

2012

Rose Beyond the Thorns Caregiver Weekend

Kingsmill Resort

Williamsburg, VA, March 23-25, 2012

In the course of discussions with many caregivers throughout 2011, a need for TBI caregiver respite emerged at an all time high. Caregivers are carrying exceptional loads, stress, and emotional voids with relationships and personal wellbeing hanging in the balance. Many caregivers voiced thoughts of suicide and feelings of being overwhelmed. SEMPERMAX Support Fund offered a weekend retreat of respite and fun combined with socialization and networking, among peers sharing similar challenges, and incorporating counseling and vetting sessions to bring to light issues, feeling, and fears that these women are facing, in an atmosphere of safety and understanding. Tina Atherall, LCSW attended for professional support.



Sixteen (16) caregiver spouses attended this all inclusive weekend at Kingsmill Resort in Williamsburg, VA. The event included activities to rejuvenate the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects that make a person whole in these stunning and dedicated women: spa services (including pedicure/ manicure, massage, and facial), a walk through historic Williamsburg, a quick jaunt for retail therapy with the direction that they could only spend the money on themselves, late night talks, and tool kit building workshops. The primary goals were to (1) provide connections so that the spouses left knowing they were not alone, (2) re-direct the spouses to take time for self-care, and (3) to provide spouses with tools to lessen the impact of stress and emotional and physical voids they may experience.



Over the course of the weekend, we touched on the four major aspects of the human person that support fullness of life – physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. The participants were encouraged to remember to give themselves

opportunities to address each of these, if even in small doses. At times they are intertwined. The tools we came up with as a group were recapped (see below) and provided a foundation to support them in this endeavor.

RECAP

Physical: running, massage, walking, hot bath, get dressed and made up

Emotional: friendships, personal contact, FaceBook, laughter, retail therapy, talk, guiltlessly accept compliments, allow yourself to notice smaller, even fleeting efforts of love from your spouse and allow them to carry more weight

Intellectual: reading, learning a new skill, going back to school, new hobby

Spiritual: sunsets, sunrises, faith, acknowledge beauty in a garden/art,

meditation

Other Intertwining Tools: lock yourself in the bathroom (give yourself alone/regroup time), separate physical and emotional components, refrain from comparing the present to the past, identify goals for yourself on paper or white board, allow mutual reciprocation of emotional dump, identify your Circle of Influence for conflict resolution and stress reduction: *Remember that what we say and what we do can influence others. You can expand the circle of what you can control and de-conflict arguments with your spouse by managing what you say and what you do.*

This road of recovery is wrought with reminders of things lost – through the PEB process and in attempting to attain services and benefits for our spouse, we are forced to highlight all the deficits, disabilities, and issues, and if we allow ourselves to dwell on those long enough, we miss the abilities, possibilities, and empowering moments when life can begin anew.

Grieve.Acknowledge.Move Forward. Believe in yourself and in each other!

Feedback:

"Ladies,

I want to say thank you for all that you have sacrificed for both our country and your family's. This weekend has helped my wife understand just a little more what I'm dealing with and that there are others out there going through the same things as we are." - N.M.

"Tim & Shannon

I hope this finds you well. My wife came back raving about what a wonderful weekend she had! Thanks - it was a great idea and she definitely needed it! Hope to see you guys soon!" sf,
M

"This weekend will be one to remember! I am blessed to have met each and every one of You. Happy Monday :)" - S

"Thanks for a great weekend. I really enjoyed getting to know all of you. I found Lincoln's speech from Colonial Williamsburg. As President Lincoln says it here, "You are sure to be Happy Again." Especially if we stay in-touch and continue to learn from each other. Thanks, Shannon for providing a place and a time we could come together. It was amazing. Best to All" - PH