

Organization gives support to Alzheimer's caregivers

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Shirley Hammond wanted to go home, and her daughter, Kae, couldn't understand why. Hammond was already in the home she shared with her husband for years.

After time, however, Kae learned how to deal with her mother's sporadic and often frustrating behavior -- and she wants to help others who may be going through the same thing.

Kae Hammond is the founder of La Quinta-based ALZ Life Matters, a professional services organization that focuses on supporting Alzheimer's and dementia caregivers.

"What I discovered as a caregiver is as much as you think you know, and even if you've read a few books, nothing really prepares for it," Kae Hammond said. "So my intention is to help caregivers get a much clearer understanding about what's going on with their loved one and make it as manageable of a journey as possible."

Kae Hammond hosts ongoing workshops that aim to teach caregivers about the various steps and conditions that Alzheimer's and dementia patients go through as the disease progresses.

"The reality is that it's not the person you know, it's the person with Alzheimer's," Kae Hammond said. "They live in the present and what's in front of them, and you have to learn to live in the present, too."

Sauni Hawes of Rancho Mirage, who is a caregiver for her mother Jeanne, said ALZ Life Matters greatly helped her cope with what she called a painful dilemma.

"I walked away a different person because of the information I was able to learn from Kae's workshops," Hawes said. "I learned to let go of the mother who raised me because that's not the person she is anymore. I was trying to correct her and bring her back to my reality, and now I've learned to let her be in her own reality."

For Maria Renoos of La Quinta, ALZ Life Matters also assisted in helping deal with the situation while keeping her stress level down.

"This is a 24-7 job," Renoos said of caring for her husband Norman who was diagnosed with dementia nearly three years ago. "So I learned you have to go with the flow. You can't snap at them when they do something you think isn't right; you have to calmly talk to them about it or distract them because otherwise it just makes things worse."

Kae Hammond said the most pressing reason she decided to share her knowledge with others is because she discovered a staggering statistic, that 70 percent of caregivers die before their loved ones because of the high stress they experience.

Therefore, she tries to emphasize the importance of bringing calmness into the home, and among the most powerful techniques to do that, Kae Hammond said, is music.

Today, ALZ Life Matters is scheduled to host "Connected" featuring pianist Bill Protzmann, a musical healing performance artist.

"The idea is to give caregivers and their cared-fors an example as to how music can really help -- whatever your physical or emotional circumstance is," Kae Hammond said. "They'll see behavioral changes and mood changes during this concert."

Protzmann, who hails from Idyllwild, has been conducting these healing performances for about 17 years now.

"One of the things that music does is short-circuits your mind and takes you right to the feelings, emotions and memories that are connected to that music," he said.

Protzmann plans on performing a range of music from ragtime to classic to the blues and modern music to provide the audience with a "really wonderful ride through music."

"The one other thing that's so important for Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers is that music connects them on a level that they can't get any other way," he said. "It builds a bridge because there's a shared recognition of a feeling that shared experience and emotion is very powerful when you're caring for a loved one."

Glance: If you go

What: "Connected," a two-hour concert starring pianist Bill Protzmann

When: 1 p.m. today

Where: Center for Spiritual Living, 45-630 Portola Ave., Palm Desert. The venue is handicapped accessible.

Details: The event is produced by ALZ Life Matters, a professional services organization that focuses on supporting Alzheimer's and dementia caregivers.

Tickets: \$12 or \$20 for a caregiver/cared-for couple. Group rates are also available for groups of 10 or more.

Information: www.alzlifematters.com, (760) 777-8039

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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