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Easter Seals to lead respite network offering support to caregivers

Delaware Community Foundation Awards \$92,000 Grant

Easter Seals Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore has received a \$92,000 grant from the Delaware Community Foundation as the lead agency in a collaborative effort to make respite available to the estimated 130,000 Delawareans providing unpaid care for a relative, friend or loved one. Respite care is the temporary relief or "break" provided for caregivers and families who are caring for children or adults with disabilities, chronic or terminal illnesses or the elderly.

Easter Seals, a leading provider of disability services throughout the state, will serve as the central administrator and will manage the project known as the Delaware Lifespan Respite Network. The Network will be a service delivery system dedicated to help Delaware caregivers who have been challenged by a lack of centralized information to find respite services, an inadequate supply of quality respite care providers, and the financial resources to pay for the care.

"We know that there is a desperate need for accessible, affordable and quality respite care for our most vulnerable citizens and their families," said Bill Adami, President and CEO of Easter Seals. "The pressures of around-the-clock care for an individual with significant health or other challenges sometimes can be unbearable for families and loved ones. We hope that this new system, when fully instituted and funded, will offer meaningful relief to the thousands of family members who, quite simply, need a break from continuous caregiving."

A collaborative effort between Easter Seals, the University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies, Children & Families First, State agencies, and others, the Network will address the respite care needs of people with disabilities, chronic health conditions, and the aging. The system will consist of a centralized database where caregivers can turn to for referral to respite services for their loved one. When fully implemented, it will also offer caregiver and service recipient training, provider services (including training and quality assurance), and administrative services such as planning, program evaluation, fund development, financial management, and recordkeeping.

According to a University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Study, the average caregiver is a 52 year old woman who has been caring for her family member for over 20 years (Center for Disabilities Studies, 2003). This type of unpaid care was valued at almost a billion dollars in Delaware alone (National Family Caregivers Association, 2006).

Originally spearheaded by Easter Seals almost six years ago, the Delaware Caregivers Support Coalition was formed as a collaboration of various key stakeholders, including consumers of respite, state agencies, disability organizations, and respite services providers to tackle the lack of a coordinated respite care system in Delaware. The Delaware Caregiver Support Coalition has been instrumental in the development of the Network plan.

Now celebrating its 60th anniversary, Easter Seals offers a range of services, including outpatient rehabilitation therapy, early intervention services for children, day services for adults with physical disabilities and cognitive disabilities and assistive technology services to increase the functional capabilities of people with disabilities. For more information about the programs and services offered at Easter Seals, call 800-677-3800 or visit www.de.easterseals.com.
