

Family Living Programs **Empowering Family Caregivers**

Situation

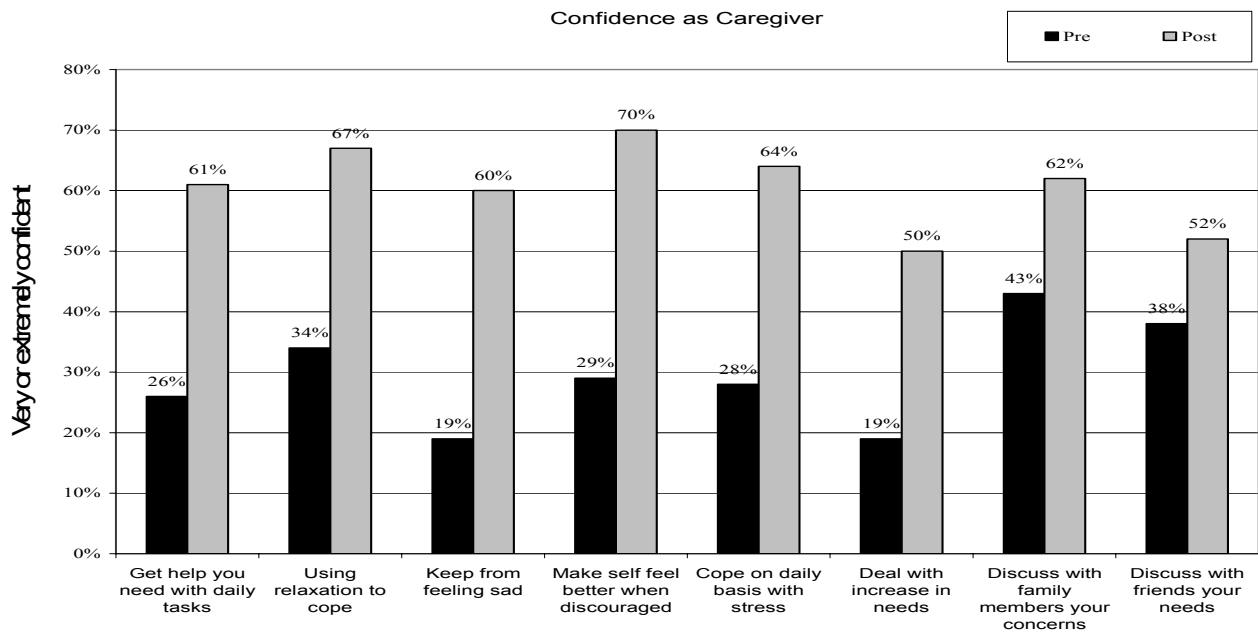
In rapidly growing numbers, family members are assuming the care of relatives in times of crisis and illness. Family members step in and assume numerous roles and responsibilities because of disease, aging, or the inability of parents to provide care for their children. Approximately 25 million family caregivers provide 80 percent of home care to aging parents or spouses. Family members are the major source of support for individuals who are unable to care for themselves. As baby boomers continue to age, more family members are being called upon to provide daily/weekly/monthly care. Many caregivers find themselves lacking caregiving knowledge and skills, are emotionally drained, and often feel out of control or unaware of where to turn for assistance and help. These caregivers are under a lot of stress and often neglect their own health and well-being. Educational programs and resources can be a source of assistance for family caregivers.

Extension's Response

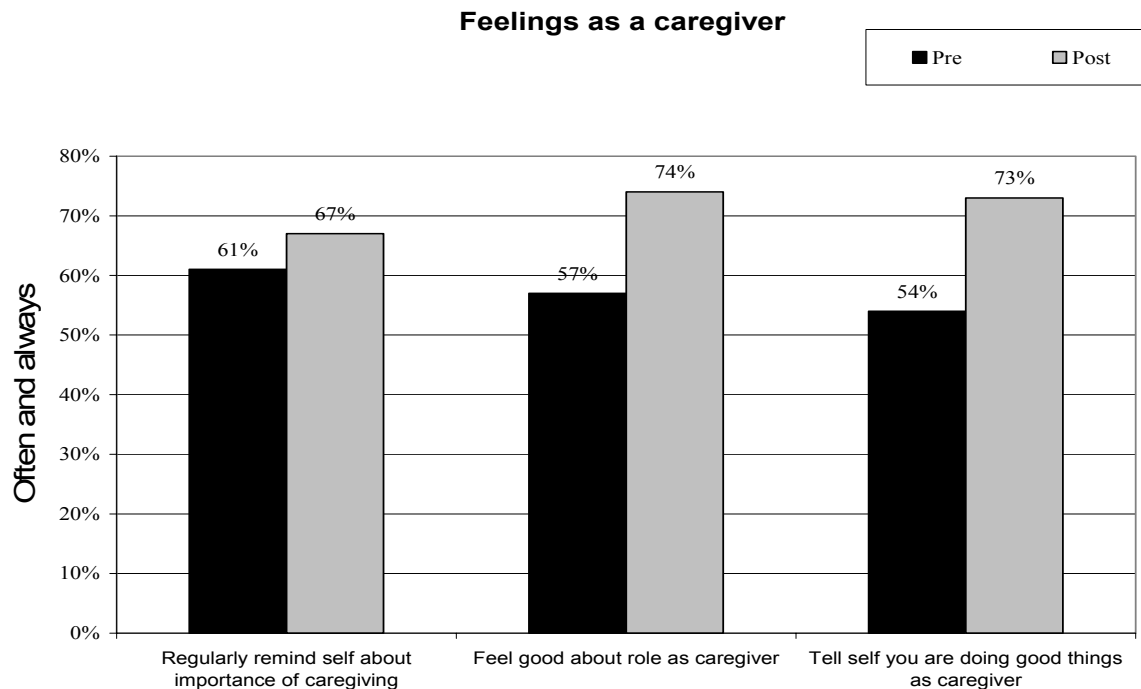
The Wisconsin Alliance for Family Caregiving, with leadership from UW-Extension and AARP, has been training class leaders (108) to teach the six-week curriculum, Taking Care of You...Powerful Tools for Caregiving locally. Twenty-one individuals (5 Extension staff) were certified to train individuals to become class leaders for the Powerful Tools curriculum this year. A statewide evaluation database was established to collect pre and post evaluation information. One hundred sixty-five individuals have signed up to participate in the local series with 141 (85 percent) completing three or more classes and 136 (82 percent) completing pre and post evaluations.

Outcomes

A major objective of the Powerful Tools curriculum is to empower the caregiver to do tasks for themselves and reach out to family, friends and support systems to assist them. Caregivers were asked to share how confident they were on specific tasks before the series and afterward to learn if the series assisted them in learning new coping skills and strategies. The areas they felt most confident in were making themselves feel better when discouraged, using relaxation to cope, and coping with stress on a daily basis. Below are the before and after responses of participants:

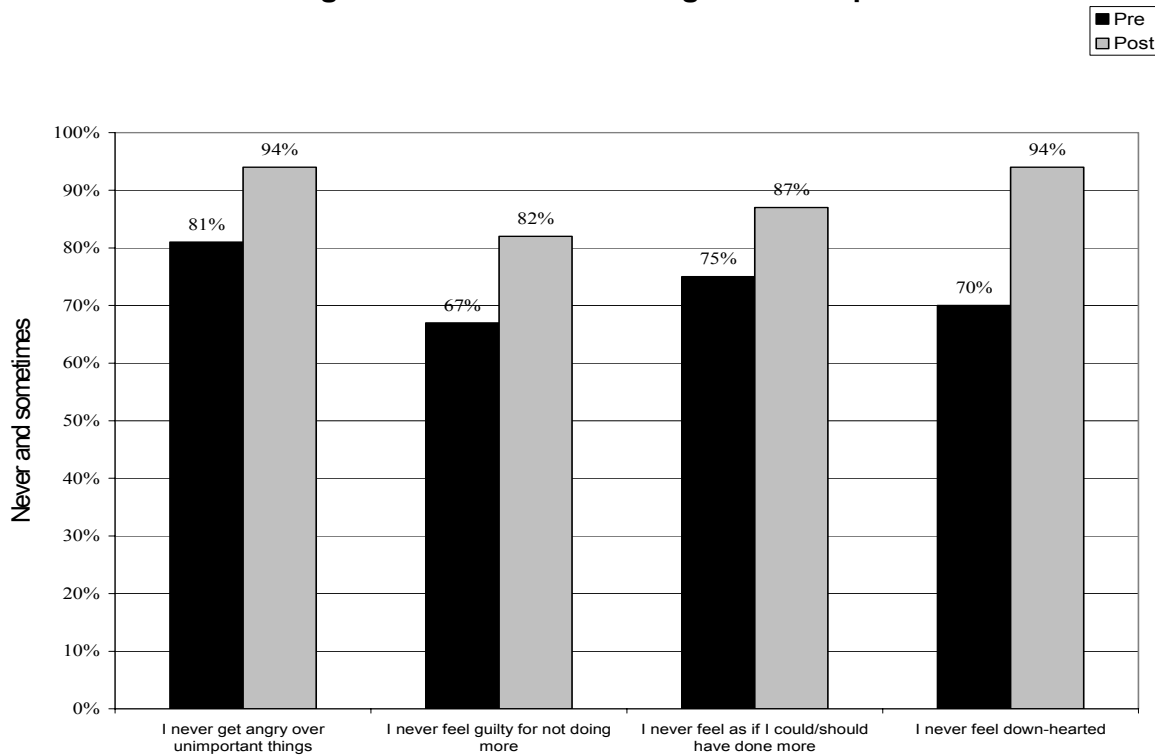


Caregivers reported more positive feelings about their role as a caregiver and remind themselves more often about the good things they do as a caregiver.



Caregivers were also less likely to get angry or feel downhearted in their role as a caregiver.

Feelings and reactions to feelings from the past month



Caregivers shared throughout the workshop series about how the class was helping them in their caregiver roles. Here are a few comments written on the evaluations:

- Completely changed my outlook and the way I do things in caring for mom.
- I liked the emphasis on problem solving and action plans. I liked that very much. I also liked the affirmation that these situations are difficult and involve many feelings.
- The confident feeling I came away with – I was able to make small but important changes to improve both my life and my “care receiver” mother’s life.
- Attending these classes has given me a new outlook – positive.

Individuals who participated in the workshop series rated the class 4.8 on a five point scale with a majority, 73 percent (99 individuals) rating it a five or excellent.

Seventy-seven percent of the class participants were female, 95 percent white, with 92 percent having graduated from high school. Thirty-two percent (41 individuals) had a college or graduate degree and 66 percent had incomes greater than \$20,000. Most (51 percent or 67 individuals) were caring for a spouse with an additional 33 percent (44 individuals) caring for a parent. The individual they were caring for was usually in their home (58 percent or 75 individuals) and many (62 percent or 84 individuals) had Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia.

County Stories

Barron County

In Barron County, UW-Extension and the County Aging Department taught the Powerful Tools class to twelve caregivers. This was the first time the caregivers had attended a program that focused on the impact of caregiving with their own lives and emotions. When asked what new “tools” or skills they LEARNED and USED as a result of attending the series, they reported:

- Knowing and understanding what my sources of stress are, managing stress by understanding what I can and cannot change, changing negative self-talk to positive self-talk, completing an action plan, using “I” instead of “you” messages, and coping with feelings of guilt, anger and resentment in a healthy way.
- Caregivers reported reductions in anger and guilt and more positive feelings about caregiving. One caregiver said she felt more positive and less angry and realized that in the last weeks she hadn’t fought with her husband at all.
- Other testimonies: ” I feel renewed in my strength and determination to care for my parents at home as long as possible.” “This class has put me in touch with what is ‘really’ happening in my situation and has given me ideas to ‘unstick’ myself.”

Bayfield County

Upon request of the Red Cliff Reservation Elderly Program Director, the Powerful Tools series reached seven Red Cliff family members involved in caregiving.

- Pre and post class evaluations were completed that indicated an increase in participants’ confidence level for providing caregiving to others, and a reduction in anger and guilt resulting from caregiving.
- Participants also noted learning new communication skills and felt good about learning from others in similar situations.
- Two class leaders from the Red Cliff Reservation were also trained to lead future sessions utilizing the curriculum.
- Reservation-based class leaders will help facilitate the continuation of the program, as Red Cliff is geographically isolated.

Ozaukee County

The UW-Extension Family Living Educator and an Aging Services Benefit Specialist taught Powerful Tools to fourteen caregivers and quickly started a list for the next series. Eleven participants completed pre and post evaluations and put into practice one or more tools learned during the series.

- Nine used action plans and positive self-talk, ten used relaxation tools, while six used “I” messages and long-range goal setting.
- One participant gave each of the educators a computer designed thank you card “to someone who brightened up my life with hope and encouragement through your caregiver classes.”
- Participants’ confidence as a caregiver increased in the following areas: Getting help with daily tasks, using relaxation to cope, making yourself feel better when discouraged, coping on day-to-

day basis with stress, discussing concerns with the doctor, discussing concerns with family members and friends.

- Other comments included: “I learned to take care of myself and also better care of my mom through the tools we were taught”; “I am grateful for having the opportunity to participate”; “Instead of worrying about the future, I am concentrating on what can be done now, as I now realize that too much stress can affect my health”; “I liked the action planning, it got me motivated to do things and plan ahead and stick to my plan”; I got more things done, it made me feel good. I liked the relaxation tools. They really work and the self-talk is very uplifting for me”; “I am trying to use the ‘I’ messages, positive self-talk and assertive communication in daily life.”

Waushara County

The Waushara County Caregivers support group is going strong with over a dozen regular members who support one another.

- At least seventy-five percent of the caregivers who attend either the support group in this county and/or in Green Lake County have been trained in the Powerful Tools curriculum.
- These people give credit to the education and support they have received to continue in their caregiving roles.

Green Lake/Marquette/Waushara Counties

The Powerful Tools curriculum was taught in a tri-county setting to Green Lake, Marquette and Waushara County caregivers. The community linkage with Green Lake Human Services, Northland Home Health, and Waushara County Department of Aging, as well as the UWEX Family Living Agents, made it possible to connect to local caregivers.

- The nine family members who participated reported increased confidence in their ability to care for themselves and interact with other family members while caregiving.
- Appreciation for the availability of the course and the support of others through the group situation lead to the formation of a new support group in the area.

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