

**Providing Assistance to Older Adults and Grandchildren:  
Caregiver Needs Assessment of Riverside County Employees**

**Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews**

**Prepared for the  
Riverside County Department of Human Resources  
County of Riverside Office on Aging**

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## **A. Introduction**

The number of informal caregivers has increased throughout the United States. Today the United States has over seventeen million caregivers of older adults and over six million children living with their grandparents. Because of these trends, the Riverside County Office on Aging decided to examine the caregiver issues that concern the County's business community through focus groups and key informant interviews.

A focus group was held June 27, 2002 and key informant interviews were held during the summer of 2002. The focus group was comprised of twelve representatives of businesses throughout Riverside County. A wide variety of community businesses ranging from health care providers to manufacturers participated in this forum. The group's discussion focused on eight central questions. The answers to these questions provided a wealth of information regarding working caregiver issues in the workplace.

## **B. Purpose of the Focus Group**

The purpose of the focus group was to address and summarize eight specific needs and concerns of the community workforce in relation to caregivers of older adults. The focus group participants addressed the following issues:

1. The level of caregiver experience among *employees*.
2. The level of experience with caregiving for older adults within the *company*.
3. The type of caregiver service that *employees* are providing.
4. The effects of caregiving for older adults on *employees*.
5. The effects of caregiving for older adults on *employers*.
6. The availability of caregiving resources within the *company*.
7. The type of resources requested by *employers*.
8. The services the *community* could provide for caregivers and their employers.

## C. Summary of Caregiver Focus Group

### 1. What is your experience or the experience of your employees with caregiving for an older adult?

**Fifty percent** of the focus group participants have had experience as caregivers in the workplace. The primary challenges facing these caregivers include transportation issues and the organization of daily affairs for the older adult.

### 2. What is the experience within your company with caregiving for an older adult?

**Thirty two percent** of the focus group participants have employees that are currently serving as caregivers for older adults. Riverside Community Hospital estimates that between **32 to 40 percent** of their employees act as caregivers for an older adult.

### 3. What type of caregiving services are *employees* providing?

Currently employees are providing some caregiver services for caregivers of older adults such as shopping for groceries, transporting family members to doctor's appointments, assistance researching health services, and providing financial assistance for the older adult.

### 4. What are the *effects on employees* of providing care for an older adult?

The major effects on employees of providing care for an older adult are increased absenteeism, decreased productivity, and increased personal stress.

**Absenteeism of the Caregiver.** Caregiver absenteeism may be due to the:

- Need to take time off from work to take the older adult to their doctor's appointments.
- Need to leave work early or arrive to work late because of caregiver responsibilities.

**Productivity of the Caregiver.** Decrease productivity may occur when the caregiver is forced to make telephone calls during work hours to the:

- Doctor's office to schedule appointments.
- Care recipient (older adult) to assure them that the older adult is all right (safe) during the day.
- Hospital to check on the older adults health.

**Stress Level of the Caregiver.** Increased stress levels of the working caregiver may be produced by and lead to:

- Feelings of depression
- Feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility of assisting an older adult in addition to work duties
- Difficulties communicating with siblings
- Difficulties in handling all of the older adult's business affairs

**5. What are the *effects* on employers of employees that care for an older adult?**

The employer is affected by employees who act as a caregiver of an older adult by an ***increase in errors*** in the workplace, a ***decrease in productivity*** because of ***stress*** and ***work interruptions*** (especially time lost making telephone calls), and ***employee replacement costs*** due to absenteeism or separation of service.

Productivity decline may occur due to the caregiver being stressed and not able to work at the same rate, or the caregiver may make more mistakes than an employee that does not have the additional responsibility of caregiving.

Absenteeism of the caregiver may occur because the employee needs to leave work to drive their parent or friend to a doctor's appointment.

**6. What resources are available for caregivers within the company?**

Resources that are available within the company for caregivers of older adults include: Family Medical Leave, long-term care Insurance, support groups, and

flexible hours. Other new programs or services that should be developed include Telemedicine programs, estate planning seminars, legal service resources, and more flexible hours and job sharing.

**7. What resources would the participants like to have available for employees ?**

The suggestions included providing financial assistance, developing support groups during break times, and providing access to the services of a discharge planner.

**8. What resources can the local community provide for working caregivers and their employers?**

- Provide Health Fairs
- Design programs that are available after the regular workday has ended.
- Distribute information about community services through doctors' offices.
- Improve the county transportation system.

**D. Key Informant Interviews**

A second group of community business representatives were contacted for one-on-one telephone interviews and were asked the same questions that the focus group participants were asked. This group of six participants is referred to as "Key Informants."

Telephone interviews with employers indicated that up to **30 percent** of employees are performing caregiver services for older adults. The key informants reported that the major workplace problems were high levels of absenteeism, low morale, lack of work focus, and productivity declines of caregivers in the workplace.

## **E. Conclusion**

Overall, about half of the participants in the Caregiver Focus Group and Key Informant interviews were familiar with caregiver issues. Of the eighteen participants, five (28%) had a great deal of experience with caregiving, four (22%) had some experience, and nine (50%) had no experience. The companies that estimated they had the highest number of working caregivers (50%) were the assisted living facilities and the Visiting Nurses Association. The lowest estimate of working caregivers was among Wal-Mart, Bourns, and Scan Health Plan employees. In general, decreases in productivity and work interruptions were the major employer concerns. The primary recommendation to address these concerns is to increase awareness among employees and their employers in Riverside County of available community resources and services for working caregivers of older adults.

## **F. Focus Group Participants**

Barbara Moore, Sales Manager  
Century 21 Real Estate

Barbara Reece, Executive Director  
Encore Senior Living

Kathryn Dydo, President  
Information Network

Diane Gutormson, Senior Vice President - Lending  
Inland Empire Bank

Lisa Foster, Manager  
J.Z.'s Party Charm

Rick Foster, Director of Operations  
J.Z.'s Party Charm

JoAnna Ghazi, Representative  
Prime Care of Corona

Cindy Roth, President  
Riverside Chamber of Commerce

Lynn Kelly, Director of Human Resources  
Riverside Community Hospital

Terry A. Beech, Attorney  
Senior Law and Estate Planning Center

Katie Wical, Marketing Director  
Somerset Place Assisted Living

Maggie Giunta, Hospice Liaison  
Visiting Nurse Association

### Observer

Linda Swanson,  
Riverside County Office on Aging

## **G. Key Informant Participants**

Bonnie Robins, Director of Human Resources  
Bourns

Cynthis Rhynus, Purchasing Agent  
Mel's Industrial Supplies

Patricia Smith, Director of Student Health Center  
Riverside Community College District

Steve Hovey, Human Rescues Department  
Riverside County Office on Education

Karen Van Hulta, Director of Contracting  
Scan Health Plan/Senior Care

Lucy Brown, Store Manager  
Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.