

Testimony of Sister Barbara Ann Boss

Good Afternoon, my name is Sister Barbara Ann Boss, a Sister of Charity from Seton Hill in Greensburg, PA. At the present time I am the CEO at Elizabeth Seton Center located in the South Hills of Pittsburgh. Seton Center is an Intergenerational Center dedicated to the belief that, no matter what age we are, growing and learning are lifetime activities and that people of all ages are bound together by what they share, not separated by age or interest. Our programs include care for children age 6 week through 12 years of age, enrichment programs for seniors, arts programs such as instrumental music instruction and theater activities for all ages and care for the frail elderly.

Today I am not here to give you facts, numbers or statistics about what each of these programs need to survive I come to talk about the struggles, stress and strain that people caught in the middle, better known as the “sandwich generation” are experiencing. Just last week we were interviewing for a position at Seton Center so this story is very fresh in my memory. First, picture this, a grandmother, now not one old in age, but one in her 50’s or early 60’s, young looking and willing, able and out of necessity has to work. All of the sudden she finds herself faced with custody of a four year old grandson. The grandson attends Seton Center during week day and she receives subsidized care. However, she is employed at a fast food restaurant that schedules her to work evenings and week-ends. How does she choose between the safety and security of the child and her job? Her only choices are find a 9 to 5 job or go on welfare. Believe it or not there are some people out there who feel that their self-worth is measured by their ability to provide for themselves and their family. Maybe we need to think outside the box. A sandwich has a top, middle and bottom. What if the top is a grandparent taking on the responsibility of the child and grandchild.

At Seton Center we have expanded our Adult Day Services hours to 6:00 am to 9:00 pm and on Saturdays from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm to accommodate the needs of the “Sandwich Generation” One of the reasons is to enable the adult child of a frail elderly person to attend the sport’s games, rehearsals, or other events that are a growing part of their own children’s life. Many times we hear “Can mom/dad stay at the Center longer today so I can go to my child’s game.” Or can mom/dad come on Saturday so that we can spend quality time with our children.” We all know that the Family is the core of our society. Many times the Sandwich Generation find themselves caught in the middle between parents and child. This generation needs respite time or they become overwhelmed and stressed. Having an overwhelmed and stressed caregiver is not able to give quality care to parent or child.

Most of the clients we care for at Seton Center are victims of Parkinson’s disease, Dementia or Alzheimer’s. People with these diseases often do not sleep at night. My father was a victim of

Parkinson's. Being an independent person all his life he would wake up at night and try to get out of bed causing many falls. If my mother was to get any rest, it meant that the children had to take turns doing night duty. This became very stressful knowing that you had to go to work the next day with little sleep.

Financially, the strain on the "Sandwich Generation" is huge.

1. If the parent has any retirement funds set aside the adult child tries to make the funds stretch as long as possible. Before placing the loved one in a nursing home they will try juggle their own work schedule to care for them, find someone to come into the home or place them in an Adult Day Service facility. There needs to be more education on funding sources that are available and the services that Adult Day Care can offer. In most cases this kind of information is given when the adult child comes to inquire about services at the Center. However, most centers do not have the funds for marketing budgets. How do those in need even know where to go for assistance.
2. Child Care can be expensive. If the adult child qualifies for subsidized care there is usually a long waiting list for the funding.
3. Transportation issues. Families often need help getting their parents to the Adult Day Care site. Transportation rules prohibit families from choosing the best center for their loved one. Because multiple companies service areas of the county and will not cross into another's area, clients often cannot go between their homes and the Center of their choice.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my experience and the experiences of the families we see at the Seton Center.