

Professional Caregivers



Every day, there are people going into the homes of older adults and individuals living with disabilities to perform all of the tasks that keep people safe, healthy and independent. The vital work they provide also offers a few hours of respite to family members. Professional caregivers typically work with 3-4 individuals a week, often being viewed as family members to those individual families. In our rural counties, caregivers are driving upwards of an hour to get to a care recipient's home. They do all of this for wages only slightly above minimum wage.

Darla and Kristi work for Baldwin Family Health Care. They are just two of the hundreds of professional caregivers in our region performing the tasks necessary to keep people independent, in their own homes and offering family caregivers a few hours of freedom and time to take care of their needs. When asked why they do it, Kristi replied, "Knowing that what I'm doing helps them stay in their home, seeing their faces light up when I walk in, makes it all worth it." Likewise, Darla describes, "What makes it rewarding for me is, I leave here knowing I brightened their day, that they get to keep living at home and their families don't have to worry about them."

One kind of caregiver that defies categorization is the person who becomes both the professional and the family caregiver for their loved one. For some people, becoming the paid caregiver is the only means to keep their loved one at home. When Jimmy Kelly's brother, Freddie, had a stroke and was no longer able to live alone, she took him into her home. Jimmy was still working when Freddie came to live with her. In order to provide her brother the care he required, she needed to be home with him full time. Being trained to become Freddie's caregiver allowed Jimmy to leave her job and to care for her brother. Even though she is home caring for Freddie 24/7, she earns pay for 20 hours/week, foregoing the respite provided by having a caregiver come into her home. Jimmy has been providing care to Freddie for nine years, "He's my brother. I love him, so I'm going to keep caring for him."



Jimmy Kelly and her brother, Freddie

One of the greatest challenges AAAWM and our partners who provide in-home services face is the shortage of workers available to fill the need for care that exists. Providing direct care is a tough job and the wages paid are low. AAAWM will continue to build awareness around this issue and advocate for change on state and federal levels. We recognize and honor the important work professional caregivers provide throughout our region and state.