would alleviate the need of taking a loved one to a doctor's appointment in distant communities such as Buffalo.

"Therefore, it's an hour long instead of a whole day" for a doctor's appointment, Battaglia commented.

"In the budget, we're hoping we could serve anywhere from 40 to 80 caregivers with some technology equipment that could help them achieve their respite needs" or training on their own equipment, she continued. "We have funds for the hardware and the software, but we also have funds to provide technical assistance."

Funding could also be used to provide internet boosters or WiFi service in households without online connections or adequate services.

"The sky is the limit because every caregiver has a different need," Battaglia said.

At HomeCare & Hospice, Ink Young, director of organizational advancement, said she looks forward to finding out the needs of the local caregivers and the technologies that will be available to them.

"I think it will be a fun thing, because the Ralph C. Wilson Foundation has done a lot for our local organizations," Young said.

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