

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING**

**Hearing on “Finding a Cure: Assessing Progress Toward the Goal of Ending
Alzheimer’s by 2025”**

**Polly Bradley
Director of Adult Day Services, Southern Maine Agency on Aging**

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Chairman Collins, Ranking Member McCaskill, and Distinguished Members of the Committee; thank you for the opportunity to speak about the Southern Maine Agency on Aging’s efforts to support Maine families with dementia. I am here as a professional and the child and caregiver of someone who suffered with dementia. We all are hoping for a cure for dementia. However, until a cure is found, organizations like SMAA are providing a tremendous level of support for families coping with these huge challenges.

I would like to speak about the importance of adult day services, or ADS, and the impact they have on the members who attend. These members were teachers, veterans, doctors, business owners,—our moms and dads. Dementia is slowly robbing them of their good years. SMAA is on the leading edge helping these people.

Since 2012, the Southern Maine Agency on Aging or SMAA, has developed two state of the art adult day centers. They are arguably the best in New England and maybe the United States. Knowing that Maine is the oldest state by median age, we knew we needed to redesign our program. We embarked on a complete overhaul--shifting to a medical model which is person centered. We also wanted to ensure that our model would be affordable.

Every design detail, from the colors to textures to lighting was based on the latest research on what is best for the member. Our experiences as well as many research studies demonstrate that social interaction and activity helps maintain physical and emotional health as well as maintain cognitive function. The Centers offer multiple rooms giving us the ability to run several programs simultaneously. We have designed these Centers on a sustainable financial model allowing us to care for a total of 75 members per day. We employ over 40 people and SMAA provides support to over 200 families.

Another differential is our professional staff. In addition to highly trained and compassionate direct service professionals, we employ two social workers, an RN and a licensed recreation therapist. Our centers offer our members a home away from home environment. We have a number of volunteers assisting our staff. We collaborate with local universities which allows us the opportunity to offer practical training to social work, EMT, occupational and recreational therapy students who are focusing on geriatrics at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

All of this expertise gives our members the opportunity to socialize, and make new friends. Being in a supportive day center reduces depression, anxiety and minimizes the risk of falling. Our programs include pet therapy, exercise, music, art therapy, gardening, and cooking to name a few. We serve nutritious meals and snacks, offer transportation and help with hygiene, including showering as needed. Several times a year, our members work on special projects like making

dog treats for the local animal shelter. These activities give them a tremendous sense of pride in being able to contribute to the local communities.

Family caregivers tell us that their loved ones are happier. They come home from our Centers eager to talk about their day. They refer to our Centers as their club which makes them eager to return.

Our program extends to our caregivers because we know that it can be a lonely and depressing journey. Our caregivers are spouses, adult children, grandchildren among others who desperately want their loved ones to stay home. For many, avoiding a residential institution is their goal. The word institution speaks for itself, in the eyes of many people, it is not an option.

Our Family Caregiver programs are designed to provide support, counseling, education and referrals. Our social workers work closely with caregivers allowing them to share their inner most feelings, regarding stress, self-care, behavioral challenges, hopes and doubts. The Savvy Caregiver is a national evidence based program, as is Savvy Caregiver Advanced, for ongoing support and training throughout their journey.

Family caregiver support is a must for the overall health and wellbeing of caregiver and the member. Research shows that caregivers have a higher risk of heart disease, lower levels of self care, increased substance abuse, and depression. Our Centers are an oasis for caregivers to reconnect with friends or in the case of adult children, continuing to work knowing their loved one is safe and engaged. There is a ripple effect to better health and happiness and creating better days over all.

On a more personal note, I was extremely blessed to have spent the last 10 years caring for my Dad, Tim Stewart, who had Frontal Lobe Dementia. My Father was a successful business man. My parents were tireless volunteers and generous patrons of many charities. Dad was a charismatic person who loved being the center of attention, telling jokes and making people laugh. He was the de facto mayor of his community, and everyone loved him.

Frontal lobe dementia takes all filters away. This was true of my Dad. His extroverted nature manifested into his dementia and he then became the crazy old bald guy. He, however, was very proud of this name—he wore clothing with this logo. This became emotionally and physically challenging, for all of us, especially my mother. His extroverted nature blended with dementia made every day a struggle. Local businesses and restaurants which he had frequented for years asked him not to return because of his behavior. His world, our world, shrunk quickly. We were lucky to have the means to hire caregivers during the day to give my Mom a break. But even with hired support, the burden was heavy. SMAA's first new Center in Falmouth did not open in time to help my family. We made the difficult decision to place him in an institution.

Because of my parents' involvement with SMAA, we are honored to have the Stewart Center carry our name. We treasure the memory of Dad cutting the ribbon at the Stewart Center before dementia stole the last bit of him.

We lost my Dad in December. Everyone at some point will be touched by this disease. It's staggering to know that every 67 seconds someone in the US develops Alzheimer's. Until we find a cure, it's comforting to know that centers like the Sam L. Cohen Center and the Stewart Center are here to help. Thank you.